PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 387 (Part 1)

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FIFTY-FIRST YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 2001–02

COMPRISING PERIOD
17—27 June 2002

£70

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17 June 2002

THE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 13 JUNE 2001]

FIFTY-FIRST YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 387**

EIGHTEENTH VOLUME OF SESSION 2001-2002

House of Commons

Monday 17 June 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

The Secretary of State was asked—

Military Police (Aldermaston)

1. **Mr. David Rendel** (Newbury): If he will make a statement on levels of overtime working by military police officers at AWE Aldermaston in the last 12 months. [58670]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): There are no military police officers stationed at AWE Aldermaston. However, Ministry of Defence police are stationed there, and during the calendar month of May 2002, 9,837 overtime hours were worked.

Mr. Rendel: I hope that the Minister agrees that an excessive amount of overtime seems to have been worked at Aldermaston in recent years. Given what happened on 11 September last year and the extra concerns that people living around Aldermaston have that a similar attack might be launched against the site, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will also agree that it is important that we reduce the amount of overtime being worked. If not, some of the people there, who are working almost double time in the most excessive cases, will not be fit to do the job of carrying a gun and guarding such an important site.

Dr. Moonie: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that excessive overtime is undesirable. Overtime hours at AWE Aldermaston have traditionally been higher than the force average because of the underbearing of officers at that establishment. However, I am sure that he will pleased to know that I plan to post 31 recruits into that station, effective from 9 September 2002, joining four who were posted in recently. A further intake of recruits is scheduled for September 2002 and a number of those probationers are expected to be posted to AWE Aldermaston.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Has the Minister been able to make any assessment of the likely costs of overtime at the establishment if stories in *The Observer* yesterday are correct that a nuclear weapons factory is to be established at Aldermaston in the near future? If that is so, will there be a statement and debate in the House before such an important decision is taken?

Dr. Moonie: I am happy to say that the statements were incorrect. Work is going on at Aldermaston, of which we have made no secret, to maintain the reliability of our nuclear deterrent, as we are faced with the fact that we no longer test these weapons. Anything else in the story was, I am afraid, entirely fanciful.

Mr. Paul Keetch (Hereford): Given the concerns raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) about security at Aldermaston, can the Minister confirm that the reports raised in *The Observer* yesterday were not new but simply a rehash of what was already known? Given that the Government's current policy on the security of bases is to parcel out security away from the military police such as those who guard Aldermaston either to the military provost guard service or private security companies, does the hon. Gentleman agree that that policy is now untenable? Is it not the case that the British people might begin to question the commitment of troops overseas in the war against terrorism if we cannot guarantee security at our own nuclear installations?

Dr. Moonie: It is interesting that a party that gave us precious little help when we were trying to extend the powers of the Ministry of Defence police should now attempt to criticise us—on entirely spurious grounds, I may add—for the way in which they work. We need no lessons from the Liberal Democrat party nor, for that matter, from Greenpeace on the level of security that we maintain at our establishments—which, I can assure the hon. Gentleman, are robust.

Mrs. Ann Cryer (Keighley): Does my hon. Friend appreciate that many Labour Members will be disappointed by his comment regarding Aldermaston and further developments of nuclear weapons? Does he also appreciate that this is hardly the right message to send to Pakistan and India at the moment?

Dr. Moonie: I point out again that there is no new development of nuclear weapons going on at Aldermaston. We are ensuring that our nuclear deterrent is reliable and capable of being deployed. That involves a great deal of careful work to ensure that there is no chance of having to go back to testing the weapons physically. I should have thought that my hon. Friend would agree with us on that point.

Nepal

2. **Mr. Bill O'Brien** (Normanton): What discussions he had with the Prime Minister of Nepal on his recent visit to the UK on the question of military help to Nepal; and if he will make a statement. [58671]

The Minister of State for Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): Prime Minister Deuba of Nepal called on my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for International Development and myself on 13 May. Mr. Deuba outlined the current situation in Nepal and said that poverty reduction was their overall priority, including health, education, and provision of water. He stated that Nepal needed assistance in three areas: economic development, security and the mobilisation of international support for Nepal. On the security front, it was acknowledged that Nepal needed help in logistics and communications.

The Nepalese Prime Minister was advised that the United Kingdom will be hosting a conference in London this month, with the aim of bringing together the international community to agree a common strategy of support for Nepal. This will address security concerns as well as the political and developmental challenges facing Nepal.

Mr. O'Brien: I thank my right hon. Friend for his reply. Nepal is a good ally of the United Kingdom—for many years, the sons of Nepal have been recruited into the Gurkha regiment and are now recognised as the finest fighters in the world. Nepal re-established its democracy in 1990. Does my right hon. Friend acknowledge that during his visit to the UK, Prime Minister Deuba outlined the internal problems that Nepal is having with the Maoist terrorists and requested help in the form of training their forces as well as providing helicopters and other technical equipment? Does my right hon. Friend accept that much more needs to be done if we are to help Nepal defend its villages from terrorists? What more help can we give to ensure that democracy and freedom apply in all the villages in Nepal?

Mr. Ingram: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. He is right to highlight the good support that we have received from Nepal and our good relationship with that country over many, many years. The Gurkha regiments have served with distinction in every theatre in which they have been involved, from the Falkland Islands to current operations in Bosnia.

My hon. Friend asks what more can be done: in my answer, I set out the range of efforts that we are making. The intergovernmental and international conference later this month will consider additional ways in which we can give assistance to that troubled country in its efforts to take on the insurgents to whom he referred.

Patrick Mercer (Newark): May I join the Minister in paying tribute to the record of Gurkha soldiers, in particular the Gurkha Rifles, especially in the light of the recent anniversaries of the triumphs in the Falklands? However, when Nepal is in such need of our help, will the Minister tell us why the first Gurkha reinforcement company has been disbanded, why the second one will be disbanded next year and why the third and final Gurkha reinforcement company will be disbanded the year after next?

Mr. Ingram: I have set out all the areas in which we seek to give assistance to Nepal and, in terms of the strength of the British Army, they are kept constantly under review. I am happy to set out at length for the hon. Gentleman the reasons why those changes have taken place.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): In the Minister's discussions with the Prime Minister of Nepal about possible military assistance to help to defeat the Maoist guerrilla campaign that seeks to destroy democracy in Nepal, did the Government again raise the question of the welfare of ex-British Army Gurkhas in Nepal? For example, did the right hon. Gentleman discuss how Britain might help to end the intimidation and extortion to which some of those loyal former servants of the Crown have been subjected by the Gurkha Army Ex-Servicemen's Association—a Marxist-Leninist organisation which speaks only for a small minority of former British Army soldiers and whose claim against the British Government for discrimination is being advocated by the wife of our Prime Minister?

Mr. Ingram: On the latter point, the hon. Gentleman will be aware of the way in which members of this country's legal profession are allocated work. If he is asking for a change in that, he should be raising the matter with a different Minister—if that is his point of view—although I suspect that some of his hon. Friends may be somewhat reluctant to make a change.

In respect of the kernel of the hon. Gentleman's argument, that point diminished a good question. There are serious and important issues that we have to address and, yes, in passing, some of them were touched on by the Prime Minister—in relation to the in-country issues in respect of the Gurkhas who served with us with distinction. In my earlier response, I set out the various ways in which we are taking forward those matters and they may, of course, be raised at the intergovernmental international conference later this month.

Aircraft Carriers

3. **Chris Grayling** (Epsom and Ewell): If he will make a statement on the replacement of the Royal Navy's carriers. [58672]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): The CVF—carrier vessel (future)—project is progressing well and we remain fully committed to it as part of our extensive programme of new naval shipbuilding. It remains our plan to replace the existing Invincible class carriers with two new, larger and much more capable carriers that will enter service in 2012 and 2015 respectively. Risk reduction and design work on CVF is well advanced. Early next year, we expect to be in a position to select a preferred prime contractor from the two consortiums currently competing, and to approve investment for the build programme at the end of 2003.

Chris Grayling: Does the Minister plan to sell the current HMS Invincible—perhaps to India—to help pay the bill, and if so, when?

Dr. Moonie: Under current plans, Invincible will remain in service until at least 2010. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that no discussions have taken place with anybody about the sale of any of our carriers.

David Cairns (Greenock and Inverclyde): May I draw my hon. Friend's attention to the bid by BAE Marine Systems to build the new carriers on the Clyde and, in particular, the envisaged use of Inch Green dry dock in Greenock? He will be aware that that is one of the most advanced dry docks and deep-water births in Europe and that it pioneered the welding together of mass hulls of ships in the early 1970s, with oil tankers. So may I tell him that, at Greenock, we have a readily available work force, the facilities and the experience, and all we need now are the orders?

Dr. Moonie: My hon. Friend will know that I am well aware of the quality of shipbuilding available on the Clyde, particularly in his constituency. It is however still too early in the programme for us to assess the full impact that CVF will have on shipbuilding jobs; what I can say, of course, is that it remains a tremendous opportunity for shipyards throughout the United Kingdom.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): The House will be very glad to hear the Minister's reassurance to my hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) that he has no plans to sell HMS Invincible to the Indians, or indeed to anyone else, but I am just a shade puzzled by an article in *The Sunday Times*, dated 2 June. Under the headline "Aircraft carrier on sale to India", it went on to tell us that

> "the aircraft carrier, along with naval Sea Harrier jets to fly from it, is top of Delhi's . . . shopping list . . .
>
> MoD officials have discussed with their Indian counterparts the possibility of selling the ship, which would help to pay for Britain's two new replacement 'super-carriers'."

That might just be a bit of froth were it not for the fact that it was written by none other than James Clark, the paper's defence correspondent, who, a few weeks previously, had been appointed as the new spin doctor in the Ministry of Defence. Will the Minister now care to tell the House whether or not he is correct in saying that he has no plans to sell Invincible, or whether his spin doctor is correct in saying that the Government do?

Dr. Moonie: I have already set out the Government's position very clearly, and I am not used to having my word questioned in the House. All I can say to the hon. Gentleman, to try to lighten the blow, is that I am often puzzled by some of the stories that appear in *The Sunday Times*.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): The Minister will be aware of the quality of the work force at the Clyde submarine base and the need to ensure the capacity of that base continues. Given that considerable changes have been taking place in the past few months and that the work force need to look forward to stability in the base's capacity, will he tell us how the contract for Astute class submarines will be awarded?

Dr. Moonie: I am well aware of my hon. Friend's interest in such issues, but I am unable at present to give him any further enlightenment on the basing of the Astute class submarines.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): What will the replacement carriers be carrying?

Dr. Moonie: Oddly enough, things that fly. The primary aircraft will be the future joint combat aircraft. The Lockheed Martin joint strike fighter has been identified as the aircraft with the best potential to fill that role. The ships will also carry maritime airborne surveillance and control aircraft and helicopters from all three services in a variety of roles.

Pilot Recruitment

4. **Mr. Desmond Swayne** (New Forest, West): What recent progress he has made with recruiting additional pilots. [58673]

The Minister of State for Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): Armed forces' recruitment of pilots is such that, in financial year 2001–02, the recruiting exceeded demanding targets. We are on course to meet fully the pilot recruitment target for this year.

Mr. Swayne: Why have the Government reduced the trained requirement for the Royal Air Force from 54,530 to 49,990 since the strategic defence review?

Mr. Ingram: Of course, manning and training requirements are constantly kept under review. We face a number of issues, one of which is, of course, recruitment. I have said in answering the hon. Gentleman's specific question—in which I would have thought he had an interest, but clearly not—recruiting is very high for pilots. We are addressing retention with a wide range of measures, and already the indications are that they will prove successful, but only time will tell just how successful.

Angus Robertson (Moray): Will the Minister consider using additional resources, possibly raised from the commercial use of RAF bases, to help in the retention and training of pilots? Will he perhaps consider instructing RAF Strike Command to widen its ongoing feasibility study into this issue to include RAF Kinloss in my constituency? That would not only offer a possible new revenue stream to help in the retention and training of pilots, but boost desperately needed commercial landing options in the north of Scotland.

Mr. Ingram: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that we are considering the use of such airfields, but the primacy would be in terms of strategic and military usage. It would be wrong to rule out any option that would enable best use of our existing assets, but that must not undermine or work against that which we ask our armed forces to deliver from those bases.

A340 Air Tanker

5. **Mr. Ben Chapman** (Wirral, South): If he will make a statement on the A340 Air Tanker. [58674]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): The future strategic tanker aircraft is planned to replace our current air-to-air refuelling fleet. Two consortiums have submitted bids for this prospective private finance initiative project: AirTanker Ltd., which has proposed the use of Airbus A330 aircraft; and the Tanker Transport Service Company Ltd., which has proposed Boeing 767 aircraft.

I can also announce to the House that having considered the progress made with both consortiums in contract negotiations, it is clear that more time will be required to complete these complex discussions. As a result, we have decided to delay introduction of the PFI service from 2007 to 2008.

Mr. Chapman: My hon. Friend will understand that these are uncertain times for the aerospace industry. May I therefore express regret on behalf of my constituents who work at Broughton, however understandable the reasons for the delay in going ahead with the project? Will my hon. Friend tell me when he expects to make an announcement on preferred bidder status? Will he assure me that, when he examines the bids, he will consider value for money over the whole PFI period and not just the initial capital costs?

Dr. Moonie: We are committed to pursuing a PFI solution to the FSTA requirement as long as it provides the required operational capability at best value for money. The project is currently in a competitive assessment phase. This is one of the largest and most innovative PFIs currently being considered by my Department, and it is small wonder, given its complexity, that it is taking the companies bidding longer than we first expected to come forward with detailed proposals. I assure my hon. Friend, however, that we shall consider those very carefully, and that, whatever solution we arrive at to this requirement, we will ensure that it provides the best answer to our needs.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): May I point out to the Under-Secretary that new aircraft, in the form of the A330 200 series, would offer by far the best option, both industrially and technically, inasmuch as they would be new aeroplanes as opposed to refurbished old Boeing 767s? They are appropriate for the proven drogue system, with a drogue under each wing to refuel two aircraft at a time, and have a bigger fuel uplift, too. From every point of view, therefore, they would be the superior option.

Dr. Moonie: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point. What we are concerned with, however, is arriving at the best solution overall. The requirement will be intended to fly for something like 27 or 28 years. It is therefore absolutely crucial that we get it right before we embark on what, as I have said, will be one of the most expensive projects in which we have been involved.

Sierra Leone

6. **Mike Gapes** (Ilford, South): What recent assessment he has made of the security situation in Sierra Leone; and if he will make a statement. [58675]

The Minister of State for Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): The security situation in Sierra Leone since the holding of credible and peaceful presidential and parliamentary elections on 14 May has been encouraging. Our forces have played an important role in restoring stability, through their programme of advice, training and support to the Sierra Leone armed forces and Ministry of Defence. There is much work still to do, however, if we are to achieve our objectives of developing a professional, effective and accountable armed forces and MOD, which are sustainable without substantial external assistance. The UK-led international military advisory and training team will, therefore, continue to help build the capacity of the Sierra Leone armed forces and MOD over the longer term.

Mike Gapes: May I congratulate my right hon. Friend and his colleagues on the decisive action that our Government took two years ago to defend and secure democracy in Sierra Leone? May I also congratulate our armed forces on the work that they have been doing there? Will he indicate further how long it will take before we can be absolutely confident that this job is fully completed?

Mr. Ingram: My hon. Friend is right to give plaudits to our armed forces. The United Nations force—UNAMSIL—has 17,500 men in the country and it has also played a role.

We are only a month away from the elections that took place on 14 May and we have to make a proper security assessment. That is currently being done. The best outcome would be for Sierra Leone to become safe enough for us to seek a reduction in the number of our forces and then seek their withdrawal. However, as I said, IMATT, which is British led, will continue its work in the longer term. Clearly, it will play a role in the key issues of rebuilding the Sierra Leone army and providing back-up to the MOD in that country.

Hugh Robertson (Faversham and Mid-Kent): Does the Minister agree with the assessment of many of those who have served in Sierra Leone that there can be no long-term settlement to the troubles of that country until all the diamond mines are returned to Government control? Does he agree with that assessment? If so, what are the British Government doing about it?

Mr. Ingram: That question moves away from the military role that our armed forces and the MOD will play in all that. There are key components in making that country whole again and gaining control of one of the key—perhaps the key—drivers of the economy is paramount. We have to consider the way in which that can be best achieved.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): I am bound to say that the diamond mines have an impact on the security situation in Sierra Leone. They underline the heavy commitment that we may have to make if the situation in Sierra Leone deteriorates again.

The Army's commitments remain heavy and yet there is growing speculation that the Secretary of State will shortly announce cuts in the target size of the Army. Will the Government take this opportunity to end the speculation and reaffirm their commitment to a fully trained Army strength of 108,500, as set out in the 1998 strategic defence review, so that we can fulfil commitments such as that in Sierra Leone?

Mr. Ingram: We fulfil our commitments everywhere our people are asked to be deployed. I remind the hon. Gentleman that the leader of the Conservative party—when he had the role that the hon. Gentleman now undertakes—criticised what we were doing in Macedonia. He said that it was a step too far and that we could not deliver our objectives in 30 days and get out within that time frame. We did that, because of the capabilities and the planning of the military chiefs who deploy our people. We are more than satisfied that we can continue to meet our commitments. Clearly all commitments and the capability in reaching strength have to be kept under review, because we have to seek to meet the targets that we set. That is our objective.

In relation to the hon. Gentleman's first point, I answered the question about the security element of the diamond areas—not diamond mines—and I said that that was a key component. He clearly did not listen to my answer.

Mr. Jenkin: I remind the Minister that the original commitment to Sierra Leone was for a few months but, years later, we are still there. He also declined to recommit to the SDR target of 108,500 and, in fact, the figures published at the end of last month show an Army trained strength of only 100,900 and that the Government are working to a reduced target of 107,900. Why have the Government secretly abandoned the 108,500 target set in 1998 and how will he achieve any target given that Labour has managed to add a net total of merely 30 men to Army manpower over the past four years?

Mr. Ingram: A number of points are raised within that question. I know that it is not the place of the hon. Gentleman to give answers at the Dispatch Box, but if he is suggesting that we should not have continued to deliver in Sierra Leone because of all the other elements that he brought into play—the implication of his question is that we should withdraw because of manning strengths or if the situation deteriorates—I would like to debate that matter with him. There is no SDR target with the figure that he quoted. He has got that wrong as well.

Mr. Jenkin: The adjutant-general told the Select Committee on 1 November 2000:

> "The figure we are working to is 108,500".

The Minister is saying that that figure has been abandoned. How can we maintain operations in places such as Sierra Leone when the Government are quietly abandoning their recruitment and retention targets?

The 1998 strategic defence review said:

> "Overstretch is trying to do too much with too little manpower . . . additional pressures from persistent overstretch contribute to higher exit rates from the Armed Forces."

It promised

> "to improve recruitment and retention so that our units are properly manned",

boasting:

> "That era of decline is behind us."

Is it not the truth that the Government have completely failed to deliver Labour's promises on recruitment and retention in the armed forces? Overall manning is being cut; defence equipment programmes are being delayed or cancelled; ships are being scrapped or sold; Tornado and Sea Harrier squadrons are being—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The question is too long.

Mr. Ingram: I do not know which question the hon. Gentleman wants me to answer—[Hon. Members: "All of them."] Well, I shall try to do that, but certainly not at the Dispatch Box now.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Just answer the question on Sierra Leone.

Mr. Ingram: The hon. Gentleman asked many questions; I am not sure, however, that there was one on Sierra Leone. He just kept dropping in those two words to demonstrate a relationship with his set question.

The figure that the hon. Gentleman quoted on the SDR was a notional figure. It is not the figure on which the working assumption has been based. If he reads parliamentary answers to parliamentary questions, he will discover the precise figures. I cannot give them off the top of my head, but I shall write to him with all the information that is on the public record.

The hon. Gentleman did not say—I never expected him to—what he would do in Sierra Leone. As I understand it, he is saying that there should be a very considerable increase in Tory defence expenditure. He has not given a figure, however, and perhaps he can help us on that.

NBC Missile Threat

8. **Mr. Tony Lloyd** (Manchester, Central): What recent assessment he has made of the threat to the UK of a missile strike containing *(a)* biological, *(b)* chemical and *(c)* nuclear warheads. [58678]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): We take very seriously the ambitions of certain states to acquire weapons of mass destruction and the means to deliver them. We recognise that some states of concern may already be capable of targeting United Kingdom forces deployed in areas close to them and of targeting the territory of some of our friends and allies.

However, we assess that there is currently no significant threat of a ballistic missile strike against the mainland of the United Kingdom delivering biological, chemical or nuclear warheads, but we do continue to monitor developments very closely, particularly as they might affect deployed British forces.

Mr. Lloyd: Will my right hon. Friend confirm the long-standing view of successive British Governments, both Conservative and Labour, that we would not use nuclear weapons in a pre-emptive strike? Does he agree that as far as biological and chemical weapons go, the establishment of a proper control and inspection regime should be at the top of the world's agenda and that those countries, such as the United States, that sabotage that kind of regime put not only themselves at risk, but the rest of us as well?

Mr. Hoon: I can confirm that there has been no change in the essential rules that we follow on the use of nuclear weapons. I have made it clear before how important it is to recognise that they would be used only in what are described as extreme conditions of self-defence. I want to emphasise that it does not help the deterrent effect of nuclear weapons to spell out precisely what those circumstances might be. I can stress, however, that nuclear weapons would be used proportionately and consistently with our obligations in international law.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): Given the historic agreement between Russia and NATO, does the Secretary of State support the US decision to withdraw from the anti-ballistic missile treaty last December, or does he support the Labour Members who have been criticising it so much?

Mr. Hoon: As I have consistently said to the House, the ABM treaty is a matter between the parties: the United States and, formerly, the Soviet Union, now its successor state, Russia. In those circumstances, it is not a matter for the British Government to make observations about the appropriateness or otherwise of that treaty having come to an end. However, the fact that there is now an agreement to effect a very substantial reduction in the offensive weapons systems available to both Russia and the US must be cause for congratulation, and it is a great success.

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): Both the MOD's White Paper and the national intelligence estimate to the US Senate conclude that the missile threat is very remote compared with the threat posed by smuggled weapons of mass destruction. Our Chief of the Defence Staff and his predecessor are among the many experts who have expressed doubts about missile defence. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it would be wise to base British defence policy on military intelligence, on intelligence in a broader sense and on British interests, and not on a desire to appease the obsessions of the US Republican hawks?

Mr. Hoon: If my hon. Friend was referring, as I think he was, to the prospect of the United Kingdom becoming involved in missile defence, I am sure that he knows my answer better than I do. For the avoidance of doubt, I shall repeat it: we have not been asked to participate in any such system, and unless and until we are, our position remains that we wait to see what system the US decides on.

I do not think that my hon. Friend's initial analogy is appropriate. Even if I accepted his argument as being true, it is not appropriate to say that simply because there is a greater threat, we should avoid taking defensive measures against the lesser threat.

David Burnside (South Antrim): The Secretary of State will agree that the assessment of any threat to the United Kingdom from any source depends heavily on the competence of our intelligence services—MI5, MI6 and our Army special forces. Is he aware that a deliberate black propaganda campaign is being carried out by a number of newspapers and by a television programme, to be shown later this week, to blacken the reputation of special forces who have served in Northern Ireland—the same special forces who served in Afghanistan? What is the Ministry of Defence doing in a proactive, positive way—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's question is far too wide.

Form 680 Procedure

9. **Norman Lamb** (North Norfolk): If he will make a statement on the F680 procedure. [58679]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): The MOD form 680 procedure allows defence exporters voluntarily to seek preliminary Government advice at the marketing stage on the likely prospects for eventual approval of an export licence. The procedure is also the mechanism by which the MOD authorises the release of United Kingdom classified military information in support of marketing activity.

Our export controls are greatly strengthened if our exporters market and promote their products responsibly and have the information necessary to do so. The procedure does not exempt industry from the need to apply for an export licence, but it does provide an indication of whether a licence is likely to be issued. It saves industry time, money and potential embarrassment in pursuing export prospects for which a licence is not likely to be issued. Licences are still decided on a case-by-case basis as each application is submitted.

Norman Lamb: May I ask the Secretary of State about the use of this procedure in relation to the sale of the air traffic control system to Tanzania? The preliminary clearance under the procedure was given in August 1997 without any consultation with, or even the knowledge of, the Department for International Development. On the basis of that preliminary clearance, BAE Systems entered a binding contract with the Tanzanian Government; Barclays provided a soft loan; approximately $15 million was paid over and most of the equipment was built, thereby presenting the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry with a fait accompli when it came to deciding the export licence application. Is that how the F680 procedure is supposed to operate, and if so, is not there a need for urgent reform? Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that preliminary clearance—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Dr. Moonie: The assessment took place in July 1997, as the hon. Gentleman said. Sustainable development was not a specific factor to be taken into account when considering F680 applications, although the impact on the economy of the recipient country was. Anything else in his question is a matter between the company that sold the equipment and the Tanzanian Government who bought it, not a matter for the Ministry of Defence. As I said, we do not give clearance: we give guidance.

Wind Farms

10. **Ms Julia Drown** (South Swindon): If he will make a statement on the grounds on which his Department opposes wind farm planning applications. [58680]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): Every proposal is considered individually. The criteria for that case-by-case consideration is that of the effect of the development on the ability to train our pilots safely, and on operational capability. The Ministry of Defence is also mindful of the potential impact on microwave link communication and Met Office radars.

The presence of wind turbines in most areas of the United Kingdom would present no difficulty to low-flying aircraft, and those and other naturally tall structures are taken into account as part of routine planning. In certain circumstances, wind turbines have the potential to affect radar adversely. Research is currently under way with the Department of Trade and Industry into the impact of wind farms on radar.

The three specially designated tactical training areas are located in central Wales, northern Scotland and the border area of northern England and southern Scotland. Within those areas, military fast jets may fly at 100 ft. There are clearly specific considerations to be taken into account in those areas.

Ms Drown: I thank the Minister for that reply. Whereas the Ministry of Defence has objected to nearly half the applications for wind farms in this country, there are 6,000 wind farms in Denmark, none of which has been objected to on the ground that radar might be interfered with. Given that the Government need to increase renewable energy drastically if we are to meet our Kyoto targets, will he try to learn lessons from the Danes so that the Ministry of Defence is not such an obstruction to the Government meeting their environmental targets?

Dr. Moonie: I am not sure about lessons from the Danes. One lesson that I might take from them is that they build their windmills in flat areas similar to the countryside around Swindon rather than on hill crests in Scotland, where they would impinge on the environment in which I like to take my leisure.

We give careful consideration to such developments and we do not object to proposals lightly. In fact, we are carrying out further research to see whether we might narrow the areas that give rise to objections. However, I repeat the truism that in low-flying tactical training areas, where aircraft fly as low as 100 ft, structures that may be 200 or 300 ft high are not likely to be welcome.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): Is the Minister aware that aircraft, especially from RAF Marham, regularly fly very low over the north-west part of my constituency and across the Wash? Is he aware that there is a planning application for a number of wind turbines onshore, in the area around Hunstanton, and that another has been submitted for 60 turbines offshore in the Wash, very near the RAF bombing range? What is his view, especially on the latter application and its potential effect on the viability of that bombing range?

Dr. Moonie: I cannot say that I have looked into the bombing range, although given the number of precision munitions that we buy nowadays, we might be able to build closer to it than we could in the past. Of the 18 offshore applications received so far, we have objected to five. That shows that we take seriously our role as a Government who are trying to support renewable energy.

NATO-Russian Relations

11. **Hugh Bayley** (City of York): If he will make a statement on the relationship between NATO and Russia. [58681]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): Last month saw an historic transformation of the NATO-Russia relationship, with the first meeting at the Rome summit of the new NATO-Russia Council. That is a major step towards the alliance's long-standing goal of building a secure, co-operative and democratic Euro-Atlantic area. We welcome the very positive approach that has been adopted by Russia in establishing the NRC, and all allies look forward to working with Russian colleagues as equal partners in areas of common interest.

Hugh Bayley: I welcome closer co-operation with Russia on security matters, but I have two questions for the Secretary of State. If Russia were to be attacked by another country, would the NRC be convened immediately, and what obligations, ~~if any,~~ would NATO have to go to Russia's defence?

Mr. Hoon: There is no specific agreement to cover either of those eventualities; I can see no specific reason why it would be necessary to convene an NRC meeting in the event of Russia being attacked, but if the existing members of the council judge that useful and appropriate, that could well occur in appropriate circumstances. Similarly, the article 5 guarantee only affects members of the NATO alliance, and so does not apply to the NATO-Russia Council.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Clearly, the warming of relations between Russia and NATO is critical at a time when we face the threat of international terrorism on an unprecedented scale. However, does the Secretary of State agree that it is also important to remember that NATO is first and foremost a military alliance? While welcoming former adversaries into association with NATO, we must also bear it in mind that, should democracy in Russia take a backward step, our arrangements should not compromise the ability of the original NATO countries to defend themselves.

Mr. Hoon: That must be right. However, it is equally right to pursue the opportunity for closer co-operation between NATO and Russia, not least because it flowed from the appalling events of 11 September. Specifically, there is an agreement to discuss techniques and measures to deal with global terrorism, which must be welcome to all concerned.

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): Given the formation of the NATO-Russia Council and the likelihood of a large increase in NATO membership at the Prague summit at the end of the year, has my right hon. Friend made an assessment of the need to change the decision-making structures of NATO in the interests of security and military efficiency?

Mr. Hoon: NATO's specific decision-making structures must remain a consensus of all member states. However, the United Kingdom strongly supports the need to look again at the way in which NATO reaches its decisions and the alliance's bureaucratic supporting structure. That should follow any enlargement, should it occur at Prague.

Defence Diversification Agency

12. **Mr. Simon Thomas** (Ceredigion): What opportunities he has examined for a future role for the Defence Diversification Agency at Aberporth. [58682]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): The Defence Diversification Agency has held a number of discussions about its role at Aberporth, where it currently provides a part-time technology diversification manager. The post is funded by the Welsh Development Agency, which recently invited us to make a proposal for expanding the service, as we shall now do.

Mr. Thomas: I thank the Minister for his reply. He will know of the difficulties caused by the withdrawal of funding for MOD apprenticeships at Aberporth earlier this year, but he may not be aware of the threat to 450 jobs at Dewhurst in Cardigan. Does he therefore agree that the progression of the Aberporth scheme under the technology diversification manager is essential to realise its assets and that the appointment of a full-time manager would help enormously in that task? Will he work with QinetiQ, the private company, and his colleagues in the Wales Office to realise the aim of diversification and new technology jobs at Aberporth?

Dr. Moonie: I pay tribute to the interest and application that the hon. Gentleman has devoted to the issue as the local Member. An approach by the Welsh Development Agency to the Defence Diversification Agency indicates that the organisation is held in high regard locally. Although the DDA has not been operational for long, the signs are that it will be remarkably successful in bringing technology into the MOD and spreading it out. We will take every possible step to ensure that the proposal proceeds.

Middle East

13. **Mr. Andrew Stunell** (Hazel Grove): What recent assessments he has received of the availability of UK ground forces for operations in the middle east. [58683]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): We have long recognised that our national interests are directly affected by events right across the middle east. We therefore continue to place high priority on our ability to project and sustain power in the region. As part of its routine planning work, the Ministry of Defence keeps a range of military options under review. Exercise Saif Sareea 2 in Oman towards the end of last year, for example, clearly demonstrated our ability to deploy UK ground forces over long distances and to sustain them there.

Mr. Stunell: May I direct the Secretary of State's attention to Iraq? Is he aware that US officials are now saying that the air strikes in the no-fly zone are no longer primarily aimed at humanitarian objectives, but are directed at opening up the capacity for more widespread bombing in Iraq? Bearing in mind the US President's policy of taking out Saddam Hussein, can the Secretary of State say whether UK forces are to be deployed in pursuit of that policy?

Mr. Hoon: I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's premise. The air strikes are self-defence against attacks on our aircraft and on coalition aircraft patrolling the no-fly zone, so their primary purpose is to defend aircrew and their aircraft against those attacks. The humanitarian purpose of having planes patrolling the no-fly zone continues.

Mr. Brian Jenkins (Tamworth): May I direct my right hon. Friend's mind to the situation in the middle east regarding Palestine and Israel? If British troops are to be used in some form of peacekeeping force in that situation, will he give an absolute assurance that they will go in only with a United Nations mandate and to uphold United Nations resolutions?

Mr. Hoon: In order for there to be a peacekeeping force, there has to be peace. I assure my hon. Friend that the United Kingdom Government will continue their efforts to bring about a peaceful situation in that difficult part of the world, but until that situation arises, his question is somewhat premature.

Mr. Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford): In the event of a deployment in the middle east, would British troops, like our American allies, enjoy the protection of theatre missile defence systems?

Mr. Hoon: The hon. Gentleman deliberately keeps his question as vague as possible. He refers to a deployment in the middle east, which is a very large region. Of course, as no theatre missile defence system is readily available to any forces deployed anywhere in that region, I can only say that that would not yet be available to the United Kingdom.

Equal Opportunities

14. **Fiona Mactaggart** (Slough): If he will make a statement on equal opportunities in the armed forces. [58684]

The Minister of State for Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): A new diversity policy has recently been agreed for the armed forces. The policy seeks to build on existing equal opportunities policies and practices. The aim is to create an organisational culture that values individuals from diverse backgrounds, treats all personnel fairly and with respect, and recognises the importance of their contribution to operational capability.

Fiona Mactaggart: Did my right hon. Friend see any black faces during the trooping of the colour ceremony? I am afraid that I did not, which made me anxious that it is possible that the elite regiments of the British Army are failing to recruit from all the communities that make up Great Britain. If that is the case, what action will he take to ensure that every Briton has an equal chance to be a soldier in every regiment of our armed forces?

Mr. Ingram: Unlike my hon. Friend, I did not see the trooping of the colour, but perhaps I should explain why: I was in the Falkland Islands representing Her Majesty's Government at the liberation day commemorative parade in Port Stanley, where the armed forces were given the freedom of the islands. I will try to seek a specific answer to her question and find out whether people from the ethnic communities were in the parade but not shown on television, but I think that the implication of that question is a slur on all the efforts that have been made not only by the Government, but by all armed forces representatives who seek strenuously to encourage an increase in recruitment from the ethnic communities in this country. Indeed, the targets that we have set are very challenging, and although we have not met them, the progress is very encouraging indeed.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): May I assure the Minister that there are black faces in all the regiments of the Foot Guards—or certainly most of them? I know because I have seen them. For the avoidance of doubt, will he reaffirm that the important thing about the armed forces is that they are good at defending this country, and not that somebody is ticking off the number of people with black faces or brown faces, or whatever other sort of people there might be?

Mr. Ingram: I agree with the hon. Gentleman's underlying view. I think that we should view the armed forces in a holistic way, in terms of what they are asked to do and the way in which they deliver. We ask a lot of them and they deliver to a very high extent, irrespective of their ethnic background.

Afghanistan

15. **Ann Clwyd** (Cynon Valley): Whether the international security assistance force has helped with humanitarian aid missions in Afghanistan; and if he will make a statement. [58685]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): The primary role of the international security assistance force—ISAF—is to help the Interim Administration to maintain security in Kabul and its surrounding areas, but national contingents within ISAF have also been involved in a number of humanitarian projects. United Kingdom service personnel, in conjunction with the Department for International Development, have contributed to the rebuilding of Kabul's education system through helping with repairs to its schools. ISAF has also on occasion responded to critical emergencies to help to save lives. There has been no expansion in ISAF's mission as defined in the authorising United Nations Security Council resolutions.

Ann Clwyd: As my right hon. Friend knows, the security situation inside the country is worrying many people, especially as reports from Human Rights Watch and others say that troops attached to the warlords are running wild around the country, creating a climate of fear and instability. As peace is very tenuous in Afghanistan, many people believe that it is important that disarmament take place as soon as possible and that ISAF's capability be expanded. That was the view of the Government, and they argued in favour of it. Is it still possible that ISAF's role can be extended outside Kabul into the rest of the country so that the peace that exists there now, slight though it is, can be strengthened?

Mr. Hoon: It is important to present a balanced picture of what is happening in Afghanistan. Although my hon. Friend is right to draw attention to tensions caused by the continuing existence of well-armed rival factions, it is equally important to put into the balance the fact that there is an extremely successful Loya Jirga process that has built on efforts right across the country—that is, regional meetings ultimately leading to the present meeting in Kabul. Informed observers tell me that that demonstrates the Afghan people's determination to rebuild their country and to take the opportunity that has been provided to them.

I do not particularly recognise my hon. Friend's description of the situation around the country, but she is right to draw attention to the need to continue to have regard to it. I gave examples of where ISAF has, through its national contingents, operated outside Kabul, and I am sure that in such humanitarian circumstances that will continue.

QinetiQ

16. **Mr. Peter Luff** (Mid-Worcestershire): If he will make a statement on progress on the privatisation of QinetiQ. [58686]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): Since the vesting of QinetiQ as a company on 1 July last year, work has concentrated on preparing the company for sale, options for which were through flotation or strategic partnership. Although flotation had always been our preferred route, following a comprehensive review of the available options for the transaction route and timing in conjunction with specialist advisers and QinetiQ's senior management, we decided that the strategic partner route offers the best potential for a transaction in 2002, offers value to the taxpayer and meets our objective of a successful public private partnership. I informed the House of that on 6 March.

Mr. Luff: May I seek an assurance from the Minister that in the run-up to privatisation the Government are not seeking to maximise the short-term value of the company's property portfolio? Specifically, will he assure me that he is putting QinetiQ under no pressure whatsoever to sell land at Throckmorton to the Home Office for use as an asylum accommodation centre? That would be likely to prejudice the site's long-term value as it develops into a science park, following the great success of the science park at Malvern.

Dr. Moonie: On the hon. Gentleman's general point, I assure him that a strategic partner such as we envisage would work closely with QinetiQ and contribute significantly to growing the overall value of its business, from which the taxpayer would benefit through the Ministry of Defence's initial retention of a significant financial interest in the company. The MOD will also retain a special share as a means of protecting United Kingdom defence and security interests.

On property, the management of the property portfolio is a matter for QinetiQ. I assure the hon. Gentleman that there has been no pressure from my office, nor, to my knowledge, from any other in the Ministry of Defence, as regards any sale prospect.

Brigadier Roger Lane

17. **Mr. Harold Best** (Leeds, North-West): If he will make a statement on the circumstances surrounding the transfer of Brigadier Roger Lane to other duties. [58687]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): The decision that Brigadier Jim Dutton should succeed Brigadier Roger Lane as commander 3 Commando Brigade in April 2002 was taken by the First Sea Lord in July 2001, as part of the normal appointing process for senior officers in the naval service. Ministers were not involved and would not expect to be because it was a routine changeover at one-star level.

Brigadier Lane was in command of operations in Afghanistan in April 2002, and the Chief of the Defence Staff and the First Sea Lord therefore decided that the planned handover should be delayed. It will now take place after the operations have been completed.

I retain complete confidence in Brigadier Lane.

Mr. Best: If the succession to Brigadier Lane was conducted in the manner described, why does my right hon. Friend believe that the media made such a fuss?

Mr. Hoon: That is clearly a matter for them, but I was surprised by the story that began the so-called controversy. It suggested that I faced mounting pressure to sack the Royal Marines commander in Afghanistan. That could not have been true because there was no such pressure. At least, if it existed, I was not aware of it.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): Why did the Secretary of State tolerate a situation whereby officials in his Department were criticising a serving officer, who, as the right hon. Gentleman well knows, has no opportunity to answer any criticism? Will he ensure that that never happens again while he is in charge?

Mr. Hoon: Let me make it clear that no Minister in the Ministry of Defence tolerates any such briefings by officials in the Department. If the hon. Gentleman has any specific examples of such briefings, I assure him that I shall investigate them fully if he makes them known to me.

Hugh Robertson (Faversham and Mid-Kent): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wish to correct the misapprehension given by the hon. Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart)—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman cannot extend Question Time by raising points of order.

Orders of the Day

Enterprise Bill

[2ND ALLOTTED DAY]

As amended in the Standing Committee, further considered.

Schedule 13

LISTED DIRECTIVES

3.32 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Miss Melanie Johnson): I beg to move amendment No. 380, in page 239, line 40, at end insert—

> '8A Directive 2000/31/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 8 June 2000 on certain legal aspects of information society services, in particular electronic commerce, in the Internal Market ("Directive on electronic commerce").'

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: Amendment No. 195, in clause 204, page 147, line 4, after '(2)', add 'or (2A) or (2B)'.

No. 196, in page 147, line 26, at end add—

> '(2A) An act or omission or course of conduct falls within this subsection if it amounts to the abuse by the person in question ("the supplier") of his superior knowledge or bargaining strength so that he:
>
> (a) unfairly induces consumers to enter into transactions which are not the result of free and informed decisions; or
>
> (b) unfairly hinders consumers from enforcing rights under any consumer transaction.
>
> (2B) In considering whether an act, omission or course of conduct amounts to an abuse under subsection 2A, the court shall take into account all the circumstances, including the nature of the goods or services in question, the nature and extent of any commitments undertaken by the consumers in question and any lack of good faith on the part of the supplier, and the court may have regard to:
>
> (a) any representation made by the supplier, or failure to disclose information, which unreasonably prevents consumers from making adequate price or value comparisons between competing suppliers;
>
> (b) any exploitation by the supplier of consumers' inability to make free and informed decisions, or to enforce rights under contracts, because of physical or mental infirmity, inability to understand the language of the transaction or other vulnerability;
>
> (c) any failure by the supplier to comply with a consumer code of practice (as defined in section 8(4) of this Act) which he claims to follow;
>
> (d) any act or omission by the supplier which causes any unreasonable expense of time or money by consumers pursuing legitimate complaints or rights under contracts entered into with the supplier; and
>
> (e) any failure to keep consumers reasonably informed about matters relating to a contract for supply of services, or which might affect a decision whether or not to change suppliers.'.

Government amendment No. 375.

Amendment No. 373, in clause 208, page 150, line 18, after 'a', insert 'domestic or a'.

Government amendments Nos. 376 to 379.

Miss Johnson: Consumer protection, apart from consumer safety in relation to goods, is a devolved matter in Northern Ireland. The Belfast agreement gives the Northern Ireland Assembly the authority to pass primary legislation in Northern Ireland on devolved matters, subject to the Assembly's option to seek to include Northern Ireland provisions in United Kingdom-wide legislation, especially on devolved issues when parity is normally maintained.

The option was discussed in the Northern Ireland Assembly on 5 June when the Assembly agreed the motion:

> "That this Assembly endorses the principle of extending the consumer protection measures in the Enterprise Bill to Northern Ireland".

The Assembly agreed that such an extension is the best way to ensure that Northern Ireland consumers are not disadvantaged through their standards of protection when compared with consumers in England, Scotland and Wales.

Clause 273 means that part 8 already extends to Northern Ireland, but amendments Nos. 375, 376 and 379 are necessary to make appropriate provision.

I shall not go into detail about the amendments unless hon. Members wish me to do so. Amendments Nos. 375, 376 and 379 apply to Northern Ireland. The others are much more technical, and I do not believe it is necessary to go through them unless hon. Members seek clarification.

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): I am grateful to the Minister for the quick guide to Government amendments. I agree that they are either consequential and minor or have the effect that she described. Amendment No. 378 is significant because it updates the definition of an associate. She was good enough to write to me about that and explain the reason for it. We therefore have no difficulty with it. I shall leave Liberal Democrat Members to speak about amendment No. 373. I principally want to speak about amendments Nos. 195 and 196. Unless the Minister has a concession up her sleeve, I intend to press amendment No. 196 to a Division.

Consumer protection is very much Tory territory. It was mapped out by the Conservative Government in the 1970s, and in particular by the then Sir Geoffrey Howe, in the fair trading legislation of that time. I even played a modest walk-on role, by helping to write a pamphlet, published in 1972, called "Square Deal for Consumers", when I was a very young, obscure, research assistant. Now I am an equally obscure middle-aged Front-Bench spokesman, and it is amazing to see what has happened in the intervening 30 years—except to my career, of course.

The principle behind our legislation in the 1970s was clear, and the view of our party has not changed since then. It is that consumers do best when markets are working properly and fairly. Not even Adam Smith took the view—although it is often ascribed to him—that markets could be completely unregulated. That translates neatly into my party's current approach, which is to try to help the vulnerable, right across the policy spectrum. In this instance, the vulnerable are consumers. That is in contrast to this Government's actions, which are those of a party dedicated to helping not the vulnerable but its cronies and its donors. We dealt with that matter to a great extent on Thursday in the context of the Express Newspapers Group takeover, however, and I do not wish to reopen that discussion today.

[Mr. Nigel Waterson]

The problem is that we have moved on since the 1970s. The need for consumer protection has moved on as well, and it keeps changing. That is why we are rightly revisiting the fair trading legislation, and why the Government are, sadly, missing this moving target. We heard many examples of this in Committee, but I shall resist the temptation to return to them on Report. I shall, however, cite just two which are indicative of the evidence that we have received from the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux, the National Consumer Council, the Consumers Association and many other organisations, about the scams and abuses that our constituents are having to deal with in the early part of this century as opposed to the 1970s.

One good example is so-called holiday clubs. The abuse of time-shares became apparent and was tackled some years ago. That is why many of the same personalities are now involved in so-called holiday clubs. As an observer of these matters, I find it difficult to see the difference between the two, although some of the current literature supporting holiday clubs carries a large disclaimer on the front saying, "This is not a time-share". But, of course, in many ways, they are.

Many of the abuses and many of the personnel have been carried forward from the old time-share cons to the so-called holiday clubs. In the last few weeks alone, we have read of one fraudster involved in time-shares and holiday clubs who had to pay some £36 million in compensation to his victims, and of another who was recently brutally murdered—or committed suicide, depending on one's view of events—in Spain. In that example, the law has slowly caught up with time-shares, only to find that these activities are now carrying on under a different name, largely outside the scope of the law. Moreover, I do not believe that they will be affected by the provisions in the Bill.

Another good example, of which we heard evidence in Committee, is high-pressure sales techniques in people's homes—often those of the elderly and frail. Age Concern produced an excellent report on this issue recently. The existing rules can easily be subverted by an individual being manoeuvred into inviting a salesman to visit them in their own home. In that way, the requirement for a seven-day cooling-off period and other regulations that would normally apply can be avoided. We heard an example of a lady who had had a salesman sitting in her home for five hours until she eventually signed on the dotted line to buy a very expensive orthopaedic chair that she probably did not need in the first place.

There are various ways of approaching this matter to ensure that the Bill will bite on these and the many other abuses that we debated in Committee. In Committee I tabled amendments Nos. 46 and 47, which were subtly different from these amendments but were part of the attempt to establish a general duty not to trade unfairly. As I think I conceded at the time, the terms of those amendments were quite wide; that is why we have now tabled amendments Nos. 195 and 196.

We must strike a balance between ensuring that there is some predictability, so that burdens are not placed on reputable businesses, and making the provisions flexible enough to catch the fraudsters and con artists who move on rapidly when the law is changed—as has happened in the case of time-shares—to another scam that is subtly different but outside the law. If we continue along the road that the Government seem intent on taking, the law will always trail behind some of the cleverer fraudsters.

In its briefing for the Bill, the Confederation of British Industry made clear its opposition to a clause providing a general duty in regard to unfair trading. It felt that such matters should be clearly identified and defined. It referred to discussions taking place in the European Union, with the aim of establishing a pan-European approach. It said:

> "This has been criticised by the CBI and other business associations across other Member States as raising many practical and legal issues. It is premature to be considering such a clause in the context of national legislation at this stage, when there is wide ranging debate on the issue in the EU."

We rely very much on the views of the main consumer protection organisations, however—particularly the National Consumer Council, to which I pay tribute for its substantial efforts in briefing, I am sure, not just the Opposition but the Government at both ministerial and official levels, in an attempt to deal with the problem. If we do not deal with it, we shall be passing legislation—with the best intentions in the world; I do not question the Government's intentions for a moment, at least in regard to this part of the Bill—that will not make life any better for the victims of scams.

The National Consumer Council thinks it important

> "to stress the need for some flexible legislation to deal with new unfair trading practices as they emerge, particularly as Part 2 of the Fair Trading Act is being repealed in Clause 10 of this Bill."

It has taken on board some of the points made in Committee on the earlier, more broadly drafted amendments. I suppose that that is how the system should work, ideally. It wants the new amendments

> "to demonstrate that there is more than one way to produce a generally-worded, open textured approach to achieve a 'general duty'."

It says that the amendments

> "use the concept of a disparity in bargaining position".

The NCC says, with some justification, that that is not a novel idea in English law. There has been legislation of that kind for some time—for example, the Unfair Contract Terms Act 1977, which contains a different set of rules and a different burden of proof, depending on whether a transaction is between two businesses or between a business and a consumer.

The NCC says that amendment No. 196

> "broadens the definition of a domestic infringement to include abuse of a bargaining position by a supplier in its dealings with a consumer, pursuing consumers to enter into transactions or hindering them from enforcing their consumer rights.
>
> 2B elaborates on the definition of abuse and sets out the factors which a court shall take into account."

It refers to good faith, the nature of goods and services being supplied, the

> "extent of any commitments to the consumer"

and

> "any exploitation of the consumer's inability to make free and informed decisions or enforce his rights due to vulnerability".

It gives the example of physical infirmity.

I do not think that the NCC and I are saying for a moment that this is the ultimate set of amendments with which to deal with the problem. We are saying that we have taken on board some of the criticisms made in Committee by the Minister and others and tried to produce a more rigorous definition. It is entirely open to her to concede the principle and say that the Government will consider carefully how to produce the same result in a way that is better drafted. That would avoid a Division.

3.45 pm

The NCC says that Kent county council is having a problem with itinerant tarmacadam merchants. I wondered where they had gone. They have tarmacadamed a large proportion of my constituency over the years, and now they have clearly moved on to Kent. This typical scam is especially serious in areas with a high proportion of elderly people. These characters turn up and talk people into having their drives tarmacadamed unnecessarily. They do the work shoddily and then demand more than they original contracted for. The NCC says that a general power would deal with that problem.

The NCC also describes how these matters are approached in the European Union and the United States of America. Very recently, the Commission issued a communication outlining key issues for a framework directive based on the wider concept of fair commercial practices, rather than on misleading practices. It suggests four possible categories: a prohibition on businesses engaging in commercial practices that mislead or are likely to mislead the consumer; a duty to disclose to the consumer all material information that is likely to affect the consumer's decisions; a prohibition on the use of physical force, harassment, coercion or undue influence; and effective information disclosure and complaints handling in the after-sales period. It also proposes, as a side issue, that the framework directive would be covered by the injunctions directive, so that such practices could be tackled quickly and effectively.

That approach may go too far for our purposes, and any solution that we come up with here will not simply be grafted on to a European directive; it must be properly bedded in English law. I repeat, however, that such concepts are not unfamiliar in legislation and regulations covering unfair contract terms, for example.

The United States Federal Trade Commission takes a somewhat similar view. It has a double mandate, to ensure fairness in competition and fairness in commercial practices in the interests of the consumer. That is not dissimilar from the approach that we are suggesting. Recently, the FTC took a case against Budget, which was apparently renting out cars that had been subject to recall notices. Consumers were not adequately informed about the risks or how to avoid injury.

Not surprisingly, the NCC argues that business should not be overly worried about these measures, because good businesses will benefit from measures that stamp out unfair competition from those who use unfair practices.

Another part of the Bill scraps part II of the Fair Trading Act 1973, which has fallen into relative disuse, largely because of the procedural problems that it poses. In principle, and in its day, however, it allowed the Secretary of State to prohibit a novel unfair practice that harmed the interests of consumers. Certainly, we need to extend protection, not to reduce it. The NCC cites the Consumer Transactions (Restrictions on Statements) Order 1976, prohibiting notices misleading consumers about their rights under the Sale of Goods Acts, such as no returns or no refunds for sales goods.

That takes us back to the essential difficulty with what the Government are trying to do. Of course we welcome the extension of stop now orders and the provisions on enforcement, but the legislation has to make a difference and it is no earthly good simply making it easier to enforce existing legislation. There is a large body of malpractices, abuses and, frankly, scams out there, which form a regular part of all our mailbags. They simply will not be tackled by this legislation as it stands.

I have given the example of the unsolicited visit versus the solicited one—a narrow distinction that can make all the difference. Those who invite a salesperson in are not covered; they do not enjoy protections such as the cooling-off period. That is a perfect example of how, over the years, tricksters and downright criminals have developed a fine ability to get round current law by making minor adjustments to the way they do their business.

Unless the law can get ahead of such fraudsters, rather than constantly banging along in their wake, I cannot see how we can clamp down properly on what the NCC and other bodies call shark practices. Indeed, we can all commend and support its "shark practices" campaign. The NCC's latest press release states that, according to its research,

> "Fewer than one in . . . ten consumers think businesses do their best to treat customers fairly and a third"—

a staggering figure—

> "say they have been treated unfairly in the last two years."

As Deirdre Hutton, chairman of the NCC, states:

> "The Bill is very welcome and will do a great deal to increase consumer protection. But there will still be gaps in the coverage of the law that will allow shark practices to slip through."

We agree, which is why we have tabled the amendments.

I stress that the amendments are new. We and the NCC have taken the trouble to narrow their wording as much as possible, but we will in no way get upset if the Minister thinks that the drafting could be improved. All that we need is an assurance that she agrees with what we are trying to achieve, and that—perhaps in the Lords—the Government will produce specific amendments to deal with these precise issues. However, unless she gives clear undertakings and makes clear promises in response to these amendments, I intend to divide the House.

Mr. Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland): Amendment No. 373, which is in my name and those of my colleagues, is short and technical, and deals with an issue on which we would not seek to divide the House. However, I would welcome the Minister's explanation as to why paragraph (b) refers to

> "conduct which constitutes a Community infringement",

but not to conduct that constitutes a domestic infringement. That seems a simple point of consistency, and if the Government have chosen to be inconsistent, it is incumbent on them to explain why.

The Liberal Democrats broadly support the thrust of amendments Nos. 195 and 196. The hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) comprehensively outlined the thinking behind them, and on this occasion I am pleased to associate myself with the bulk of his comments, particularly those relating to the NCC, which offered invaluable assistance to me and my colleagues in Standing Committee. The more I consider the consequences of

[Mr. Alistair Carmichael]

repealing part II of the Fair Trading Act 1973, the more I recognise the need for protections such as those offered in the amendments.

My experiences as a solicitor in private practice and since becoming a Member of this House have shown me that, after a contract has been perfected, the struggle between the consumer and the supplier is very unequal. I have seen many examples of it causing great distress to some of the most vulnerable people in our society. Elderly people, perhaps for reasons of politeness, are not prepared to show pushy salesmen the door. However, as the hon. Member for Eastbourne said, if they invite them in, they thereby forgo even the benefit of the small protection that the law currently offers.

The fraudster will always stay one step ahead, no matter how inventive or ingenious we are in the protections that we seek to give the consumer. The fraudster will always try to find some way to negate the work that we do here. My experience is that two main types of fraudsters are operating. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the drive tarmacadamers. I am alarmed to hear that they have moved from Eastbourne to Kent, but I am somewhat comforted by the thought that if they are on a northward march we have some time to go before we have to suffer them north of the Pentland firth. In the meantime, I hope that we will be able to put the necessary protections in place.

At the other end of the spectrum is the large commercial organisation that operates by sending a targeted sales force to people's homes and having them sign up on the spot to something that they subsequently are not able to honour. My experience of that was prior to the election, when I wished to install double glazing in my house in Aberdeenshire before selling it. The sales techniques of the double glazing companies were remarkable. I could not believe the number of salesmen who came to the house while I was away politicking in the northern isles and who told my wife that they could not enter into a contract unless her husband was home. That was all the more remarkable because anyone who knows the Carmichael household will know that the soft touch was the one in the northern isles, not the one who had to stay at home.

I have given one small example of the techniques used by such companies. The most vulnerable individuals need some protection from the worst excesses. I hope that the Minister will give us some assurance that the necessary protections, which would be the teeth of the Bill, will be given serious consideration in the other place. The amendments tabled by the Conservatives have our support and the blessing of the NCC. Their acceptance would be an important signal from the Government that they are prepared to protect the rights of vulnerable individuals in their homes.

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): I wish to speak briefly in support of my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) and the amendments he has tabled. I hope that the Minister will consider the points that he made. When all is said and done, I suspect that we do not disagree on much. We had a robust debate on the issues in Committee, but it was also a friendly debate. I know that the Minister has received briefings similar to those we have had, both from consumer bodies and from business representatives.

I am a little less idealistic than my hon. Friend about our ability to change the law for ever more. I fear that whatever changes are made, there are some who will always look for loopholes. Both my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne and the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) made it quite clear that there are a number of rogue traders who will abuse any loopholes in the law.

4 pm

My hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne referred to the comments of the CBI, which acts on behalf of business organisations. It has opposed the concept of unfair trading on the basis that it is insufficiently well targeted and gives rise to a degree of legal uncertainty. Having crossed the Rubicon and decided to go ahead with some degree of unfair trading in the Bill, we should ensure that these provisions have some teeth. Our main concern is that we would quickly find that protection of the consumer under the Bill proved illusory. For that reason, we are keen to press amendments Nos. 195 and 196 to a Division.

Reference was made earlier to the Unfair Contract Terms Act 1977. It has worked very well for the past quarter of a century; under its terms, individuals are, by necessity, treated differently from businesses. The concept is that in any trading bargain there could be a disaggregation between the bargaining powers of a large or even a small business and an individual who may be subjected to a doorstep sale or one by mail.

There has been no feeling that the 1977 Act should be repealed and no concerns about its provisions. There is, therefore, an acceptance of the potential inequality of bargaining power that needs to be entrenched within the law. Amendments Nos. 195 and 196 do not seem to go much further than the Government have been willing to go to date. They would ensure, as far as possible, a culture of fairness and fair trading between businesses that will also allow consumers a fair share of any resulting benefit, as the NCC has pointed out.

The last thing that any Government want, when putting new legislation on the statute book, is many hundreds or thousands of claims. It has been made quite clear that the unfair practice envisaged in our amendments would have to affect a group of consumers before any action could be taken. In other words, an individual could not clog up the legal system.

I shall be interested to hear what the Minister has to say in this regard. I agree with all Opposition Members who have spoken so far that the amendments require further buffing up. We would be comfortable with the Minister reconsidering the wording and finalising it before the Bill goes to another place. I hope that she will not only answer some of these points but go some way to ensuring that this very important procedural protection is included in the Bill.

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): I support amendment No. 196, tabled by the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson). If he cares to push it to a vote, we will support him in the Division Lobby.

I was interested in the comments of the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael). If I were him, I would not be too sure about the tarmacadamers; they have reached from Eastbourne up to Angus. I have often had them at my door, along with people wanting to cut my trees, install double glazing and paint my windows. I suppose that that may say more about the state of my house than anything else.

The hon. Member for Eastbourne slightly undersold amendment No. 196. It seems to me that his amendment would lay down certain principles for deciding whether an action had been unfair. That is important because, as has already been pointed out, changes can occur rapidly—con men have a habit of getting around regulations quickly.

Like the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland, I was a solicitor in private practice prior to my election to this place, and often came across the problems of victims—especially elderly people—of power salesmen who came to their door. One very elderly client of mine, sadly now deceased, was subject to periods of confusion and I was constantly having to extricate her from contracts that she had signed after the visits of salesmen who had persuaded her to buy all sorts of strange and wonderful things of which she had no need and which she would never have bought in normal circumstances.

Some of the worst offenders were the privatised utility companies; salesmen constantly tried to persuade people—especially the elderly—to change their electricity and gas suppliers. Those salesmen often used methods involving extreme pressure. On one occasion, I went home from my office at lunchtime to find one of those people on my doorstep trying to convince my wife. In my brief conversation with him, he told me three things about the contract that he was trying to sell that I knew were untrue.

That salesman was quickly shown the door, but many elderly people are not able to do that. The client to whom I referred earlier changed her electricity supplier and then became utterly confused about who she was getting her electricity from. Worse than that, however, because she had changed to a gas company, the electricity company salesman appeared at her door a couple of weeks later trying to persuade her to change to that supplier. The matter went on and on and the poor lady got into an utter fankle. I had to sort it out and get her back to suppliers that she could recognise and understand.

That situation arose because people are allowed to engage in that type of doorstep selling. Although amendment No. 196 is not perfect, it would go some way towards laying down principles that a court could consider in dealing with such techniques. If we are too restrictive, it will be easier for con men to get around the regulations. General principles allow the courts more latitude to interpret actions as they occur.

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): The general debate on amendment No. 196 was conducted in a fairly laid-back way by the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson), who suggested that if there was general Labour support for the aims of his proposal, he would not divide the House. I hope that he does not do so, as his proposal could almost be described as a wrecking amendment.

We all understand and accept that a number of people suffer from high-pressure salesmanship. There are a huge number of victims, so it is right to do what we can to protect people. However, once we make high-pressure salesmanship illegal, we might begin to bring the process into disrepute—a law that applies almost all the time is difficult to apply at any particular time.

Subsection (a) states that a person must not unfairly induce

> "consumers to enter into transactions which are not the result of free and informed decisions."

Let us consider that in relation to decisions about purchasing a holiday on the basis of brochures which, as we all know, bear little relation to the actual circumstances that obtain at the holiday resort. It is understood that a certain distortion is part of holiday companies' modus operandi. That is a form of high-pressure salesmanship, but it does not typically result in people complaining bitterly when the resort turns out to be more overcrowded than expected, with fewer loungers, less clean water—or the sewage being used to water the plants, as was my experience at one holiday venue—and so on.

Mr. Waterson: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving us all a sneak preview of his holiday plans, but how would he approach the case, raised in the NCC's briefing, of the holiday brochure that quite truthfully said that the holiday hotel was 25 metres from the beach, but sadly did not mention that there was a motorway in between?

Mr. McWalter: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. We could probably all exchange enjoyable anecdotes about these matters. Clearly, there is deception, but the issue is at what stage that deception becomes more than something that could be addressed by a compensatory payment from the holiday company if it were a member of the Association of British Travel Agents. At what stage do we move from an informal framework for resolving bitter disappointment at the quality of the venue to requiring the power to take strong legal action? That is my worry with amendment No. 196.

One needs to understand what would count as an informed decision. There is an onus on consumers at least to conduct their proceedings as wisely as possible. I understand that the current framework could be much extended, and I agree with the hon. Member for Eastbourne, who made this point in Committee, that selling people products in their own homes is perhaps not so much high-pressure salesmanship as almost putting the seller in such a dominant position that gainsaying the transaction is not feasible. If we can somehow produce a form of words that would prevent that, we might perhaps have an amendment that would be worth pressing to a Division.

Many decisions that people currently take are not fully informed, but informed enough, and many of them are not free, but free enough. If we try to elaborate too strongly in general terms on whether there is a legal right to take such matters to the Office of Fair Trading or others, there is a real danger that we could end up with a completely unworkable law. I suspect that the Opposition know that amendment No. 196, which they drafted, would be unworkable. However, the motives behind it are good and it would be sensible not to divide the House but to engage in what I hope would be constructive discussions.

To revert to a theme to which I have referred several times in these discussions, one has to try to make clear to what extent we should seek to combat unfair trading under

[Mr. McWalter]

the Bill and to what extent we should bear in mind the fact that there would be huge repercussions for the rest of the law, including the criminal law, in trying to tackle some of the other issues that result in people trading not just unfairly but viciously.

I hear what hon. Members have said about the tarmacadam merchants. Funnily enough, they have even appeared in Hemel Hempstead. One of the things that I have been trying to do is to get the Treasury to break down the barriers between Customs and Excise and the Inland Revenue. It is clear that much of the activity that goes on is illegal under current tax law, but we have an absurd situation in which information is insufficiently shared between two departments of the Treasury. Consequently, just when it might become apparent that a driveway layer is in breach of his obligations under Customs and Excise regulations, corroboration is needed from the Inland Revenue—whose records are completely different—and nothing gets done.

4.15 pm

People who are quite sophisticated, at least in terms of having no fixed abode and having other mechanisms for evasion, end up not being brought to book even though there are laws which should bring them to book and which if implemented would result in their no longer being in business. We must therefore try to ensure that the framework of law outside this Bill—which, after all, is important in promoting and setting a framework for fair enterprise—also delivers an appropriate range of laws to combat various kinds of malpractice.

Having spoken so far in favour of the Government's line, I want to conclude my remarks—this may not surprise those few Members who are present—by saying that I am reluctant to support Government amendment No. 380 as I understand it. I am worried about it on two grounds. First, it refers to directive 2000/31/EC. I have not been able to get hold of that document. It is not in the Vote Office, and I feel reluctant to nod such matters through. I should also be grateful if the Minister confirmed whether the directive—which I have not read, but which I have read about—says, for instance, that there is potential for considerable interference with what one might call domestic communications of an electronic character. Will the Minister reassure me that that is not involved in directive 2000/31/EC?

Miss Melanie Johnson: If I may, I shall start in roughly reverse order, and deal with the two other amendments outside the issue of the general duty to trade fairly or not to trade unfairly, and the issues raised in the substantive part of the debate this afternoon.

Amendment No. 373—as the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) raised the question—would enable an enforcer to make an application for an enforcement order against a person who it believed was likely to engage in conduct that would constitute a domestic infringement. That is already the case in respect of community infringements, as we believe that that is a requirement of the injunctions directive. Officials have discussed this matter with the Office of Fair Trading and the Local Authorities Co-ordinating Body on Regulatory Services—formerly the Local Authorities Co-ordinating Body on Trading Standards. Although I fully understand the argument in favour, we have not yet been provided with sufficient convincing cases in which it might be used to merit extending the scope of domestic infringements in this way. A power to prevent infringements before they occur is likely to be the most useful in advertising, where a single misleading advertisement has the potential to harm a large number of consumers. That would be a community infringement. As I mentioned, the Bill gives enforcers the powers to take action to stop likely community infringements—if necessary, by applying for an interim enforcement order. I hope that that addresses the hon. Gentleman's point.

Before I deal with the wider issues, I shall deal with the anxieties of my hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead (Mr. McWalter) about amendment No. 380. The amendment seeks to add the e-commerce directive to schedule 13, which lists the individual EC directives to which the definition of a community infringement in clause 205 applies. This is required by the EC injunctions directive. My Department's consultation on the extension of the stop now regulations to cover the e-commerce directive ends on 5 July. Regulations implementing the other provisions of the directive will be made shortly. I am not sure what my hon. Friend's anxiety is, but I hope that my explanation will have allayed it.

I now come to the substantive debate and to amendments Nos. 195 and 196. They would enable enforcement action to be taken against some conduct that [illegible] be unfair but that is not currently unlawful. We debated the issue at length in Committee, and the amendments that we debated then were modelled on the approach taken in the Unfair Terms in Consumer Contracts Regulations, and contained an indicative list of conduct that may be but is not necessarily held to be unfair.

The amendments seek to achieve a similar result by preventing suppliers from unfairly taking advantage of their superior knowledge and bargaining strength vis-à-vis the consumer. We all recognise the imbalance in the relationship and several Members have referred to it. The nature of the conduct that would be covered by this wording would be fairly limited, but I appreciate that, as some Members have acknowledged, it is the principle of the general duty that they wish to debate. I shall therefore consider that point.

I certainly agree that businesses should not abuse their superior bargaining position to take unfair advantage of consumers. Indeed, businesses that treat their customers honestly and fairly are much more likely to prosper by building up a loyal customer base. The hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) made the point that he thought that there was not much between us on this issue, and he is entirely right. The question is how to achieve the goal that many of us share. Like the hon. Gentleman, I recognise that business has some concerns.

I also accept that a small number of unscrupulous traders take a much more short-sighted view of their customers than do decent businesses. However, as I have told hon. Members before, I am not convinced that enshrining in the Bill a general duty not to trade unfairly is the best way of ensuring that consumers receive a fair deal. I shall explain why that is so and what I propose to do next.

We already have a well-established and comprehensive framework of consumer protection legislation which on the face of it would appear to cover many of the cases that hon. Members have mentioned. I cannot go through all of them because, although the Whip to whom I spoke was happy for me to speak for a few minutes, he was unhappy at the prospect of my going on for three hours. I have therefore eschewed that course of action.

Mr. Waterson: I can assist the Under-Secretary. Presumably she wants to avoid spending a quarter of an hour or more having one or more Divisions. That consideration might weigh in her discussions with the Whip.

Miss Johnson: I appreciate what the hon. Gentleman said earlier.

Several big issues are involved, one of which is how we define fair or unfair. There is much work to be done on that and it is by no means obvious that enshrining such terms in the Bill is a straightforward process that would make the provision and the definitions of fair and unfair clear to all and sundry.

We also face substantial considerations involving practicality. I shall touch on a few of the examples cited in which it is obvious that recourse is currently available, because that directly touches on the issue of practicality. Practicality involves enforcement, and many pieces of legislation impact on the cases about which Members have rightly said something should be done; I agree with them entirely on that. However, it can in practice be difficult to prove that pressured selling has taken place, for example, and in many cases it might be more sensible to improve the enforcement of existing legislation. We need to consider the evidence and the extent of the problems before we rush into legislating.

The hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) referred to the Kent county council itinerant tarmackers who have passed through everyone's constituency. Indeed, like my hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead (Mr. McWalter), my constituency in Hertfordshire is also plagued by such people.

Mr. Mark Field: Perhaps I should point out that the streets of my constituency are paved with gold. There is no risk of tarmackers coming to Cities of London and Westminster.

Miss Melanie Johnson: There are many opportunities for a riposte to that, but in the spirit of a more consensual debate, I will not take them.

The doorstep selling regulations provide a seven-day cooling-off period if a visit is unsolicited. Builders are required to carry out work with reasonable care and skill under section 13 of the Supply of Goods and Services Act 1982. Taking money for little or no work is covered by obtaining property by deception under the Theft Acts. We are also building up a quality mark scheme for reputable builders and tradesmen. There are a number of recourses. It is therefore a matter of what the consumer does to enforce legislation, and that would be the case were we to broaden the measure or not.

On the Trade Commission case and the hiring out of unsafe cars, in the UK that would be a breach of a term of contract, implied by statute, that a car should be of a satisfactory quality and fit for its purpose. That problem would be covered by part 8.

I am trying to illustrate the difficulties with some cases before setting out our approach. In relation to the elderly lady cited by the hon. Member for Eastbourne—it could, of course, have been an elderly gentleman, but for some reason it never is, although I am sure they are just as frail—because the visit was unsolicited it would be covered by the doorstep selling regulations, with the statutory cooling-off period and cancellation rights. The same cooling-off period would apply if the consumer had agreed to a visit from a salesperson as a result of an unsolicited visit or call.

Mr. Waterson: To save the Minister time, the point is that what typically happens is that the elderly lady—as she said, elderly gentlemen do not seem to feature in such stories—fills out and sends in a coupon in, say, *Saga Magazine*, a perfectly reputable publication, and that is construed as an invitation to the salesman to visit her. As the visit is not unsolicited, it is outside the protection to which the Minister referred.

Miss Johnson: I do not want to give too much complicated legal advice from the Dispatch Box for fear of coming up against the lawyers when I leave the Chamber. Obviously issues arise if someone buys something that they have not requested or set out to buy in the first place. That was cited in a number of examples. If people request a home visit for one product but are sold something else, they are also covered by the doorstep selling regulations.

Mr. Carmichael: I am listening to the Minister and wondering how anyone could possibly think that there is a problem, but we all know from our constituency experience and the experience of bodies such as the NCC that there is. I suggest that, rather than dealing with it through subordinate legislation such as that described by the Minister, it would be infinitely preferable to establish general broad principles capable of definition and enforcement by the courts, and that is what the Conservative amendments would do.

4.30 pm

Miss Johnson: I am not trying to suggest that there are no problems, and I shall go on to make points which will, hopefully, help the hon. Gentleman. I was illustrating the fact there are practical difficulties in some of these cases. Many of the problems faced by consumers are already covered in consumer protection legislation, and the difficulties arise in awareness of the law, in enforcement and in the empowerment of the consumer to secure enforcement through the appropriate route.

I shall not take up the time of the House by going through all the examples given by the hon. Member for Eastbourne, but he mentioned the time-share directive, and asked whether time spent on a canal houseboat is covered. There are provisions covering such arrangements, and in further discussions with the European Commission we shall seek to extend the directive to time-shares of less than three years' duration and time on canal houseboats. Because many people spend their holidays abroad rather than in the UK—many in other EU member states or areas covered by EU legislation—it is important that we look to the European dimension of all these matters.

[Miss Johnson]

Having said all that, it is important that we look again at the question of what we should do next. Policies for any new laws should be founded in fact and on a robust evidence base to ensure that they address issues of significant consumer detriment in a way that existing legislation does not.

It is important that new legislation should not create undue or unnecessary burdens on business, and I know that some hon. Members are concerned about that. For that reason, I have decided that the next step should be to invite key stakeholders from consumer groups, enforcers and business to a seminar with me in the summer. I want to use that occasion to look in more detail at the cases cited by consumer organisations in support of a general duty to trade fairly or not to trade unfairly—the very cases that hon. Members have raised in the House. Once I have a clearer picture of the problems, I shall consider what further action would be appropriate. At the moment, however, because many of the problems concern infringement and enforcement, we are in danger of simply legislating without giving consumers more effective recourse to the law.

I agree with hon. Members on both sides of the House that there are issues that need to be addressed. We agree that the consumer needs to be protected, and we share the same ends. However, I also agree with the hon. Members for Cities of London and Westminster and for Orkney and Shetland that the law will never catch up with the fraudster. That, I am afraid, is almost bound to be the case, but it is incumbent on the Government to do our very best to make sure that the law works as effectively as possible for consumers. There is already a great deal of consumer protection legislation, and if we can identify genuine loopholes, where problems exist that do not arise from enforcement, and tackle them separately, I will be happy to have further meetings with all the interested parties to see what steps would be most appropriate.

Mr. Waterson *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. The hon. Gentleman does not have a right of reply.

Mr. Waterson: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: If the hon. Gentleman wants to indicate whether he will press amendment No. 196 to a vote, he may do so, but a speech would not conform to the convention of the House. I ask him to understand that if one Member who has tabled an amendment seeks the leave of the House to speak, other Members may feel that they have the same entitlement.

Mr. Waterson: I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I shall speak strictly on the basis you set out, but I thought it might be worth outlining my approach to the amendments, especially amendment No. 196, on which I said that I might seek to divide the House.

Our amendment is not a wrecking amendment, as the hon. Member for Hemel Hempstead (Mr. McWalter) claimed it was. It is a genuine attempt—our second—to deal with a practical problem. Our aim is not to ban high-pressure salesmen, as he put it, but to deal with situations in which there is an imbalance in the bargaining positions of the parties.

The Minister was rather fatalistic. Rather like Stanley Baldwin, who said in the 1930s that the bomber would always get through, in her final remarks she seemed to suggest that the fraudster would always get away with it, no matter how much we tried.

Miss Melanie Johnson: The hon. Gentleman has gained a mistaken impression. As I think the hon. Members for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) and for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) would agree, although it is impossible to close for ever every possible avenue that fraudsters might find or invent for themselves, it is incumbent on the Government to give the consumer as much ready protection as possible. It is our intention to do that, and I believe that the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) shares that intention.

Mr. Waterson: Let me put it another way. This is not a situation in which the best should be the enemy of the good. If there are things the Minister can do that would cause an immediate improvement in the position of consumers, albeit without closing every conceivable loophole, those things should be welcomed and pressed forward with.

Mr. Carmichael: Does the hon. Gentleman agree with me that the best way to deal with future loopholes—if I can put it like that—is to construct a framework that is based on principle? That principle can be applied to future cases, and the effect is simply to extend the principle. The alternative is a narrow, legalistic approach wherein the remedy precedes the right.

Mr. Waterson: I agree, with one proviso, which I am sure the hon. Gentleman accepts, which is that that framework should be firmly bedded in the structure of our existing legal system.

The Minister touched on the difficulties of defining fair and unfair, but I thought that I had explained where the concept of fairness had already appeared in legislation and had not caused any great difficulties. She talked about difficulties of definition and of practicality and enforcement, although she agreed that something should be done.

The Minister appears to think that the matter is more one of improving enforcement of existing legislation—no one could disagree with her on the need for that—but the key point is that many of the scams are simply outside the scope of existing legislation. It does not matter how much effort is put into enforcing existing legislation if the scams are outside it. I commend to her the report by Age Concern on the sale of assistive products, which documents a great many cases—almost invariably involving elderly ladies—which arise almost daily.

Finally, the hon. Lady said that she sought to extend the time share directive. My point is that by the time that directive has been extended, the tricksters and fraudsters will be doing something else just as damaging to consumers under a different label.

What can the Minister offer us? An invitation to a seminar—at least I hope that I am included on the guest list. If the Minister invites me, I shall be delighted to attend. In the meantime, the fact that all she has in mind is a seminar suggests that her Department's thinking has not moved on. On that basis, I shall press amendment No. 196 to a Division.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 204

DOMESTIC INFRINGEMENTS

Amendment proposed: No. 196, in page 147, line 26, at end add—

'(2A) An act or omission or course of conduct falls within this subsection if it amounts to the abuse by the person in question ("the supplier") of his superior knowledge or bargaining strength so that he:

(a) unfairly induces consumers to enter into transactions which are not the result of free and informed decisions; or

(b) unfairly hinders consumers from enforcing rights under any consumer transaction.

(2B) In considering whether an act, omission or course of conduct amounts to an abuse under subsection 2A, the court shall take into account all the circumstances, including the nature of the goods or services in question, the nature and extent of any commitments undertaken by the consumers in question and any lack of good faith on the part of the supplier, and the court may have regard to:

(a) any representation made by the supplier, or failure to disclose information, which unreasonably prevents consumers from making adequate price or value comparisons between competing suppliers;

(b) any exploitation by the supplier of consumers' inability to make free and informed decisions, or to enforce rights under contracts, because of physical or mental infirmity, inability to understand the language of the transaction or other vulnerability;

(c) any failure by the supplier to comply with a consumer code of practice (as defined in section 8(4) of this Act) which he claims to follow;

(d) any act or omission by the supplier which causes any unreasonable expense of time or money by consumers pursuing legitimate complaints or rights under contracts entered into with the supplier; and

(e) any failure to keep consumers reasonably informed about matters relating to a contract for supply of services, or which might affect a decision whether or not to change suppliers.'.—*[Mr. Waterson.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 148, Noes 258.

Division No. 275] **[4.39 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Arness, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Barrett, John
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Carmichael, Alistair
Chidgey, David
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heath, David
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Key, Robert
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Weir, Michael
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Charles Hendry and
Mr. Desmond Swayne.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Bayley, Hugh
Benn, Hilary
Benton, Joe
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*

Bradshaw, Ben
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas
(Newcastle E & Wallsend)
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Burgon, Colin
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, Jean
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry
(B'ham Hodge H)
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dowd, Jim
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hoey, Kate
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hurst, Alan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie
(Welwyn Hatfield)
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Palmer, Dr Nick
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ruddock, Joan
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Ian Pearson and
Derek Twigg.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 206

ENFORCERS

Amendment made: No. 375, in page 148, line 27, at end insert—

'(c) the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment Northern Ireland.'—*[Miss Melanie Johnson.]*

Clause 208

APPLICATIONS

Amendment made: No. 376, in page 150, line 29, after "Wales" insert "or Northern Ireland".—*[Miss Melanie Johnson.]*

Clause 210

ENFORCEMENT ORDERS

Amendment made: No. 377, in page 151, line 32, leave out "that subsection" and insert—

'subsection (3) of that section'.—*[Miss Melanie Johnson.]*

Clause 215

BODIES CORPORATE: ACCESSORIES

Amendment made: No. 378, in page 156, line 12, leave out subsection (10) and insert—

'(10) A person is an associate of an individual if—

(a) he is the spouse of the individual;

(b) he is a relative of the individual;

(c) he is a relative of the individual's spouse;

(d) he is the spouse of a relative of the individual;

(e) he is the spouse of a relative of the individual's spouse;

(f) he lives in the same household as the individual otherwise than merely because he or the individual is the other's employer, tenant, lodger or boarder;

(g) he is a relative of a person who is an associate of the individual by virtue of paragraph (f);

(h) he has at some time in the past fallen within any of paragraphs (a) to (g).

(11) A person is also an associate of—

(a) an individual with whom he is in partnership;

(b) an individual who is an associate of the individual mentioned in paragraph (a);

(c) a body corporate if he is a controller of it or he is an associate of a person who is a controller of the body corporate.

(12) A body corporate is an associate of another body corporate if—

(a) the same person is a controller of both;

(b) a person is a controller of one and persons who are his associates are controllers of the other;

(c) a person is a controller of one and he and persons who are his associates are controllers of the other;

(d) a group of two or more persons is a controller of each company and the groups consist of the same persons;

(e) a group of two or more persons is a controller of each company and the groups may be regarded as consisting of the same persons by treating (in one or more cases) a member of either group as replaced by a person of whom he is an associate.

(13) A relative is a brother, sister, uncle, aunt, nephew, niece, lineal ancestor or lineal descendant.'—*[Miss Melanie Johnson.]*

Clause 221

EVIDENCE

Amendment made: No. 379, in page 158, line 25, at end insert—

'(c) section 7 of the Civil Evidence Act (Northern Ireland) 1971 (c. 36 (N.I.)) (corresponding provision in Northern Ireland).'—*[Miss Melanie Johnson.]*

New clause 6

BANKRUPT'S HOME

'(1) The following shall be inserted after section 283 of the Insolvency Act 1986 (definition of bankrupt's estate)—

"283A Bankrupt's home ceasing to form part of estate

(1) This section applies where property comprised in the bankrupt's estate consists of an interest in a dwelling-house which at the date of the bankruptcy was the bankrupt's sole or principal residence.

(2) At the end of the period of three years beginning with the date of the bankruptcy the interest mentioned in subsection (1) shall—

(a) cease to be comprised in the bankrupt's estate, and

(b) vest in the bankrupt (without conveyance, assignment or transfer).

(3) Subsection (2) shall not apply if during the period mentioned in that subsection—

(a) the trustee realises the interest mentioned in subsection (1),

(b) the trustee applies for an order for sale in respect of the dwelling-house,

(c) the trustee applies for an order for possession of the dwelling-house,

(d) the trustee applies for an order under section 313 in Chapter IV in respect of that interest, or

[illegible]) the trustee and the bankrupt agree that the bankrupt shall incur a specified liability to his estate (with or without the addition of interest from the date of the agreement) in consideration of which the interest mentioned in subsection (1) shall cease to form part of the estate.

(4) Where an application of a kind described in subsection (3)(b) to (d) is made during the period mentioned in subsection (2) and is dismissed, unless the court orders otherwise the interest to which the application relates shall on the dismissal of the application—

(a) cease to be comprised in the bankrupt's estate, and

(b) vest in the bankrupt (without conveyance, assignment or transfer).

(5) If the bankrupt does not inform the trustee or the official receiver of his interest in a property before the end of the period of three months beginning with the date of the bankruptcy, the period of three years mentioned in subsection (2)—

(a) shall not begin with the date of the bankruptcy, but

(b) shall begin with the date on which the trustee or official receiver becomes aware of the bankrupt's interest.

(6) The court may substitute for the period of three years mentioned in subsection (2) a longer period—

(a) in prescribed circumstances, and

(b) in such other circumstances as the court thinks appropriate.

(7) The rules may make provision for this section to have effect with the substitution of a shorter period for the period of three years mentioned in subsection (2) in specified circumstances (which may be described by reference to action to be taken by a trustee in bankruptcy).

(8) The rules may also, in particular, make provision—

(a) requiring or enabling the trustee of a bankrupt's estate to give notice that this section applies or does not apply;

(b) about the effect of a notice under paragraph (a);

(c) requiring the trustee of a bankrupt's estate to make an application to the Chief Land Registrar.

(9) Rules under subsection (8)(b) may, in particular—

(a) disapply this section;

(b) enable a court to disapply this section;

(c) make provision in consequence of a disapplication of this section;

(d) enable a court to make provision in consequence of a disapplication of this section;

(e) make provision (which may include provision conferring jurisdiction on a court or tribunal) about compensation."

(2) Section 313 of the Insolvency Act 1986 (c. 45) (charge on bankrupt's home) shall be amended as follows—

(a) in subsection (2) for ", up to the value from time to time of the property secured," substitute "; up to the charged value from time to time,", and

(b) after subsection (2) insert—

"(2A) In subsection (2) the charged value means—

(a) the amount specified in the charging order as the value of the bankrupt's interest in the property at the date of the order, plus

(b) interest on that amount from the date of the charging order at the prescribed rate.

(2B) In determining the value of an interest for the purposes of this section the court shall disregard any matter which it is required to disregard by the rules."

(3) The following shall be inserted after section 313 of that Act—

"313A Low value home: application for sale, possession or charge

(1) This section applies where—

(a) property comprised in the bankrupt's estate consists of an interest in a dwelling-house which at the date of the bankruptcy was the bankrupt's sole or principal residence, and

(b) the trustee applies for an order for the sale of the property, for an order for possession of the property or for an order under section 313 in respect of the property.

(2) The court shall dismiss the application if the value of the interest is below the amount prescribed for the purposes of this subsection.

(3) In determining the value of an interest for the purposes of this section the court shall disregard any matter which it is required to disregard by the order which prescribes the amount for the purposes of subsection (2)."

(4) The following shall be inserted after section 307(2)(a) of the Insolvency Act 1986 (c. 45) (after-acquired property: exclusions)—

"(aa) any property vesting in the bankrupt by virtue of section 283A in Chapter II,".

(5) In section 384(2) of that Act (prescribed amounts) after "section 273;" insert—

"section 313A;".

(6) In section 418(1) of that Act (monetary limits in bankruptcy) after the entry for section 273 insert—

section 313A (value of property below which application for sale, possession or charge to be dismissed);".

(7) In subsection (8)—

(a) "pre-commencement bankrupt" means an individual who is adjudged bankrupt on a petition presented before subsection (1) above comes into force, and

(b) "the transitional period" is the period of three years beginning with the date on which subsection (1) above comes into force.

(8) If a pre-commencement bankrupt's estate includes an interest in a dwelling-house which at the date of the bankruptcy was his sole or principal residence, at the end of the transitional period that interest shall—

(a) cease to be comprised in the estate, and

(b) vest in the bankrupt (without conveyance, assignment or transfer).

(9) But subsection (8) shall not apply if before or during the transitional period—

(a) any of the events mentioned in section 283A(3) of the Insolvency Act 1986 (c.45) (inserted by subsection (1) above) occurs in relation to the interest or the dwelling-house, or

(b) the trustee obtains any order of a court, or makes any agreement with the bankrupt, in respect of the interest or the dwelling-house.

(10) Section 283A(4) of that Act shall apply to an application made during the transitional period in relation to a pre-commencement bankrupt as it applies to an application made during the period mentioned in section 283A(2).'.—*[Miss Melanie Johnson.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Miss Melanie Johnson: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

New clause 6 was tabled to fulfil a commitment made in Committee to my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Borrow), who had tabled his own new clause to deal with situations where the bankrupt's family home remains liable for sale by the trustee, and indeed is sometimes sold by him, long after the bankrupt has been discharged. The current provisions can lead to some harsh outcomes and perceived unfairness, and my hon. Friend mentioned representations from a wide range of organisations—including the Insolvency Practices Council, the Bankruptcy Advisory Service and the Association of Business Recovery Professionals—seeking clarification and a change to the law. The hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Djanogly) also spoke in Committee in favour of change.

My hon. Friend accepted that his new clause may not have been perfectly drafted and withdrew it on our undertaking further to consider the issue of the family home. New clause 6 provides for more equitable treatment of the family home in bankruptcy. The home will continue to vest on bankruptcy in the bankrupt's estate, as it does now, but the clause provides a three-year period during which the trustee must act. If he does not do so, the family home reverts to the bankrupt at the end of that period. The clause provides for extending that period in special circumstances, but that will be the exception rather than the norm.

We believe that all the relevant provisions will result in a much fairer regime. They will provide some certainty to the bankrupt, the trustee and the creditors about the time scale, which is currently open ended, for dealing with the family home. They will create a balance between the interests of the bankrupt and his or her family and the creditors. In a minority of cases, that balance can currently unfairly favour the interests of creditors, and the provisions will help lift the stigma of bankruptcy.

In considering the matter further, we have concluded that those who are bankrupt when the new provisions come into force should also benefit. There seems no sound reason why that should not happen, especially since they feel the unfair effects of the current law. The new clause therefore contains transitional provisions.

The provision is detailed because it deals with a complex subject. Nevertheless, we believe that it will create a reasonable balance between the interests of creditors, by providing ample time for the disposal by the trustee of the bankrupt's interest in his or her sole and principal residence in the most appropriate manner, and those of bankrupts and their dependents, by providing a degree of finality about the time scale in which their interests in their homes will be tackled.

I ask hon. Members to support the new clause.

Mr. Waterson: I am grateful to the Minister for explaining the thinking behind the new clause. As she rightly says, it is based on a similar amendment which the hon. Member for South Ribble (Mr. Borrow) tabled in Committee. As she also said, a central reason for the new clause is removing the stigma of bankruptcy. The Opposition and the Government differ sharply on the matter. As the Minister knows from our Committee proceedings, we have genuine anxieties about whether removing the stigma to the extent for which the Bill provides is commendable. We have examined in some detail experience in the USA, Hong Kong and Scotland to ascertain what has happened in other parts of the world where similar proposals pertain.

Mr. McWalter: The hon. Gentleman mentions removing the stigma on bankrupts. Does he accept that the new clause would remove it from some but possibly make it worse for those whom one might regard as maleficent bankrupts?

Mr. Waterson: Clearly, it affects bankrupts who have a substantial asset in the form of a home in which they live. However, I am sure that the hon. Gentleman and the Minister accept that the new clause is part of the general philosophy of the provisions that we are considering: removing the stigma of bankruptcy, and making it easier for people to become bankrupt and come out of bankruptcy. The argument for that is based on the unsustainable proposition of culpable and non-culpable bankrupts. We do not accept that, and we have argued for a third category: the pathological optimists, who do not mean any harm but leave a trail of debt and destruction.

It is instructive to examine the Minister's initial reaction to what was new clause 12, which the hon. Member for South Ribble tabled in Committee. She did not greet it with special enthusiasm,

> "as it can lead to a certain rough justice in practice and is not entirely compatible with 'A Fresh Start'".—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 16 May 2002; c. 714.]

"A Fresh Start" is the title of the White Paper, and the Minister herself made those remarks.

In Committee, we covered the point that English law makes no distinction between personal and corporate insolvency. We know that after the changes in the law in the USA, 1.5 million bankruptcies a year there have nothing to do with business. The vast proportion constitute consumers who are wiping out consumer—usually credit card—debt. We must be under no illusions about the provision being directed at individuals who run up personal credit bills. In many cases, the only asset available to their creditors will be the remaining equity in their homes. With the current explosion in consumer credit, this problem is likely to get worse rather than better.

5 pm

In addition, another part of the Bill contributes to the problem that will arise from new clause 6. That involves the more limited time that will be available to investigate bankrupts and their assets before they are discharged from bankruptcy. We shall investigate this matter in greater detail under the eighth group of amendments. The Bill sets out a period of 12 months, but makes it clear that, for many bankrupts, that will be the upper ceiling, and that they will come out of bankruptcy well within the 12-month period. One of the arguments against the three-year period relates to whether the ownership of a property comes to light in a reasonable time, and I shall come to that in a minute. We want to ensure that, in introducing these changes—which must all be taken together—we do not produce a kind of rogue's charter.

I am sure that the Minister will concede that excluding a bankrupt's home in certain circumstances is a major issue in this legislation, and the proposal has been introduced very much at the last minute. I concede that there was a discussion based on the new clause tabled in Committee by the hon. Member for South Ribble, although, as I recall, that came towards the end of the Committee's deliberations. The Minister, having promised to come back to us on this matter, has, indeed, produced the Government's own new clause. This has come at a very late stage in relation to our discussions on the Bill last Thursday and today.

There are two aspects to the Government's rather detailed new clause. The first issue relates to a bankrupt's sole or principal residence being returned to them, in principle, after three years. The second issue—to which the Minister did not, perhaps, devote as much time as she should have—involves the provision about low-value homes. Subsection (3) of the new clause proposes that, when a bankrupt's sole or principal residence is involved, and a trustee applies for an order for the sale or possession of the property, or

> "for an order under section 313 in respect of the property",
>
> "The court shall dismiss the application if the value of the interest is below the amount prescribed for the purposes of this subsection."

That is quite a dramatic departure, even from the debate that we had in Committee. As I read that paragraph, it seems to be saying that properties below a certain value will be exempt from the bankruptcy process in any event. Presumably, it leaves the fixing of the value—the so-called low value—to regulation. It would be interesting to hear more of the Minister's thinking about what kind of low value we are talking about.

This measure has the potential to be extremely divisive across the country. How is this low value to be established? Judged by London standards, properties in some parts of the country have a very low value indeed, but only on a comparative basis. What attempts, if any, have been made to consult insolvency practitioners, consumer bodies or the credit industry on the effects of this and the earlier part of the new clause? What is the thinking behind this development concerning low-value properties? How is that term to be defined? What is the basis for it? This provision goes significantly beyond the debate that we had in Committee, and it would be interesting to know precisely what the departmental thinking behind it is.

These major concerns are borne out by a letter that was sent to the Minister by an anonymous insolvency practitioner, a copy of which was also sent to me. This person has practised as an insolvency practitioner for many years, and used to work for the Insolvency Service. His first point was that he was unsure when the three-year period would begin to run. As I read the new clause, it would seem to begin when the bankruptcy starts. The gentleman to whom I refer, however, points out that it might make more sense if the three years ran from when the trustee became aware of the existence of the property.

Miss Melanie Johnson: Subsection (5) states that if the bankrupt does not notify the official receiver or the trustee of the property, the three-year period will be extended.

Mr. Waterson: That is very helpful.

[Mr. Waterson]

As I am sure the Minister will accept, it is not unknown for a bankrupt to hide his interest in a property. This is not a situation in which all or even most bankrupts rush to declare all their assets at the beginning of a bankruptcy.

The gentleman I mentioned writes:

> "What the government appears to be saying to unscrupulous or feckless/reckless bankrupts . . . is that if you risk, in the main, other people's money and if you are lucky enough for the equity in your house to increase . . . that windfall benefit will be yours rather than your long suffering creditors', the government needless to say being one of the larger losers. This doesn't encourage enterprise, but a bunch of gamblers gambling recklessly with other people's money."

Before proceeding, the Minister should at least ask the insolvency profession whether hers is a sensible approach.

We are prepared to concede that, if there is some unfairness, it could be argued that it is experienced by the bankrupt's spouse rather than the bankrupt if he or she has not been kept fully informed. The hon. Member for South Ribble said, not unreasonably, that it was a shock for someone, having initially kept his home, to use it some years later during a bankruptcy; but I understand that that has been addressed for some years by the Insolvency Service itself.

The bankrupt and/or his or her spouse is given the opportunity, in the event of negative or limited positive equity, to purchase the property for a nominal sum—usually £1—with legal costs of no more than £230. It is difficult to believe that the bankrupt or spouse could not raise that kind of money if the offer were made in the usual way. However, the gentleman's letter continues:

> "I have seen many cases working for an Insolvency Practitioner, where there are many unanswered letters on file from the Official Receiver, to the bankrupt offering to sell his interest in the property for a nominal sum. I have looked at the file of one bankrupt where there were no less than 6 letters on file from the Official Receiver commencing within weeks of the Bankruptcy".

The problem seems, however, not to relate so much to the matrimonial home with negative or very limited equity. Any bankrupt with any sense should accept the terms routinely offered. I am told that the practical problem for trustees is dealing with cases in which the bankrupt's share of the equity is perhaps between £2,500 and £10,000, and it is beyond the ability of the bankrupt or his spouse to borrow that sum, but uneconomic for the trustee—in terms of his own fees—to pursue the matter through the courts.

As for bargaining with the bankrupt, the trustee would not give up the potential right to sell the matrimonial home as a way of ensuring a more satisfactory result in terms of the bankruptcy overall. One of the aims of new clause 6 is to prevent such pressure from being exerted on a bankrupt who may be less than willing to volunteer assets or payments to satisfy creditors.

One answer proposed by our anonymous correspondent is that the Insolvency Service should review its files far more regularly, not just when the assets fall into its lap—usually when the bankrupt wants to sell or remortgage his home. He says:

> "in my experience this is the most common way insolvency practitioners get appointed."

He says, in conclusion:

> "There is a cheap and effective way for many bankrupts/spouses to protect their homes, the fact that the way has not been taken is normally the ostrich response of many bankrupts and the fact it takes some years to discover is due at best to the under resourced and under trained Insolvency Service, at worst due to their inability to apply or understand their own procedures."

On any view, this provision must shift the balance of power between creditors and debtors. It is bound to have a knock-on effect on the credit industry, quite apart from the effects, which we discussed at length in Committee and will discuss at length again today, of other provisions relating, in particular, to personal insolvency. It is important that Ministers and officials consult fully before proceeding with the proposals, because the ghost at the banquet—the law of unintended consequences—is bound to arise again here, as sure as eggs is eggs. As the Opposition, we must at least try to guard against that.

With all due respect to the hon. Member for South Ribble, who advanced arguments that were sometimes simple and emotional, there is always another side to the question. It is important that the Government do not rush to try to right an apparent injustice, when the real injustice is often the one visited on creditors, who may be not banks or credit companies but simply other individuals, family or friends, who have advanced money to a bankrupt. All too often, the lender of last resort is a close family member or friend.

Mr. David Borrow (South Ribble): I welcome the new clause. I am extremely grateful that the Minister delivered on the promise made in Committee. The new clause is long and complex, because this is a complex and difficult area of law, but the principles are simple, to echo the word used by the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson). When a person goes bankrupt, it is reasonable for the creditors to be able to get access to all the assets, but we are talking not about assets but about a family home in which there is no interest, or only marginal interest, at the time of bankruptcy.

The new clause means that the creditors must, within three years, either take possession of the property and dispose of it or allow the bankrupt to continue to own it so that equity builds up, either by an increase in its value or by a lessening of the mortgage debt. If the house were a moveable chattel, it would be sold and the value would be distributed among the creditors, but at the time of bankruptcy there is nothing for the creditors to get hold of, because it does not exist.

Under the current law, the value in the property that is built up, through hard work and paying off the mortgage and through changes in the property's value after the bankrupt is discharged, can end up being distributed to the creditors a decade or more later, when any other asset belonging to the bankrupt at the time of bankruptcy would already have been sold and distributed.

In my view, it is important to be able to say that, once a bankrupt has been discharged, a line has been drawn under the matter and he can get on with his life, build up equity in the home and anticipate being able to retire with a property that has been bought and paid for. Under the current law, that may not happen. The hon. Member for Eastbourne asked about what happens if the family home does not come to the attention of the trustee at the time of bankruptcy, but that point is adequately dealt with in new clause 6, which points out that the three-year period begins when the property's existence comes to the attention of the trustee.

5.15 pm

This is a modest but important new clause for certain people. I welcome its introduction by my hon. Friend the Minister, and the fact that her officials have found time to ensure its correct drafting. I hope that the House will accept it.

Mr. Mark Field: I accept the points made by the hon. Member for South Ribble (Mr. Borrow) today and in Committee. It seems unusual and perhaps unfair on a bankrupt to be left in limbo for such a period, particularly in cases where the matrimonial home is clearly part of the bankrupt's estate when proceedings begin, and the risk of needing to sell it off to pay the bankrupt's debts is therefore small or non-existent. Such uncertainty would be especially unfair on the bankrupt's spouse and children, for example. However, there are also concerns—articulated well by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson)—about stigma and the position of creditors. In tabling this and other provisions, the position of creditors has perhaps been forgotten, or at least downgraded somewhat.

Although I appreciate that the same could be said of any arbitrary time limit, my concern about a strict three-year limit is that it might be deemed necessary to sell the bankrupt's home—to realise perhaps only a relatively small proportion of the equity—at a difficult time in the property market. I am a relatively new MP, with 12 and a half months' experience in this place, but those who were MPs during the mid-1990s will be familiar with stories of individuals who, on becoming bankrupt, had their property taken over by the mortgage company or building society, and sold for a very low value. Any arbitrary time limit such as that proposed involves the inevitable risk that the property will have to be sold at a time disadvantageous to the bankrupt. Notwithstanding the level of discretion provided by the clause, such risk remains.

Mr. Waterson: Although the Minister rightly pointed out that a court can apply a period longer than three years, under subsection (7) it is possible, in principle, for a period of less than three years to be applied.

Mr. Field: I fully appreciate that there is flexibility, but if the clause is too flexible, it risks going against the grain of the intended aim of achieving some certainty. Such certainty is necessary in the light of the concerns of the bankrupt, and particularly of the state, about housing any dependants.

It seems that the new clause will ultimately be accepted, and instinctive support does indeed exist on both sides of the House for some o. the aims of the hon. Member for South Ribble and the Government. I hope, however, that thought will be given to the underlying concern that it might be made far too easy to apply for individual bankruptcies. The real risk of this clause and other clauses is that the interests of creditors will be undermined.

We will no doubt brandish statistics later in the debate, but newspapers have recently reported that significant numbers of graduates leave university with large personal debts. They may not have the benefit of owning property, but such debts could lead to less of a stigma for being bankrupt, and students with large debts may go into bankruptcy at an early stage in order to draw a line under them. As I have said, the fear is that the interests of creditors—as my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne pointed out, the creditor of last resort is all too often friends and family—will be undermined by allowing further rights to those with debts.

I hope that the Minister will be able to provide some assurances on the points that have been made. Given the debate that we had in Committee, we can understand why the new clause is considered a good idea, but we are worried that creditors' interests will be downgraded in some way and that the strict time limits—notwithstanding the potential for some flexibility—will cause grave injustices. Examples of such injustices will no doubt have a high profile press coverage, and that will not do any of us any credit. We may find that the good intentions behind the clause will be undermined by the reality.

Mr. McWalter: I congratulate my hon. Friends the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Borrow) and the Minister on the new clause. It will significantly strengthen the Bill in terms of trying to promote a culture of enterprise. People will have greater opportunities to set up businesses—to implement a business idea—without risking all the assets that they have accumulated before setting out on a venture that will always be hazardous and difficult, no matter what the Government do. People who try to develop new businesses will always win the respect of Members of Parliament.

The new clause exposes again the fault line between the Government and the Opposition. The Opposition say that they do not support the idea that one can distinguish between bankrupts who are benign and those who are malign. Of course, the third category of serial optimist—or people who might be described as reckless—will come to the attention of the courts after the first or second reckless venture. In such cases, the courts would begin to think that such persons were malign.

Mr. Field: The legislation on individual bankruptcy and, to an extent, corporate insolvency is predicated on the basis that some bankrupts and insolvent companies are good and some are bad. However, does the hon. Gentleman agree that there are shades of grey? We are concerned that the Government's approach is naive. The issue therefore should be dealt with as a matter of fact, rather than of strict law.

Mr. McWalter: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. It is a matter of shades of grey and difficult decisions need to be made about whether somebody who has left a lot of creditors in the lurch is so culpable that they should face a long period of imprisonment or be banned from being a company director. In other cases, people might go bankrupt because someone defaulted on a large debt that was owed to them, so it was no fault of theirs—especially if the default was unforeseeable. There is a spectrum of cases and it is ultimately for the courts to decide some of them.

Under the new clause, it must be decided whether someone is malign or benign. People heading for bankruptcy can do everything possible to salt away resources so that when they go bankrupt and default on their obligations to their creditors, they can live off the fat of the resources that they have salted away. I have come across a case in my constituency of someone making extraordinary payments into a pension plan which can be

[Mr. McWalter]

drawn down early so that he can live high on the hog while the enterprises of many of his creditors are significantly diminished. That is a malign case.

Similarly, people can vest in their property a significant amount of resources that they should have been paying out on the bills to those who supplied commodities and services to their companies. However, new clause 6 caters for that eventuality. Someone may develop a significant capital in a property that is in council tax band H, for example, at the same time as they have been defaulting on their obligations, and if the company and its directors fail to take account of the process of giving an early warning and indicating to the authorities that they will have difficulty in meeting their obligations, I am sure that when the trustee applies for an order for sale in respect of the dwelling house, it will be granted. That is the process envisaged by the new clause.

Of course, much of the time, people genuinely have a single dwelling house—a principal residence—where not only they but their family and children live. Under the old regime, that asset is taken away and it falls to the state to house the family and children. These days, it is difficult for local authorities to respond positively in those circumstances. I agree with the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) about grey areas, but if we assume that the person has built up an inordinate amount of capital as a result of malign activities, it is ultimately for the courts to decide on which side of the line they fall. Have they built up that capital while failing to co-operate with the authorities? Some cases might be difficult to decide. Sometimes the order for sale will be granted because it will be reasonable to expect the family to rehouse itself in a lower value property, paid for out of residual assets.

5.30 pm

Mr. Waterson: Does the hon. Gentleman at least accept my concern that, in other parts of the Bill, the actual period for investigation and then discharge of a bankrupt could be much less even than 12 months? Given existing pressure on the relevant resources, that could mean that if the information that a property was not the sole, but could be the principal, residence, was not volunteered, that asset might not be available at all for the satisfaction of the creditors due to the dishonesty of the bankrupt and the lack of proper investigation by the trustee.

Mr. McWalter: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. Where there is non-disclosure, the person is automatically in danger of instantly being labelled a malign bankrupt; because of the failure to disclose, the kind of protection for the principal home envisaged in the new clause would not apply. Such behaviour would thus immediately constitute a prima facie case for the person not benefiting from the provision.

Mr. Waterson: The hon. Gentleman is generous in giving way to me again. The point I was trying to make was that the non-disclosure might remain undiscovered—although the hon. Gentleman is right about the effects, if it was discovered.

Mr. McWalter: I accept what the hon. Gentleman says, although if it became clear at a later stage that someone had failed to disclose, other statutes might be applicable, depending on the precise nature of the non-disclosure; for instance, the Proceeds of Crime Bill might apply.

Mr. Ken Purchase (Wolverhampton, North-East): Although I have huge sympathy with the new clause in its widest sense because it will bring a little more justice in those situations, on the narrow point that my hon. Friend makes about malignity and non-malignity, does he agree that determining between the two would be an enormous task to give anyone? Within that narrow context, does he agree that a person who fails to keep themselves fully and properly informed of good business practice might as well be acting malignly if it leads to the difficulties that we are discussing?

Mr. McWalter: As always, my hon. Friend makes a substantive point: someone might fail to co-operate in disclosing their difficulties meeting their obligations because they simply do not know that to do so could result in those difficulties being obviated. That raises interesting questions about the custodians of that process, although insolvency practitioners increasingly seek such changes in the law. When a person makes an initial approach to such a practitioner, they will rapidly be made aware of the arrangements whereby they could be assisted to discharge their obligations to their creditors.

To return to the point that I was making, the procedure admits of coping with two very different kinds of case, and even with the slightly in-between grey cases on which Opposition Members are especially keen. The result of the change—for which I have already commended my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry—would be that people could think about setting up a business without its threatening the welfare of their family. That would be a marvellous change for the business culture of this country and I sincerely hope that we can make the provision work.

I accept the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mr. Purchase) that its implementation will require extremely good communication between the Government and business, hopefully, for instance, through the agency of the Small Business Service. We should try to ensure that it becomes a prime agency for helping businesses that experience the sort of difficulties to which he adverted.

Mr. Carmichael: I shall not detain the House long. I have already given hon. Members the benefit of the Presbyterian perspective and stigma in Committee, and I do not intend to rehearse it again. However, as the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) has said, this is a question of shades of grey, and even in the Church of Scotland, we recognise shades of grey.

Mr. Purchase: Does the hon. Gentleman speak for the Wee Frees?

Mr. Carmichael: I cannot speak for the Wee Frees; I am not one of them.

The hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) said that he was aware of difficulties in other jurisdictions, including Scotland. I am not, in all honesty, aware of a great groundswell of opinion among insolvency practitioners or others in Scotland seeking the sort of changes that he seeks to promote. Unless he can supply us with more concrete examples, I wonder about the extent to which he perhaps seeks to manufacture a problem that does not exist.

I had some difficulty in reconciling the hon. Gentleman's remarks and, indeed, those of his colleague, the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster, with those made by those on the Government Benches. When all else fails on these occasions, my approach is always to read the amendment, and it seems to me that the new clause was being painted rather blacker than necessary.

The hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster says that the application should be a matter of fact, rather than of law. Indeed, if one has regard to the terms of the new clause, that is, in fact, the case. We are dealing with a number of instances in which discretion will be given to trustees, and we hope that that discretion will be excised responsibly and properly on the basis of the information available to them at any given time. Indeed, in the circumstances, I would go so far as to say that the trustees will be best qualified to judge the appropriate application.

Discretion is the important aspect. As the hon. Member for Hemel Hempstead (Mr. McWalter) said, where someone seeks to avoid disclosure, it is highly likely that the trustee will regard that as an act that would divest the individuals concerned of the protection provided under new clause 6. In other words, they would not be protected by it. On balance, the Government's approach is correct.

I have only one concern, which has not yet been properly aired: low-value homes. I want to hear more from the Minister about how those proposals will work and how the variation in property prices will be accommodated. In certain parts of my constituency, two or three-bedroom cottages can still be bought for £10,000 or £15,000.

Mr. Purchase: Are they in a nice part of the hon. Gentleman's constituency?

Mr. Carmichael: The hon. Gentleman should be aware that there are no nasty parts of Shetland. If he has learned nothing else in past eight weeks, I have surely taught him that much.

The situation in Shetland is very different from that which pertains in other parts of the country, and I wonder just how that circle will be squared. I would want to hear rather greater assurance from the Government that those concerns have been met before we rush headlong into the difficulties that I have outlined.

Miss Melanie Johnson: On a few occasions, I wonder whether all hon. Members have listened carefully to what is said in the opening remarks. I thought that I had sketched out very clearly the fact that there are two situations. I refer in particular to the comments made by the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) in his opening remarks. The new clause is intended to deal with uncertainty and variation and to achieve a balance. I thought that I had emphasised those points in my opening remarks, but I obviously failed in several regards and I shall endeavour to set the record straight.

First, let us be absolutely clear that the new clause does not exclude the family home in any sense. Were there to be a failure to disclose the existence of a family home, it would be an offence under the Insolvency Act 1986, and it would be taken into consideration by the courts. If there is equity in the property, the creditors will get the benefit of it. The effect of the new clause is that the trustee must act within three years. That is the core and central purpose of the new clause, albeit, as Members have recognised, a lengthy and complicated way of achieving it. It responds to a significant number of views that were expressed. Again, the hon. Member for Eastbourne questioned the views of the insolvency profession.

Mr. Borrow: I am sure that my hon. Friend has received a great many representations on this matter. Is she in the same position as me, however, in that the only hostile representation that I have received was from the anonymous insolvency practitioner? Does she regard anonymous representations as I do, and give very little weight to them?

Miss Johnson: Indeed. I have not seen the anonymous representation, as I suspect that it is hard to answer such an anonymous representation. It has not come to my attention, although the hon. Member for Eastbourne has raised it in his remarks.

I should like to set the record straight. On the issue of the matrimonial home, the Insolvency Practices Council said:

> "It is accepted there are many different circumstances affecting the value of the equity and the potential value to the bankruptcy estate. When should a decision be taken on realisation? At present some of the variations do not seem to be soundly based."

The Bankruptcy Advisory Service said:

> "We continue to hear from people who were bankrupt some years ago and who have not taken steps to secure their home from any action by their Official Receiver/Trustee in Bankruptcy. Now years later, they find that the property has increased in value and their regular mortgage repayments have reduced the borrowing, putting substantial equity in the property for the Official Receiver/Trustee to claim".

Clearly, a balance must be struck, which is why the opportunity is provided of three years in which to take the property into account. My hon. Friend the Member for Dudley, South (Mr. Pearson), who cannot contribute to our debate, commented to me earlier that he has a constituent—the wife of a bankrupt—for whom this is an issue after 13 years of bankruptcy. Clearly, these issues can cause considerable distress when they crop up much later.

The Association of Business Recovery Professionals also commented:

> "This is the concern, which has been identified . . . about variations in practice between trustees in bankruptcy in how they deal with the matrimonial home, and a perceived unfairness in selling the home many years after the bankrupt's discharge."

As my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Borrow) recognises, all those groups, unlike the single anonymous contributor, represent a wide range of practitioner views. Indeed, they recognise that there is a problem of exactly the kind that the Government seek to address with the new clause.

Mr. Mark Field: I thank the Minister for clarifying the issue in part. To achieve the goal of certainty, which I

[Mr. Mark Field]

fully appreciate—no doubt many Members have constituents who have been left in limbo for 10 or 15 years with debt hanging over them and the worry of the matrimonial home being sold—was thought given to allowing the trustee to put a charge on the matrimonial home? That charge would be for a set amount of money after three years, five years or whatever period. That would not necessarily take the whole home outside the confines of bankruptcy but it would provide a second mortgage that could be reclaimed when the property was sold.

5.45 pm

Miss Johnson: Consideration was given to that and several other possibilities. We thought that there were considerable practical difficulties with such a suggestion and that it might have a downside for creditors. Although it is realistic to say that the home should be taken into consideration within the three-year period and that vesting should take place, it might be better for creditors if it is disposed of a year down the line. That seems perfectly reasonable. However, it is not reasonable for the issue to arise 10 or 15 years later or for the home not to be recognised as an asset earlier.

We have tried to seek a balance. The distinctions between benign and malign or recklessness and bad luck do not come into play; it is a question of how the home is dealt with in the bankruptcy. We seek certainty while giving the trustees time to achieve a good realisation of the assets for the creditors. It is important that a time scale exists, which is why we have chosen the period of three years and tabled new clause 6.

Mr. Waterson: May I urge the Under-Secretary not to be so quick to dismiss the comments of the anonymous correspondent? I could understand that if his comments were in capital letters and green ink and liberally sprinkled with four-letter words. However, they seem closely argued and based on long experience of how things work. Does she accept or reject the practical points that he makes? She cannot get away with merely saying that, because the comments are anonymous, she does not need to deal with them. Does she accept the central thesis that there are any number of reasons for a delay in a home becoming available as an asset in a bankruptcy?

Miss Johnson: Of course there are a number of reasons for delay, but I have made it clear that the new clause already recognises that point. It is reflected in its drafting and in the provisions that will be made if it becomes a part of the Bill.

The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) said that the issue of low-value properties was of particular concern to him, and the hon. Member for Eastbourne said that it was among his list of concerns. It may be a high or low-value property, but the degree of equity in it is a separate matter. The provision will therefore deal with cases in which there is little or no equity in the property and the cost of disposal may be disproportionate in relation to the funds that could be realised for the estate by the property's sale. The provision will not apply in every case, only when there is an application for a charging order or an order for sale.

The value will be set in the light of extensive consultation with interested parties, which is the point made by the hon. Member for Eastbourne. There will be extensive consultation, and our intention is to make that clear in rules; it is not an appropriate matter for primary legislation, not least because of the changes that occur to the way in which the property market works. Equity in housing may or may not exist.

Mr. Carmichael: I am grateful to the Under-Secretary for that clarification, but the amount of equity in a property will largely depend on the health of the property market in a particular area. Although I appreciate the point that it is not necessarily a question of the value of the property itself, there will still be great disparities between different parts of the nation.

Miss Johnson: I accept that. We are all aware of the huge disparities. Indeed, those hon. Members who are in the Chamber represent constituencies with wildly differing house prices. The important consideration, however, is that we tease out in discussion how the rule will work and what figure should be used. For that reason, we believe that it is not appropriate to include it in the Bill. Instead, we should return to it in more detail after consultation.

The new clause does not encourage people to gamble with other people's money. I thought that that suggestion was beneath the hon. Member for Eastbourne. It is patently about providing a degree of certainty and balance that is currently missing. Many professionals in the insolvency sector recognise that it would be desirable to address that problem. It would make things fairer because a balance needs to be struck. The new clause will do that and it merits the support of the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 2

FEES: FURTHER PROVISION

'.—The following shall be inserted after section 415(3) of the Insolvency Act 1986 (Fees orders (individual insolvency proceedings in England and Wales))—

"(3A) An order under this section shall provide for:

(a) exemption from any fees payable under this section by applicants who, at the time when a fee would otherwise be payable, are in receipt of income support, income-based jobseekers allowance, working families tax credit or disabled persons tax credit (working tax credit and pension tax credit from April 2003) and any other benefit that the Secretary of State may by order specify;

(b) remission of all or part of any fees payable under this section where the Secretary of State considers that the payment of any fees payable under this section would, owing to the exceptional circumstances of the particular case, cause undue financial hardship;

(c) a reduction in the fees payable under this section where:
  (i) two or more people live in the same household petition for bankruptcy at the same time, and
  (ii) they are jointly and severally liable for at least one debt in both petitions;

(d) payment of any fees payable under this section by instalments.".'.—*[Mr. Waterson.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Waterson: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The subject of the new clause is, in part, a re-run of a debate in Committee. We did not get a satisfactory answer from the Minister then and I hope that our luck will be better today.

The aims of the new clause are fairly straightforward. It is based on briefing material and a draft amendment produced by the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux, which has wide experience of advising people with debt problems. By the standards of some bankrupts whom we have vilified, some people have modest debts, but they still have no way of paying them off in a reasonable working life. It may not matter for our purposes whether they are benign or malign bankrupts or would-be bankrupts, to use the terminology of the hon. Member for Hemel Hempstead (Mr. McWalter); what matters is that they simply cannot afford to go bankrupt, even if their citizens advice bureau or Member of Parliament advises them that that would be in their best interests. We are not claiming that bankruptcy should never happen and is not appropriate. In some cases, it is the best, if not the only, option.

I hope that the new clause is clear. First, it would remove financial exclusion from bankruptcy for people on means-tested benefits and tax credits by exempting them from paying court and deposit fees. Secondly, it would help people on low incomes to pay those fees by allowing for remission of all or part of those fees and providing for payment by instalments. Thirdly, it attempts to deal with the situation when both people in a couple find it appropriate to apply for bankruptcy at the same time. All that is against the background of an enormous growth in the financial advice given by citizens advice bureaux. They have seen a 39 per cent. increase in consumer credit debt problems in the past four years alone. Last year, they advised on debt and equivalent problems totalling £1.2 billion, so they know what they are talking about.

Almost by definition, citizens advice bureaux advise people who perhaps cannot afford to, or would not usually see, an accountant or an insolvency practitioner but who are at their wits' end because they cannot find a way through the debts that they have accumulated. For many people whom they advise, bankruptcy is the only way to obtain a fresh start. They also say that the administration order process in the county court does not apply if someone owes more than £5,000 or has debts that are not the subject of county court judgments.

Typically, citizens advice bureaux advise people who have debts of £10,000 or more, and I gave one of their worst examples of that in Committee. A local authority tenant, who was employed, managed to run up debts of £33,000. She went to the CAB after considering committing suicide and being depressed about the problem. It advised her that bankruptcy was the best option because otherwise it would take her at least 20 years to repay the debts. The official receiver decided not to make an income payment order or to sell any of her goods. In that legitimate case, a weight was lifted off the shoulders of that lady who, for whatever reason, ran up debts that she had no way of repaying. Another CAB in Sussex dealt with a case in which a £5,000 loan grew to more than £18,000. That caused enormous stress and again the person involved was advised to go bankrupt.

NACAB makes the point that in England, Wales and Northern Ireland—as opposed to Scotland, where it is much cheaper—it costs £370 to go bankrupt. We are in cloud cuckoo land if we think that the people we are talking about can find that amount of available cash. NACAB gives examples of people who have had to borrow money from family or friends simply to pay the fee to go bankrupt. A recent legal case of R *v.* Lord Chancellor ex parte Lightfoot attempted to deal with that problem in the courts, although it was unsuccessful.

The Minister gave part of the answer in Committee. She said that some debtors can seek a waiver or reduction of the £120 court fee. As the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) and I made clear, that still leaves £250 that is not covered by the waiver provisions. The Minister was uncharacteristically unsympathetic to the proposal. She stated that waiving all the fees in hardship cases would not be justified and

> "that all the costs of case administration would have to be met from other sources."

I am not clear how the fees are decided. Are they meant to represent the costs of administering the average case? The Minister might not know off the top of her head, but presumably there is some attempt to relate one to the other.

The hon. Lady went on to say:

> "we do not believe that general taxation should pay for people to enter bankruptcy when they may have taken on debts irresponsibly."

They might have taken on debts irresponsibly, but they might also be part of the benign category of bankrupts or would-be bankrupts who got into that state through no fault of their own. She dismissed the entire group of potential bankrupts a little too lightly.

The Minister also said that

> "a person's entry into bankruptcy is not a right, and should be considered very much a last resort."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 14 May 2002; c. 693.]

It is a last resort for the people we are talking about, but there may be much more serious consequences for them if it is not available simply because they cannot afford the fees and court costs.

My final suggestion in Committee, before giving up and promising to raise the matter on Report, was that there may be some merit in reconsidering the £5,000 limit for the county court provisions. The Minister was good enough to say that she would reflect on that point, so let us hope that she has done so and that she has proposals to change the situation.

I stress once more that we are talking about a not insignificant number of people who are excluded from the bankruptcy process for one reason—they simply cannot raise the money to pay the costs necessary to start bankruptcy proceedings, even when they have been advised by organisations such as citizens advice bureaux that it is the appropriate course of action and, in some cases, the only way out of their debt problems. We were disappointed when the Minister was somewhat unsympathetic in Committee; I hope that she will be more sympathetic today.

6 pm

Mr. Carmichael: I am pleased to support the new clause in the name of the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson). I am aware from my casework experience that this is a problem, even north of the border, where, as he says, the fees are more lenient. It seems absurd that, for lack of ready money, people cannot afford to make themselves bankrupt when it is manifestly the only course

[Mr. Carmichael]

of action open to them. The Government's attitude on this point strikes me as being not only less than helpful but inconsistent with their approach to the rest of the Bill. We have just acknowledged that in some circumstances it is right that creditors should be left unsatisfied, but in the next breath we seem to be saying that the Government must always get their pound of flesh in the form of administrative fees.

The new clause is tightly drawn and it would mean that people could get to the starting gate. The hon. Gentleman referred to the remarks made by the Minister in Committee to the effect that bankruptcy is not a right. That question is ultimately determined by the courts, and it is wrong that access to that determination should be based on one's ability to come up with ready cash.

Mr. Mark Field: I want to say a few words in support of the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) and the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael). It strikes me as odd that when we are trying to diminish the stigma of bankruptcy—the Minister will appreciate that there are, at least among Members on this side of the House, shades of opinion about the desirability of that aim—we are also making it ever more difficult for people to go into bankruptcy if they lack the relatively modest sums required.

I hope that the Minister will think twice. The new clause is tightly drawn and there is no great risk of its being abused. The advice that many hon. Members have received from citizens advice bureaux throughout the country is that the measure would not cost the Treasury huge sums, but it would be a sensible move, given the plan to ease the bankruptcy procedure. I hope that the Minister will have given some thought to the comments made in Committee and here today, and that she will be able to give us some comfort about the concerns that we have expressed.

Miss Melanie Johnson: Our debate has clearly shown the importance with which hon. Members regard the issues raised by new clause 2. The costs of entry into bankruptcy were also raised on Second Reading by my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Borrow), and a new clause identical to this one was tabled by the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) in Committee. In addition, NACAB has briefed extensively on this point, as a result of which the Government have received a number of letters from hon. Members. I therefore welcome the opportunity to discuss the issue and the points covered by the new clause.

Before I do so, however, I must say that I am bemused by the arguments advanced by the hon. Member for Eastbourne in support of the new clause, especially in light of his arguments about new clause 6. On the one hand, he argued on Second Reading and in Committee that we are being too soft on bankrupts and opening the floodgates to more consumer bankruptcy. Indeed, he was hot on that trail only moments ago. On the other hand, he has tabled this new clause, so that those who are unable to make any contribution to creditors will be able to enter bankruptcy and wipe the slate clean.

As the House will be aware, bankruptcy is not the only method of dealing with debts; nor, depending on the circumstances of the case, does bankruptcy necessarily provide the best outcomes for both the debtor and the creditor. I point out also that the courts have found that a person's entry into bankruptcy is not a right. The hon. Gentleman referred to the case of R *v.* Lord Chancellor ex parte Lightfoot, saying that the law would not help on this point, but the Court of Appeal held that the requirement to pay a deposit did not unlawfully restrict any fundamental right of access to the courts. Bankruptcy should be considered as a last resort; indeed, I thought that that was what Conservative Members were arguing. On this occasion they seem to be arguing that bankruptcy is too difficult for many people, and should be made easier, even though they may have no resources for creditors to access.

There are several other routes available to individuals with financial problems, many of which do not require a deposit. Many individuals can, and do, apply to the county court for administration orders and discharge their liabilities through monthly payments, which are set at a level that the individual can afford. More than 7,500 debtors took advantage of that route in 2001. Additionally, growing numbers of individuals with debt problems seek advice and assistance from organisations in the voluntary sector such as the Consumer Credit Counselling Service and Paylink. Those organisations will administer debt repayment plans on behalf of debtors at no cost to the debtor, the administration cost being met by creditors who agree to forgo a proportion of new debt. Several of them offer repayment plans of as little as £1 per week.

In considering changes to the arrangements for bankruptcy, account must be taken of the impact on creditors' interests, and that is my concern in considering the new clause. That point is particularly important in considering any proposal to reduce or waive entry costs in hardship cases. The bankruptcy entry deposit defrays part of the costs of administering the case. The deposit does not cover the full economic costs of administering the case, and any reduction in the deposit would mean that a greater proportion of the costs of case administration would have to be met from elsewhere, which would lead to lower returns to creditors.

The level of the deposit and fees are set through secondary legislation. It is therefore unnecessary and unduly inflexible to deal with the matter in the Bill. We recognise that this is an issue of concern, but it is also a complex matter. In considering the need for changes, it would be necessary to ensure that there is a continuing balance between the interests of the debtors and creditors. We believe that the current arrangements strike the correct balance, whereas the new clause would not.

To answer the specific point on deposits raised by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael), none of the individual insolvency provisions, nor those on fees and deposits, applies north of the border. I hope that that helps him.

The current arrangements strike the right balance, and I ask the hon. Member for Eastbourne to withdraw the motion. If he does not, and in view of the fairly fundamental inconsistency in the Opposition's approach to these matters, I shall ask the House to oppose the new clause.

Mr. Waterson: The Minister has scored a spectacular own goal. I might as easily describe her extremely tough and Gradgrind-like attitude to the new clause as wholly inconsistent with her attitude to the new clause relating to bankrupts' homes. She takes a stern line now—although perhaps I should be grateful that she has not invited me to a seminar on the issue. I thought I had made it clear that I was talking about people for whom bankruptcy is indeed the last resort, and that the only thing that keeps them from it is an inability to raise the money for the fees that have to be paid if they are to become bankrupt.

There is a way forward that does not involve the complication from which the hon. Lady shies away. I raised it in Committee and the Minister promised to reflect on it; I repeated it in my speech moving the new clause, but the Minister signally failed to touch on it in her reply. That way forward is to do something about the £5,000 limit that applies in the county court, which may have become outdated.

Miss Johnson: I should have addressed that point and I apologise for not doing so. The hon. Gentleman asked in Committee whether there might be some merit in reconsidering the upper limit of £5,000 of total debts that currently applies for the purpose of qualifying for a county court administration order, and I said that I would reflect on it.

Such matters are for my right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor to decide. His review of the enforcement of civil court judgments includes reform of county court administration orders. The Government are considering a range of options, both court based and non-court based. We do not intend to take any interim measures such as increasing the scope of the existing county court administration orders scheme, including increasing the limit, before we have considered the options for reform in that wider context. I hope that the hon. Gentleman appreciates that that is the sensible setting for further consideration of the issues.

Mr. Waterson: I am grateful for that, and I suppose it does make sense that the matter is to be considered in a broader context. I am moderately delighted that it has not been lost sight of altogether.

The Minister is taking an unnecessarily stern line. We know the sort of people that the provision covers—they are the sort of people described in NACAB's extensive briefing. I am sorry that the Government are not prepared to be more flexible; despite that, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Schedule 16

SCHEDULE B1 TO INSOLVENCY ACT 1986

Mr. Waterson: I beg to move amendment No. 79, in page 243, line 13, after "company", insert—

'and the whole or part of its business'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 80, in page 243, line 14, after "not", insert "in his opinion".

No. 81, in page 243, line 18, after "not", insert "in his opinion".

No. 82, in page 256, line 22, leave out "28 days" and insert "three months".

No. 410, in page 264, line 17, leave out from beginning to end of line 13 on page 265.

Mr. Waterson: It is fair to say that the amendments—with one exception, or perhaps with none—were tabled at the relevant points of Committee proceedings. However, we continue to feel strongly about the issues with which they deal.

Amendment No. 79—in Committee, amendment No. 403—is supported by the CBI. The CBI makes the point, which was repeated by Opposition Members throughout Committee stage—much good it did us—that we should not be in the business of rescuing empty vessels, or companies as such; rather, we should be in the business of rescuing businesses. The distinction is subtle, but important. If a company has ceased trading, there is little point in rescuing it just for the sake of it. The Minister will recognise that the amendment echoes section 8 of the Insolvency Act 1986. It would make it abundantly clear that preserving and protecting businesses and enabling them to survive is the first priority.

6.15 pm

Amendments Nos. 80 and 81, which go together, would ensure that what matters at the end of the day is a judgment based on the professional knowledge and experience of the insolvency practitioner. As I said in Committee, although I do not want to labour the point, the aim is to avoid unhelpful disputes. I could not understand why the Minister in the Committee was not prepared to accept the relevant amendment, although I think it was another Minister who dealt with that part of the Bill; perhaps we shall be able to sneak it past the Minister here today.

Amendment No. 82 is somewhat symbolic. It is part of our effort to get it across to the Government that those who practise in insolvency are extremely nervous about—if not downright dismissive of—the time limits set out in the Bill. We were assured that the Bill in all its detail, including the provisions on insolvency, was widely consulted on before it saw the light of day. However, as the shoals of briefings and proposed amendments came pouring in from insolvency practitioners and others involved in insolvency, it became clear that either the consultation had not been clear or comprehensive enough, or the views expressed had not been heeded.

In Committee, I quoted one organisation that described the time limits as "preposterous". We do not believe that the time limits can be adhered to. It is all very well to say that extensions can be applied for, so it does not really matter, but that process will itself clog up the system. We did not have a satisfactory answer to that amendment in Committee, but that might again be attributable to the fact that it was another Minister who dealt with it there—a Minister who has now gone on to glory elsewhere in the Government.

Amendment No. 410 is supported by the CBI. The CBI feels strongly—strongly enough to ask us to press the amendment again on Report after doing so in Committee—that there should be no restriction on the length of time an administration can last; hence the CBI would have us remove paragraphs 75 to 77 in their entirety from schedule 16. Paragraph 78 will ensure that administrators will remain, as they are now, duty bound to seek orders terminating the administration in the event

[Mr. Waterson]

either that the purpose is fully achieved, or that it becomes clear that the purpose cannot be achieved. Paragraph 78 is perfectly acceptable both to the Opposition and to the CBI. If creditors believe that an administrator is delaying matters—something which I suspect happens only rarely—the creditors have plentiful remedies available to them. However, once the administration procedure has started, it should continue for as long as it needs to. Any attempt to cap its duration is bound to be arbitrary, and may well lead to lots of applications for extensions.

I doubt that the provisions in the Bill have a friend in the world. The CBI is not the only organisation to have condemned them—they have been condemned by just about everybody who has any practical experience of handling trading insolvency. If the Government are intent on imposing a cap, we and the CBI urge them to allow a period of at least one year, but it would be better if there were no cap at all. After Committee stage, we remain far from convinced that a cap is needed. There is none at the moment, and the system seems to work satisfactorily in that respect. I urge the House to accept the amendments.

Mr. Carmichael: It is unfortunate that we are again rehearsing a debate that we had in Committee, but the argument advanced by the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) on the need for the amendments is a good one. I hope that the Government will take on board the force of that argument.

I can see no particular reason why we are so desperate to rescue companies when, as the hon. Gentleman said, that is a fairly meaningless term. That seems to run contrary to the Government's approach in much of the Bill, where they speak about wanting to keep or foster the culture of enterprise and avoid unnecessary administration or bankruptcy. We should look at the business itself rather than the legal entity. On amendment No. 80, we should rely on the administrator's exercise of professional judgment and not encourage a rush to litigation, which is the inevitable consequence of the clause as currently framed. Amendment No. 82 deals with the problem of indecent haste. I am sure that administrators will not drag their heels, so we are putting unnecessary pressure on them by setting a time limit of 28 days. A similar argument applies to the ending of time limits in amendment No. 410. The CBI and others have made good sound arguments which reflect experience, or the practicalities, to use the Minister's own words. The Government should give greater weight to them than appears to have been the case.

Miss Melanie Johnson: Amendment No. 79 specifies that the first objective of administration is to rescue a company and all or part of its business. As the Minister of State, Cabinet Office made clear in Committee—I am sure that he did so and assure the hon. Member for Eastbourne that I am aware of what was said in Committee—that is the clear intention behind the new purpose. The hon. Gentleman and I are in agreement that there is no sense in the administrator trying to rescue companies that are empty shells, particularly if he or she could get a better deal for creditors by selling its constituent businesses as going concerns. To "rescue the company" self-evidently means to rescue it as a going concern, with all or much of its business intact. The courts will take a practical line in interpreting the purpose. I draw hon. Members' attention to the explanatory notes, which say that

> "company rescue in the context of the clause means the company continuing as a going concern with all or a significant part of its business . . . For the purpose of these clauses, a proposal that would result in a shell company remaining would not be considered a rescue."

Mr. Carmichael: When the Minister makes such statements about the courts' interpretation, she is almost inviting the judiciary to make a contrary interpretation. We are dealing with common purpose, so does she not accept that that is better expressed in the amendments' wording?

Miss Johnson: The Bill was drafted by draftsmen who are familiar with what the courts are likely to do with the Bill's wording. Our aim is exactly the same as Opposition Members', so the amendment is not necessary. I hope that they understand the Government's position, as they allege they did not before. I hope that they realise that we agree utterly about the meaning of the provision; we believe it means what it says. but they would like more specific wording.

Amendments Nos. 80 and 81 deal with the test of what is "reasonably practicable", which governs the administrator's choice of objectives. They seek to qualify that test by specifying that it means "reasonably practicable" in the opinion of the administrator. Again, there is no disagreement between Opposition Members and the Government about that principle, but we diverge about the way in which the Bill will work in practice. The administrator is the person on the ground who is in possession of all the facts and is best placed to determine whether a particular course of action is reasonably practicable or not on the basis of his or her experience and professional judgment. It is not the courts' practice to second-guess administrators' commercial judgment in such cases, so we do not expect the provisions to be interpreted in that way; my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Cabinet Office said so in Committee. I therefore believe that the amendments are unnecessary.

Amendment No. 82 deals with one of the new time scales introduced in the revised administration procedure. The Bill requires the administrator to send a copy of proposals to creditors within 28 days' of his or her appointment; the amendment would extend that period to three months. Again, the issue was debated extensively in Committee, when we explained that the new time limits for administration would provide greater certainty to creditors and would help to make the procedure more accessible to small firms, for which the costs of running a lengthy administration can be a considerable barrier against entering the administration procedure. In conjunction with changes introduced elsewhere in the legislation, administration will become more accessible and attractive. Cases going into administration will become smaller and more straightforward, and the new time scales will prove more than adequate for them.

For larger and more complex cases for which the administrator needs more time, there are provisions to enable him or her to extend the time periods either by creditor consent for specified periods or with the permission of the court for whatever period the court thinks fit. The time limits in the Bill are rightly stringent to increase certainty and accessibility for companies and creditors, but the process is sufficiently flexible, particularly because of the provisions for extension, to ensure that it can be adapted to meet the needs of particular cases. I therefore hope that I have persuaded the hon. Member for Eastbourne to withdraw his amendment.

Mr. Waterson: I am not wholly convinced, but in the interests of making progress, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Miss Johnson: I beg to move amendment No. 99, in page 243, line 34, after "96", insert "and 99 to 101A".

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): With this it will be convenient to take Government amendments Nos. 100 and 101, 324 to 326, 102 to 104, 327 and 105, 106 to 124, 328, 125, 329, 126, 330, 331 and 127, 332 to 345, 128, 346, 129 and 347, 130 to 133, 348 and 134, 349 to 353, 140, 354 and 355.

Miss Johnson: It will be a relief to everyone in the Chamber, not least yourself, Madam Deputy Speaker, that these amendments are mostly technical and consequential. They do not deal with fundamental policy, so I do not propose to deal with them one by one. They will, however, ensure that the revised administration procedure works effectively. They are consequential amendments to the existing provisions of the Insolvency Act 1986 and other measures, and are necessary as a result of the proposed changes to the administration procedure. I do not propose to speak about them in detail, but if hon. Members would like me to address a particular amendment, I am happy to do so.

A number of Government amendments have been tabled in response to points raised by hon. Members in Committee. Having listened to what they said, we agreed to go away and consider certain matters further. I am pleased to say that a number of the amendments were tabled as a result of that discussion, and I hope that hon. Members will agree that they make useful improvements and support them accordingly.

I should like briefly to address Government amendment No. 101, which will ensure that the special insolvency provisions that apply to financial services businesses, including banks and insurance companies, under part XXIV of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000, continue to have affect. I think that that is probably the only amendment that is worth mentioning at this early stage.

I hope that hon. Members will support the amendments.

6.30 pm

Mr. Waterson: You will be relieved to hear, Madam Deputy Speaker, that I certainly do not want the Minister to deal with the amendments in any detail. I am grateful to her for acknowledging that a number of them arose from points made by the official Opposition in Committee. It would be positively churlish of us to speak at any length to the amendments, let alone press them to a Division.

Mr. Mark Field: I, too, should like to express my support for many of the amendments that have been tabled as a result of the various Committee discussions. In particular, given the importance of the insurance sector in my constituency, I welcome Government amendment No. 101, to which the Minister specifically referred.

I want to make a few brief comments, partly in relation to a briefing that may bring to light one or two slight concerns about administration. I apologise to the Minister for not mentioning the matter to her already, but as I received the briefing earlier today, I have not had an opportunity to do so. She may wish to return to the subject at a later stage. Indeed, I would be happy to deal with it in that spirit.

More generally, before we consign the concept of administrative receivership to the annals of insolvency and company law history, I point out that it has been improved as a very quick, cheap and often effective means of allowing a business to be sold without interference from either companies or creditors. Many of us have recognised that the potentially unfettered power of secured creditors to appoint receivers has sometimes made them insufficiently accountable to other creditors. Such concern was expressed in Committee and is addressed by one or two of the amendments. It seemed to us that such appointments could put paid to other potential rescue plans. Clearly, the Bill seeks to water down some of those powers in an insolvency situation. One of the anxieties in Committee was to ensure for all creditors and classes of creditors as great a degree of certainty as possible as to replacement.

As I said, I should like to address a specific concern to which I have been alerted by a constituent, an international bank, in relation to the commercial property market. The briefing that I received states that there has been some anxiety about the

> "potential knock on effects to the UK property market",

which is at a tentative stage in the economic cycle as it is,

> "of the changes proposed in the Enterprise Bill and particularly the proposal to dispense with the concept of administrative receivership."

I hope that the Minister and other hon. Members will forgive me if I now quote a little more extensively from the briefing, which obviously deals with a somewhat technical matter. It goes on to state:

> "The vast majority of commercial property refurbishment/ regeneration and development finance is structured nowadays using as a borrowing vehicle a special purpose company, the only assets of which are the project being financed."

That runs slightly counter to the concerns expressed in the debate about the previous clause, when we wanted to stress that it is all too often forgotten that it is not a company, but a business, that is being maintained. In this case, however, it is a special purpose vehicle company that may run the risk of insolvency procedure and it will wish to ensure proper safeguards. The special purpose vehicles typically have no employees.

The briefing goes on to state:

> "It is important from a funder's point of view to be able to have step in rights and to be able to appoint an administrative receiver",

which must be done rapidly where there are potential difficulties. It also states:

> "This enables the lender, in the event of financial difficulty, quickly to take control of the project, retain contractors and sub-contractors before they walk away"—

[Mr. Mark Field]

under the doubtless fairly stringent terms of their own agreement—

"and ultimately to build out the project to completion. Invariably this is the only way to maximise the benefit to the general creditors of the company."

The concern is that the abolition of administrative receivership runs the risk of increasing the level of commercial uncertainty. In a slightly more uncertain property market—I suspect that the entire property sector will face such a market during the next few years—the abolition will

"inevitably lead to an increase in cost for borrowers".

Even more catastrophically, in relation to some of the projects that are being put into place, the abolition will also lead to a withdrawal of funding by the banking system. Of course, that would especially affect more marginal projects. That is a concern for me in central London, but I am sure that my concern is shared in all corners of the United Kingdom. It is feared that the consequences will be a reduction of refurbishment and regeneration, as well as in development funding, in the commercial property sector. That is especially important in relation to various central Government proposals to ensure substantial development on brownfield sites. Clearly, all of us who represent urban or suburban seats are keen to encourage such development.

The briefing also states:

"We understand the reasons for the introduction of the Enterprise Bill and believe that the commercial property market will suffer, even though the intentions of the Bill are not aimed particularly at commercial property."

I understand that the Department has been lobbied for

"a carve out in the proposals for commercial property finance transactions that would otherwise fall within the definition of project finance."

Again, that was discussed at some length when we considered some of the schedules in Committee. As the Minister will know, an exception has been created for projects where the debt is in excess of £50 million. As I have indicated, however, the difficulty with that provision in relation to specific property finance is that the threshold is way too high for the small special purpose vehicles that are being created. In relation to certain property finance transactions, might it be possible to introduce a lower threshold of, say, £5 million to £10 million? I know that that proposal was discussed tangentially in Committee, but it strikes me that a major area of Government policy is involved, especially in relation to regeneration and refurbishment projects. We run the risk of causing such projects to fall outside the protection that would otherwise be provided in the proposed administration procedure.

I appreciate that the Minister may not have had full notice of those issues, although I suspect that the Department has been subject to various lobbying in recent weeks and months. I would be happy for her to deal with the matter in a written response, if that is necessary, but I wanted to put it on record and felt that now was the most appropriate stage in today's discussions at which to raise it.

Miss Melanie Johnson: Indeed, those subjects have been much discussed and there has been considerable liaison between Departments and with interested parties about appropriate provisions in respect of property development. I do not believe that a bespoke exception is necessary. As the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) remarked, the definition in the Bill is wide enough to include any project company that incurs a debt of at least £50 million and over which there are step-in rights. That is the case regardless of the reason why the project in question has been set up.

I heard what the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster said about special purpose vehicles of £10 million in value, but it seems a little unusual, especially in the context of our earlier remarks about property values in central London. I am listening to what the hon. Gentleman has to say and I should be grateful if he would furnish me with some further details about the background. I shall certainly consider the matter further, but I do not currently believe that it necessary to introduce any further provision. I shall undertake to look further at any evidence that he submits to me.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 100, in page 243, line 34, leave out "the replacement of" and insert "replacement and additional".

No. 101, in page 243, line 41, at end insert—

'7A (1) A person may not be appointed as administrator of a company which—

(a) has a liability in respect of a deposit which it accepted in accordance with the Banking Act 1979 (c. 37) or 1987 (c. 22), but

(b) is not an authorised deposit taker.

(2) A person may not be appointed as administrator of a company which effects or carries out contracts of insurance.

(3) But sub-paragraph (2) does not apply to a company which—

(a) is exempt from the general prohibition in relation to effecting or carrying out contracts of insurance, or

(b) is an authorised deposit taker effecting or carrying out contracts of insurance in the course of a banking business.

(4) In this paragraph—

"authorised deposit taker" means a person with permission under Part IV of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (c. 8) to accept deposits, and

"the general prohibition" has the meaning given by section 19 of that Act.

(5) This paragraph shall be construed in accordance with—

(a) section 22 of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (classes of regulated activity and categories of investment),

(b) any relevant order under that section, and

(c) Schedule 2 to that Act (regulated activities).'.

No. 324, in page 245, line 36, after "unless", insert—

'(a) '.

No. 325, in page 245, line 38, at end insert—

', or

(b) the holder of any prior floating charge which satisfies paragraph 12(2) has consented in writing to the making of the appointment.'.

No. 326, in page 253, line 31, at end insert—

'(1A) This paragraph also applies from the time when a copy of notice of intention to appoint an administrator under paragraph 12 is filed with the court until—

(a) the appointment of the administrator takes effect, or

(b) the period of five business days beginning with the date of filing expires without an administrator having been appointed.

(1B) Sub-paragraph (1A) has effect in relation to a notice of intention to appoint only if it is in the prescribed form.'.

No. 102, in page 254, line 20, at end insert "and".

No. 103, in page 254, line 21, leave out from "letter," to end of line 23.

No. 104, in page 261, line 1, leave out sub-paragraph (2) and insert—

'(2) If the court gives directions to the administrator of a company in connection with any aspect of his management of the company's affairs, business or property, the administrator shall comply with the directions.'.

No. 327, in page 261, line 34, leave out "charge" and insert "security".

No. 105, in page 263, line 26, leave out "section 4" and insert "Part I".

No. 106, in page 264, line 36, leave out paragraph (b) and insert—

'(b) if the company has unsecured debts, creditors whose debts amount to more than 50% of the company's unsecured debts, disregarding debts of any creditor who does not respond to an invitation to give or withhold consent.'.

No. 107, in page 264, line 42, after first "of", insert—
'(i) '.

No. 108, in page 264, line 43, leave out "and of" and insert ", and
(ii) '.

No. 109, in page 264, line 43, leave out "at least" and insert "more than".

No. 110, in page 264, line 44, leave out "total".

No. 111, in page 264, line 44, at end insert—

', disregarding debts of any creditor who does not respond to an invitation to give or withhold consent.'.

No. 112, in page 267, line 6, leave out paragraph (a) and insert—

'(a) that the total amount which each secured creditor of the company is likely to receive has been paid to him or set aside for him,'.

No. 113, in page 267, line 9, leave out "has been or".

No. 114, in page 267, line 28, leave out "98" and insert "84".

No. 115, in page 269, line 35, after "where", insert—
'(a) '.

No. 116, in page 269, line 35, at end insert—

'(b) the court is satisfied that the creditors' committee or a remaining administrator is not taking reasonable steps to make a replacement, or

(c) the court is satisfied that for another reason it is right for the application to be made.'.

No. 117, in page 269, line 36, leave out—

'by the holder of a qualifying floating charge he'

and insert—

'the holder of the floating charge by virtue of which the appointment was made'.

No. 118, in page 271, line 4, leave out paragraphs (a) and (b) and insert—

'(a) in the case of an administrator who dies, on the filing with the court of notice of his death,

(b) in the case of an administrator appointed under paragraph 12 or 20, at a time appointed by resolution of the creditors' committee or, if there is no committee, by resolution of the creditors, or

(c) in any case, at a time specified by the court.

( ) For the purpose of the application of sub-paragraph (2)(b) in a case where the administrator has made a statement under paragraph 50(1)(b), a resolution shall be taken as passed if (and only if) passed with the approval of—

(a) each secured creditor of the company, or

(b) if the administrator has made a distribution to preferential creditors or thinks that a distribution may be made to preferential creditors—

(i) each secured creditor of the company, and

(ii) preferential creditors whose debts amount to more than 50% of the preferential debts of the company, disregarding debts of any creditor who does not respond to an invitation to give or withhold approval.'.

No. 119, in page 272, line 43, at end insert—

'101A (1) Where a company is in administration, a person may be appointed to act as administrator jointly or concurrently with the person or persons acting as the administrator of the company.

(2) Where a company entered administration by administration order, an appointment under sub-paragraph (1) must be made by the court on the application of—

(a) a person or group listed in paragraph 10(1)(a) to (e), or

(b) the person or persons acting as the administrator of the company.

(3) Where a company entered administration by virtue of an appointment under paragraph 12, an appointment under sub-paragraph (1) must be made by—

(a) the holder of the floating charge by virtue of which the appointment was made, or

(b) the court on the application of the person or persons acting as the administrator of the company.

(4) Where a company entered administration by virtue of an appointment under paragraph 20(1), an appointment under sub-paragraph (1) above must be made either by the court on the application of the person or persons acting as the administrator of the company or—

(a) by the company, and

(b) with the consent of each person who is the holder of a qualifying floating charge in respect of the company's property or, where consent is withheld, with the permission of the court.

(5) Where a company entered administration by virtue of an appointment under paragraph 20(2), an appointment under sub-paragraph (1) must be made either by the court on the application of the person or persons acting as the administrator of the company or—

(a) by the directors of the company, and

(b) with the consent of each person who is the holder of a qualifying floating charge in respect of the company's property or, where consent is withheld, with the permission of the court.

(6) An appointment under sub-paragraph (1) may be made only with the consent of the person or persons acting as the administrator of the company.'.

No. 120, in page 274, line 3, leave out paragraph (b) and insert—

'(b) if the company has unsecured debts, creditors whose debts amount to more than 50% of the company's unsecured debts, disregarding debts of any creditor who does not respond to an invitation to give or withhold consent.'.

No. 121, in page 274, line 9, after first "of", insert—
'(i) '.

No. 123, in page 274, line 10, leave out "at least" and insert "more than".

No. 122, in page 274, line 10, leave out "and of" and insert ", and
(ii) '.

No. 124, in page 274, line 11, at end insert—

', disregarding debts of any creditor who does not respond to an invitation to give or withhold consent.'.

No. 328, in page 274, line 37, at end insert—

'"company" includes a company which may enter administration by virtue of Article 3 of the EC Regulation,"'.—*[Miss Melanie Johnson.]*

Schedule 17

ADMINISTRATION: MINOR AND CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS

Amendments made: No. 125, in page 276, line 17, at end insert—

'General

A1 In any instrument made before section 242(1) to (3) of this Act comes into force—

(a) a reference to the making of an administration order shall be treated as including a reference to the appointment of an administrator under paragraph 12 or 20 of Schedule B1 to the Insolvency Act 1986 (c. 45) (inserted by section 242(2) of this Act), and

(b) a reference to making an application for an administration order by petition shall be treated as including a reference to making an administration application under that Schedule, appointing an administrator under paragraph 12 or 20 of that Schedule or giving notice under paragraph 13 or 24 of that Schedule.'.

No. 329, in page 276, line 35, at end insert—

'5A In section 652B(3) (duty when applying to strike off defunct company) for paragraph (c) substitute—

"(c) the company is in administration under Part II of that Act;

(ca) an application to the court for an administration order in respect of the company has been made and not finally dealt with or withdrawn;

(cb) a copy of notice of intention to appoint an administrator of the company under paragraph 12 of Schedule B1 to that Act has been filed with the court and neither of the events mentioned in paragraph 42(1A)(a) and (b) of that Schedule has occurred;

(cc) a copy of notice of intention to appoint an administrator of the company under paragraph 20 of that Schedule has been filed with the court and neither of the events mentioned in paragraph 42(2)(a) and (b) of that Schedule has occurred;"'.

5B In section 652C(4) (director's duty following application to strike off defunct company) for paragraph (d) substitute—

"(d) an application to the court for an administration order in respect of the company is made under paragraph 10 of Schedule B1 to that Act;

(da) an administrator is appointed in respect of the company under paragraph 12 or 20 of that Schedule;

(db) a copy of notice of intention to appoint an administrator of the company under paragraph 12 or 20 of that Schedule is filed with the court;"'.

No. 126, in page 277, line 29, at end insert—

'12A After section 129(1) (commencement of winding up) insert—

"(1A) Where the court makes a winding-up order by virtue of paragraph 11(1)(e) of Schedule B1, the winding up is deemed to commence on the making of the order."'.

No. 330, in page 278, line 24, at end insert "copy of a".

No. 331, in page 278, line 26, after "paragraph", insert "12 or".

No. 127, in page 278, line 29, after "(3)(a)", insert ", (aa)".

No. 332, in page 278, line 36, after "paragraph", insert "12 or".

No. 333, in page 278, line 37, leave out from first "of" to "the" in line 38 and insert—

'a copy of a notice of intention to appoint under that paragraph, the date on which the copy of'.

No. 334, in page 278, line 44, after "liquidation", insert—

'either following conversion of administration into winding up by virtue of Article 37 of the EC Regulation or'.

No. 335, in page 279, line 1, after "or", insert "a copy of the".

No. 336, in page 279, line 13, leave out paragraph (c) and insert—

"(c) a copy of a notice of intention to appoint an administrator under paragraph 12 or 20 of Schedule B1 has been filed,"'.

No. 337, in page 279, line 24, leave out paragraph (c) and insert—

"(c) a copy of a notice of intention to appoint an administrator under paragraph 12 or 20 of Schedule B1 has been filed,"'.

No. 338, in page 280, line 4, at end insert "copy of".

No. 339, in page 280, line 6, after "paragraph", insert "12 or".

No. 340, in page 280, line 15, after "paragraph", insert "12 or".

No. 341, in page 280, line 16, leave out from first "of" to "the" in line 17 and insert—

'a copy of notice of intention to appoint under that paragraph, the date on which the copy of'.

No. 342, in page 280, line 32, leave out "After subsection (2) add" and insert "For subsection (3) substitute".

No. 343, in page 280, line 35, after first "of", insert—

'(a) '.

No. 344, in page 280, line 35, at end insert—

', or

(b) an order made following conversion of administration or a voluntary arrangement into winding up by virtue of Article 37 of the EC Regulation.'.

No. 345, in page 280, leave out line 36 and insert—

'(1) Section 387 (preferential debts: "the relevant date") shall be amended as follows.

(2) In subsection (2) for paragraphs (a) and (b) substitute—

"(a) if the company is in administration, the date on which it entered administration, and

(b) if the company is not in administration, the date of the approval of the voluntary arrangement."

(3) In subsection (3)—

(a) in paragraphs (aa) and (ab) for "the date of the making of the administration order" substitute "the date on which the company entered administration",

(b) after paragraph (b) insert—

"(ba) if the case does not fall within paragraph (a), (aa), (ab) or (b) and the company is being wound up following administration pursuant to paragraph 82 of Schedule B1, the relevant date is the date on which the company entered administration;", and

(c) in paragraph (c) for "paragraph (a), (aa), (ab) or (b)" substitute "paragraph (a), (aa), (ab), (b) or (ba)".

(4) After subsection (3)'.

No. 128, in page 280, line 40, at end insert—

'30A In section 422 (power to apply first Group of Parts to banks, &c.) for subsection (1) substitute—

"(1) The Secretary of State may by order made with the concurrence of the Treasury and after consultation with the Financial Services Authority provide that specified provisions in the first Group of Parts shall apply with specified modifications in relation to any person who—

(a) has a liability in respect of a deposit which he accepted in accordance with the Banking Act 1979 (c. 37) or 1987 (c. 22), but

(b) does not have permission under Part IV of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (c. 8) (administration) to accept deposits.

(1A) Subsection (1)(b) shall be construed in accordance with—

(a) section 22 of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (classes of regulated activity and categories of investment),

(b) any relevant order under that section, and

(c) Schedule 2 to that Act (regulated activities).'".

No. 346, in page 283, line 26, at end insert—

'38A In section 158 (modification of insolvency law)—

(a) in subsection (3) for paragraph (b) substitute—

"(b) the application for an administration order or the presentation of a winding-up petition or the passing of a resolution for voluntary winding up,", and

(b) after subsection (3) insert—

"(3A) In subsection (3)(b) the reference to an application for an administration order shall be taken to include a reference to—

(a) in a case where an administrator is appointed under paragraph 12 or 20 of Schedule B1 to the Insolvency Act 1986 (appointment by floating charge holder, company or directors) following filing with the court of a copy of a notice of intention to appoint under that paragraph, the filing of the copy of the notice, and

(b) in a case where an administrator is appointed under either of those paragraphs without a copy of a notice of intention to appoint having been filed with the court, the appointment of the administrator."'.

No. 129, in page 283, line 29, leave out "41(6) (including" and insert—

'40 or 41 (including paragraph 41(6)'.

No. 347, in page 283, line 30, at end insert—

'39A After section 167(1) (application by exchange or clearing house to Secretary of State about taking default proceedings) insert—

"(1A) In subsection (1) a reference to an administration order shall be taken to include a reference to the appointment of an administrator under—

(a) paragraph 12 of Schedule B1 to the Insolvency Act 1986 (c. 45) (appointment by holder of qualifying floating charge), or

(b) paragraph 20 of that Schedule (appointment by company or directors)."'.

No. 130, in page 283, line 35, after "41(2)" insert "and (3)".

No. 131, in page 283, line 35, at end insert "or repossession of goods)".

No. 132, in page 283, line 38, leave out "and 70" and insert ", 70 and 71".

No. 133, in page 283, line 39, after "charged", insert "or hire-purchase".

No. 348, in page 283, line 42, at end insert—

'(3) In subsection (2) for "an administration order has been made or a petition for an administration order has been presented" substitute "the occurrence of an event to which subsection (2A) applies".

(4) After subsection (2) insert—

"(2A) This subsection applies to—

(a) making an administration application under paragraph 10 of Schedule B1 to the Insolvency Act 1986,

(b) appointing an administrator under paragraph 12 or 20 of that Schedule (appointment by floating charge holder, company or directors),

(c) filing with the court a copy of notice of intention to appoint an administrator under either of those paragraphs."'.

No. 134, in page 284, line 12, at end insert—

'*Employment Rights Act 1996 (c. 18)*

41A (1) The Employment Rights Act 1996 shall be amended as follows.

(2) In section 166(7) (application by employee for payment by Secretary of State)—

(a) in paragraph (a) omit "or an administration order", and

(b) after paragraph (a) insert—

"(aa) if the company is in administration for the purposes of the Insolvency Act 1986,".

(3) In section 183(3)(a) (insolvency of employer)—

(a) in paragraph (a) omit "or an administration order", and

(b) after paragraph (a) insert—

"(aa) if the company is in administration for the purposes of the Insolvency Act 1986,".

(4) Omit section 189(4) (transfer to Secretary of State of rights and remedies: priority of preferential debts).'.

No. 349, in page 284, leave out lines 17 to 24 and insert—

'(7) Subsections (8) and (9) apply in relation to the reference in subsection (3) to applying for an administration order.

(8) In a case where an administrator is appointed under paragraph 12 or 20 of Schedule B1 to the Insolvency Act 1986 (appointment by floating charge holder, company or directors)—

(a) the reference includes a reference to appointing an administrator under that paragraph, and

(b) in respect of an appointment under either of those paragraphs the reference to the applicant shall be taken as a reference to the person making the appointment.

(9) In a case where a copy of a notice of intention to appoint an administrator under either of those paragraphs is filed with the court—

(a) the reference shall be taken to include a reference to the filing of the copy of the notice, and

(b) in respect of the filing of a copy of a notice of intention to appoint under either of those paragraphs the reference to the applicant shall be taken as a reference to the person giving the notice.'.

No. 350, in page 284, line 28, leave out "applying for" and insert "the making of".

No. 351, in page 284, line 37, leave out "In section 215(3)" and insert "Section 215".

No. 352, in page 284, line 38, after "insolvency)", insert—

'shall be amended as follows.

(2) In subsection (3)'.

No. 353, in page 284, line 41, at end insert—

'(3) After subsection (3) insert—

"(3A) In subsection (3) the reference to making an administration application includes a reference to—

- (a) appointing an administrator under paragraph 12 or 20 of Schedule B1 to the 1986 Act, or
- (b) filing with the court a copy of notice of intention to appoint an administrator under either of those paragraphs."'.

No. 140, in page 284, line 41, at end insert—

'46A For section 359 (administration order) substitute—

"359 Administration order

(1) The Authority may make an administration application under Schedule B1 to the 1986 Act (or present a petition under Article 22 of the 1989 Order) in relation to a company or insolvent partnership which—

- (a) is or has been an authorised person,
- (b) is or has been an appointed representative, or
- (c) is carrying on or has carried on a regulated activity in contravention of the general prohibition.

(2) Subsection (3) applies in relation to an administration application made (or a petition presented) by the Authority by virtue of this section.

(3) Any of the following shall be treated for the purpose of paragraph 9(a) of Schedule B1 to the 1986 Act (or Article 21(1)(a) of the 1989 Order) as unable to pay its debts—

- (a) a company or partnership in default on an obligation to pay a sum due and payable under an agreement, and
- (b) an authorised deposit taker in default on an obligation to pay a sum due and payable in respect of a relevant deposit.

(4) In this section—

"agreement" means an agreement the making or performance of which constitutes or is part of a regulated activity carried on by the company or partnership,

"authorised deposit taker" means a person with a Part IV permission to accept deposits (but not a person who has a Part IV permission to accept deposits only for the purpose of carrying on another regulated activity in accordance with that permission),

"company" means a company—

- (a) in respect of which an administrator may be appointed under Schedule B1 to the 1986 Act, or
- (b) to which Article 21 of the 1989 Order applies, and

"relevant deposit" shall, ignoring any restriction on the meaning of deposit arising from the identity of the person making the deposit, be construed in accordance with—

- (a) section 22,
- (b) any relevant order under that section, and
- (c) Schedule 2.

(5) The definition of "authorised deposit taker" in subsection (4) shall be construed in accordance with—

- (a) section 22,
- (b) any relevant order under that section, and
- (c) Schedule 2."'.

No. 354, in page 285, line 21, after "to", insert—

'(a) '.

No. 355, in page 285, line 24, after "(c).",", insert "or

(b) the filing with the court of a copy of notice of intention to appoint an administrator under either of those paragraphs."'.—*[Miss Melanie Johnson.]*

Clause 244

PROHIBITION OF APPOINTMENT OF ADMINISTRATIVE RECEIVER

Amendments made: No. 321, in page 169, line 10, leave out—

'or is expected to incur'

and insert—

', or when the agreement was entered into was expected to incur,'.

No. 322, in page 170, line 11, leave out—

'a project company incurs or is expected to incur'

and insert—

'under an agreement relating to the project a project company incurs, or when the agreement is entered into is expected to incur,'.—*[Miss Melanie Johnson.]*

Mr. Waterson: I beg to move amendment No. 13, in page 170, line 27, at end insert—

'72FA Sixth exception: Registered Social Landlords

1. Section 72A does not prevent the appointment of an administrative receiver of a company which is a registered social landlord at the time of the appointment.

2. Section 72A does not prevent the appointment of an administrative receiver of a company which, at the time of the creation of the relevant qualifying floating charge, was either:

- (a) a registered social landlord; or
- (b) a housing association registered as such in the register previously maintained pursuant to Part I of the Housing Associations Act 1985.

3. In subsections (1) and (2) "registered social landlord" means a body registered as a social landlord pursuant to section 3 of the Housing Act 1985 or, as the case may be, section 57 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001.'.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 318, in clause 249, page 173, line 25, at the end insert—

'other than a society which is, or at any time has been, a registered social landlord or a housing association registered as such in the register previously maintained pursuant to Part 1 of the Housing Associations Act 1985.'.

No. 319, in page 173, line 37, at the end insert—

'(2A) In sub-section (1) "registered social landlord" means a body registered as a social landlord pursuant to section 3 of the Housing Act 1996 or, as the case may be, section 57 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001.'.

Mr. Waterson: The amendments involve serious issues affecting the social housing sector. They were initially proposed by the Council of Mortgage Lenders, which has been working closely on the matter with the National Housing Federation. Let me say immediately that there is a typographical error in amendment No. 13, which should read, "Housing Act 1996", not "Housing Act 1985". If the Minister were to accept the amendment, I am sure that it would not be beyond the wit of the parliamentary draftsmen to correct that minor error.

All three amendments concern registered social landlords, 85 per cent. of which, according to the National Housing Federation, are also industrial and provident societies. Amendment No. 13 would exempt lenders to registered social landlords—RSLs—that are companies from the prohibition on appointing an administrative receiver. It would amend the clause, giving the Secretary of State power by order to provide for administration to apply to industrial and provident societies. In a nutshell, it would preserve the current position.

Some £25 billion has been lent to RSLs—mainly housing associations—for new build, repair and improvement to social housing. As I said, the vast majority of RSLs are also I and Ps—I hope that this will come out all right in *Hansard*. There is a trend for newer RSLs to be established as companies, especially those involved in large-scale voluntary stock transfers. Unsurprisingly, the availability of competitively priced private loan finance is crucial to the Government's target of achieving the decent homes standard within 10 years. I can speak with a little authority about that, having been a shadow housing Minister in a previous incarnation. If the Minister is in favour of joined-up Government, I am sure that she will want to listen carefully to the rationale behind the amendments.

6.45 pm

The briefing from the Council of Mortgage Lenders states:

> "The proposals in the Enterprise Bill strike a serious blow at the social housing finance market at a time when it is already under pressure."

It continues:

> "Under the 1996 Housing Act, the Housing Corporation has the power to create a 28-day moratorium for all creditors that will allow the opportunity to rescue the RSL if possible and to protect the interests of tenants."

On that basis, the impetus towards company rescue offered by administration already exists in the sector in a different form and should not be duplicated. The briefing goes on to say:

> "The Bill as it stands creates a serious anomaly in that clause 244(1) 72B exempts the capital markets from the abolition of administrative receivership. The capital markets are significant lenders to the RSL sector and this exemption thus creates a situation where different secured lenders to the same RSL can have different rights, a situation likely to cause significant uncertainty and to make retail mortgage lenders more cautious about assisting higher risk or ailing RSLs."

The CML believes that there will be three major consequences of abolishing the right to appoint an administrative receiver to an RSL that is a company—first, the cost of borrowing will go up because lenders will re-evaluate the risk and insist on more security; secondly, some projects may become unfundable because of their higher risk profile; and thirdly, retail lenders' present willingness to work with the Housing Corporation to assist RSLs in difficulties will be curtailed owing to the possibility that the capital markets will still be able to appoint an administrative receiver and thus be in a stronger position to realise their security in the event of default.

Amendment No. 318 would amend clause 249, which was added to the Bill in Committee and gives the Secretary of State power to bring in an administration regime for industrial and provident societies. At present, 85 per cent. of registered social landlords are in that category. The Council of Mortgage Lenders observes that

> "this proposal potentially presents a significantly larger threat than those measures relating to companies."

It also points out that variations on these proposals were suggested on no fewer than three occasions during the 1990s but were abandoned after proper consultation because of their likely effect on the social housing finance market.

At present, there is no power to appoint an administrative receiver in respect of an industrial and provident society, but lenders can, using their status as fixed charge holders, appoint a receiver under contract offering similar advantages. The introduction of administration to I and Ps will cut across that right. The CML says:

> "The effects of this proposal will be similar to those for companies, though on a larger scale"—

that is, more expensive borrowing, projects less fundable and a less sympathetic approach to the rescue of RSLs. It continues:

> "An additional important consequence however will be that lenders will be forced to secure all loans via floating charges . . . in order to gain the right to an administrator. This will cause major and ongoing disruption and expense to RSLs and lenders alike."

The National Housing Federation issued a briefing on similar terms. It represents about 1,400 not-for-profit housing organisations, which between them own or manage about 1.8 million homes in England alone. Of the change to the Bill made in Committee, it states that

> "this amendment could have an immediate and extremely damaging impact on the provision of decent, affordable housing."

The briefing refers to the suggestion that has been made, following consultation, that RSLs might be exempted from clause 249 provisions by order. However,

> "there is significant concern that just the possibility of these changes to insolvency law will be enough to damage lender confidence."

It asks for support for the amendments and states:

> "The Government must not wait for secondary legislation".

Yet again, it has fallen to the official Opposition to raise the genuine concerns of bodies out there in the real world. In this case, they are perhaps more significant than any, given their responsibility for a vast amount of social housing. From the point of view of the National Housing Federation, the amendments are necessary and helpful. It is difficult to understand how the Government could resist them. Indeed, it appears that we have already amended the Bill too much by including clause 249. I commend the amendments to the House.

Miss Melanie Johnson: Amendment No. 13 would provide a general exemption from the prohibition on the appointment of an administrative receiver over a registered social landlord. That would apply to RSLs that are companies and industrial and provident societies—the large majority—which can technically be subject to a floating charge. However, lenders do not insist on making such charges since the property is entirely land, and industrial and provident societies cannot be subject to administration.

The arguments for a special exemption seem to be based on the cost and availability of finance. Indeed, the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) emphasised that. We have listened carefully to the arguments, but we are not persuaded that there is a case for exemption for that group of lenders.

Our proposals for prohibiting administrative receivership in favour of a streamlined administration procedure will strike a fair balance between creditors and debtors. They will not affect the rights of lenders to make a floating charge, but will simply provide for its exercise through a fairer, collective framework. The new administration procedure offers flexibility, speed and adequate safeguards for the interests of floating charge

[Miss Melanie Johnson]

holders. Lenders to RSLs that are companies and already subject to administration and administrative receivership through their charges have nothing to fear from the proposals.

Let me consider amendments Nos. 318 and 319. They would remove RSLs that are industrial and provident societies from the power in clause 249 to extend administration to industrial and provident societies. I know that representatives and advisers of RSLs in that sector are worried that the power in clause 249 to extend administration to industrial and provident societies in the social housing sector could, if exercised, have an adverse impact on it. They fear that the administration moratorium may interfere with the existing arrangements under the Housing Act 1996, which already provides for a moratorium in the case of a registered social landlord in financial difficulties.

The Government would not wish to use the enabling power to extend administration to parts of the industrial and provident sector where it would be contrary to its interests to do so. Equally, we want to seek a broad range of views and do not want to rush into any decisions. Any exercise of the power will be made following full consultation, when that important issue will be examined with others that affect the whole industrial and provident sector. I assure the Opposition that we appreciate the subject's importance.

Mr. Gareth Thomas (Harrow, West): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Miss Johnson: I shall indeed give way to my hon. Friend, who had something to do with clause 249.

Mr. Thomas: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for listening so sympathetically to the anxieties that were raised with her and her officials and with me, as the mover of clause 249. Although full consultation is clearly necessary, I urge her not to draw back from using clause 249 to extend the Bill's insolvency law provisions to industrial and provident societies. In the past, such societies have had to go into liquidation because the measure's sensible powers were not available to them. The last thing we want is to deprive industrial and provident societies of that power.

Miss Johnson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his intervention, and for his continuing interest in and support for the clause that he originally tabled in Committee. I am sure that he appreciates that we do not want to take action that is contrary to the interests of any part of the industrial and provident sector. I know that his purpose in tabling the clause was to help parts of that sector in the way he mentioned. We need to maintain his objective and the overall aim of doing nothing to damage the sector; I know that he is sympathetic to that. I simply emphasise that we shall consult and examine the matter and that we will not rush into decisions. We do not want to do anything that is contrary to the sector's interests.

Dr. John Pugh (Southport): If we are to take the assurance of full consultation seriously, and it happened now, interested parties would clearly say, "Accept the Opposition amendment." They have examined and understood what is before them; they are reasonably good judges of their interests. If full consultation means anything, we should harken to the amendment.

Miss Johnson: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point, but he is not right. As a member of the Committee, he appreciates that clause 249 was included in the Bill relatively late. There has not therefore been the same opportunity for dialogue with the social housing sector and bodies that represent its interests. We believe that further consideration of the issues that the sector raises will give it an opportunity of making its views known at an appropriate time to the appropriate Department. I understand that certain matters may need to be tackled and I accept that we may need to consider that, but the amendments would not ensure that we reached the right answer by the quickest route. I know that the hon. Gentleman wants to achieve that when he urges us to accept the amendment.

In the light of my comments and assurances, I ask the hon. Member for Eastbourne to withdraw the amendment.

Mr. Waterson: I am grateful to the Minister for saying that she appreciates the seriousness that the social housing sector attaches to the issues that we are considering and for her comment that she wants to consult. Given that she appreciates the seriousness of the matter, I hope that we can assume that the consultation will proceed briskly and that action will ensue if the result is the one predicted by the hon. Member for Southport (Dr. Pugh). I am sure that he is right.

The subject is serious, and I do not want to divide the House on it. I simply emphasise the comments of the Council of Mortgage Lenders and the National Housing Federation, which feel strongly about the matter because it could cause them major problems.

Mr. Mark Field: I am sure that my hon. Friend has it in mind that the availability of competitively priced private loan finance is crucial to the sector, especially in central London. I do not say that with purely constituency interests at heart. If we run the risk, there may be further unintended consequences. The Mayor of London has already insisted on a minimum of 50 per cent. social housing in new developments. That will drive developers away from developments in much of London. In the worst-case scenario that my hon. Friend has portrayed, we run a risk of unintended consequences for a sector that will go through some difficult times in the next couple of years—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. That intervention is rather lengthy. I call Mr. Waterson.

Mr. Waterson: I get my hon. Friend's drift. If I have not, I am sure that the Minister has. It is possible to square the circle by satisfying the social housing organisations and not undermining the amendment that the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) tabled in Committee. That has attractions for the main stream of industrial and provident societies, and he obviously speaks from knowledge. However, a serious problem clearly exists. We are happy to leave it with the Minister and hope that consultation takes place shortly.

I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Schedule 18

SCHEDULE 2A TO INSOLVENCY ACT 1986

Amendments made: No. 356, in page 287, line 34, after 'a' insert—

'person who is, when the agreement mentioned in section 72B(1) is entered into, a'.

No. 357, in page 287, line 34, after 'individual' insert—

'in relation to a communication'.

No. 358, in page 287, line 37, leave out 'and'.

No. 359, in page 287, line 38, after 'a' insert—

'person who is, when the agreement mentioned in section 72B(1) is entered into, a'.

No. 360, in page 287, line 38, after 'investor' insert—

'in relation to a communication'.

No. 361, in page 287, line 39, at end insert—

', and

( ) a person in a State other than the United Kingdom who under the law of that State is not prohibited from investing in bonds or commercial paper.'.

No. 362, in page 287, line 45, at end insert—

'( ) For the purposes of sub-paragraph (1)—

(a) in applying article 19(5) of the Financial Promotion Order for the purposes of sub-paragraph (1)(a)—

(i) in article 19(5)(b), ignore the words after "exempt person",

(ii) in article 19(5)(c)(i), for the words from "the controlled activity" to the end substitute "a controlled activity", and

(iii) in article 19(5)(e) ignore the words from "where the communication" to the end, and

(b) in applying article 49(2) of that order for the purposes of sub-paragraph (1)(c), ignore article 49(2)(e).'.

No. 363, in page 288, line 2, leave out—

'section 72B and paragraph 1 of'

and insert—

'sections 72B and 72E and'.

No. 364, in page 288, line 18, leave out 'contractual entitlement' and insert 'entitlement under an agreement'.

No. 365, in page 288, line 19, leave out 'contractual responsibility' and insert 'responsibility under an agreement'.

No. 366, in page 288, line 28, leave out 'contractual responsibility' and insert 'responsibility under an agreement'.

No. 367, in page 288, line 31, leave out 'or'.

No. 368, in page 288, line 33, at end insert—

', or

(e) it is the holding company of a company within any of paragraphs (a) to (d).'.

No. 369, in page 288, line 35, after '(d),', insert—

'or is within sub-paragraph (1)(e),'.

No. 370, in page 288, line 36, leave out from 'performs' to end of line 37 and insert—

'a function which is not—

(i) within sub-paragraph (1)(a) to (d),

(ii) related to a function within sub-paragraph (1)(a) to (d), or

(iii) related to the project.'.—*[Mr. Pearson.]*

7 pm

Madam Deputy Speaker: We now come to amendments Nos. 83 and 84.

Mr. Waterson: I shall try to deal with these amendments fairly briefly, as they were debated in Committee. They relate to the abolition of Crown preference. Lest anyone should accuse me of looking a gift horse in the mouth, let me say that we unreservedly welcome the scrapping of Crown preference. The demands of the Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise have often been a malign factor in the dying days of a business, particularly a small business, and the removal of this preference can only be a good thing. It has been welcomed in all quarters. As I recall, the amount in question is about £80 million, but the measure is welcome none the less, particularly for small businesses.

As I have said before, the Chancellor's fingerprints are all over this Bill, even if it is nominally a DTI measure. He has a habit of giving with one hand and taking away with the other—hence amendments Nos. 83 and 84. Although we are abolishing the Crown's preferential rights to the debts listed in clause 245(1), we are not scrapping the DTI's subrogated preferential rights in respect of salary and wage arrears.

Miss Melanie Johnson: May I make it clear that we have already debated and accepted amendments Nos. 134 and 137, which remove the Secretary of State's right to be paid in priority to any preferential claims lodged in insolvency proceedings by former employees, which is what these amendments also seek to achieve?

Mr. Waterson: I am looking at the response from the hon. Lady's fellow Minister in Committee, and he seemed not to accept those amendments, and to insist that the Secretary of State should be able to step into a former employee's shoes.

Miss Johnson: Perhaps I can clarify this. Amendment No. 137 was taken on Thursday, and amendment No. 134 was in an earlier group. Both amendments have the same effect as amendments Nos. 83 and 84. We said that we would reconsider the issues, so I therefore believe that these amendments are no longer necessary.

Mr. Waterson: I am grateful to the Minister for that response. I shall immediately turn, on a sixpence, and express my pleasure and surprise in equal measure that the Government have accepted the argument. They were certainly fighting a doughty rearguard action on it in Committee, although I exempt the hon. Lady from any blame for that. It is extremely good news that, yet again, common sense has prevailed. I can only put that down to the detailed and energetic scrutiny that the official Opposition have applied to the Bill. It would, therefore, be quite churlish of me not to seek leave to withdraw the amendments—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has not formally moved the amendments, so need not formally withdraw them.

Mr. Mark Field: I wonder whether I might be able to say a few words on these amendments?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I think, from what the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) was saying, that he has not moved the amendment formally, so it would be inappropriate to make any comments.

Clause 246

UNSECURED CREDITORS

Amendment made: No. 98, in page 172, leave out lines 32 to 34.—*[Mr. Pearson.]*

Clause 250

DURATION OF BANKRUPTCY

Mr. Waterson: I beg to move amendment No. 85, in page 174, leave out line 12 and insert—

'(a) in the case of an individual whose bankruptcy arises from the closure of a business or trade established or operated by that individual, one year beginning with the date on which the bankruptcy commences; and

(b) in cases not falling within subsection 1(a):

(i) where a certificate for the summary administration of the bankrupt's estate has been issued and is not revoked before the bankrupt's discharge, two years beginning with the date on which the bankruptcy commences; and

(ii) in any other case, three years beginning with the date on which the bankruptcy commences'.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: Amendment No. 86, in page 174, leave out lines 13 to 16.

Government amendment No. 371.

Amendment No. 87, in schedule 20, page 292, line 32, after "knew", insert—

'or ought to have known'.

Amendment No. 88, in clause 252, page 175, leave out lines 18 and 19.

Amendment No. 411, in clause 253, page 175, line 38, leave out from beginning to end of line 2 on page 176 and insert—

'(6) An incomes payment order must specify the period during which it is to have effect which period may end after the discharge of the bankrupt.'.

Amendment No. 412, in clause 254, page 176, leave out lines 30 to 34 and insert—

'(5) An income payments agreement must specify the period during which it is to have effect which period may end after the discharge of the bankrupt.'.

Mr. Waterson: No doubt the Minister will intervene if any of these amendments have already been accepted by the Government, although I somehow doubt that that is the case. I shall speak mainly to amendments Nos. 85 and 86. Government Amendment No. 371 and our amendment No. 87 are basically identical, which seems to suggest another acceptance by the Government of our ideas.

Miss Melanie Johnson: In the spirit of my regularly helping the hon. Gentleman, I can confirm that that is the case.

Mr. Waterson: Splendid. Even I managed to notice that. Our amendment No. 88 basically repeats what is in amendment No. 86. I shall deal with amendments Nos. 411 and 412 later.

We touched on the distinction between business and consumer bankruptcies—a term which does not exist in the Bill—in Committee, but it is sufficiently important to return to it on Report. In Committee, the Minister rejected our amendment seeking separate discharge periods for business and consumer bankrupts, saying that it was impossible to disentangle business and consumer debts. The experience in the USA, when the rules were changed in a similar fashion, was that there was an explosion in the number of consumer bankruptcies—people who had run up too many credit card debts, or whatever—and a slight reduction in the number of strictly corporate insolvencies. We take the view, as does the Consumer Credit Association, among others, that it would make enormous sense to try to find a way of separating out the two, so that we can test the Government's intentions.

We are told that the reasoning behind the Bill is to encourage a culture of entrepreneurial activity and risk taking. The difficulty with that is that, whatever the result might be in the corporate sector, all the changes in the rules would have to apply in equal measure to personal, consumer-type bankruptcies. If, however, we could apply a longer period of time to the duration of individual bankruptcies—with all the consequences that would follow—and single out the very sector that the Government are trying to help, that is, corporate bankruptcies, presumably we should be doing everyone a service.

We are not necessarily suggesting that these amendments represent the best provisions that can be achieved. It is certainly open to the parliamentary draftsmen to come up with something better. The model that the Consumer Credit Association has put forward, which we are happy to adopt, contains proposals that

"the debtor states, in the bankruptcy application form, if he is in business;

making a false or misleading statement would be an offence;

creditors have a right to challenge the debtor's statement. Most would be able to do so on the basis of information in their own customer databases;

if so challenged, the debtor must produce evidence that he was in business. Even those who have not kept formal accounts should be able to do so, by producing, for example, an appointment book or purchase receipts or tax return."

That seems to be a commonsense approach, because it is actually quite difficult in real life for someone to pretend not to be in business when they really are. The Consumer Credit Association goes on to state:

"On that basis, there would be no need to disentangle individual debts. Anyone in business would benefit from the shorter discharge period, whether or not they also have consumer debts. But the credit industry would also have the important safeguard of being able to challenge those applicants whom it believes are not genuinely running a business. In this way, those looking to abuse the system . . . could be deterred."

Abuse in these circumstances can work in two ways; it can damage the credit industry, and it can also damage other consumers.

I want to ask the Minister two or three specific questions, given that, for these purposes, we accept the Government's basic premise, which is that the aim of these far-reaching changes in insolvency law is to encourage entrepreneurs to go out, start a business and take the risk of it failing through no fault of their own.

Is the Minister prepared to accept the amendments as they stand, or to return with amendments of her own? Will she at least indicate her view on the principle? If not, will she consider returning with proposals if, as we predict, there is an explosion in the number of consumers, rather than businesses, seeking bankruptcy? Does she accept as a matter of principle that people with only consumer debts should not be able to benefit from the short discharge period enjoyed by entrepreneurs—for the straightforward reason that the only purpose of that is to encourage entrepreneurs to take risks? If she believes that those with only consumer debts should also enjoy the shorter discharge period, what benefits does she think that will bring to the economy and, indeed, to consumers?

In Committee, it was argued that there was no solid or practical way of distinguishing between business and consumer debtors. In consultation with the consumer credit industry, we have come up with what we consider to be a reasonably watertight solution, but we need to know not just the Minister's problems with the drafting of the amendment but whether she has any problem with the principle.

Amendment No. 86 also returns to an argument we had in Committee, but it too is extremely important. The aim is to ensure that the official receiver conducts a proper investigation in the case of each bankrupt. Without that there would be a real risk of, in effect, rubber-stamping of bankruptcies—first because the period involved could be much shorter even than 12 months, and secondly because we can expect an explosion in the number of cases to be considered.

According to PricewaterhouseCoopers,

> "Warnings should be heeded from America, where a more friendly attitude towards consumer debt has led to a bankruptcy rate which is about 10 times the rate in the UK in relation to population"—

and we all know about the enormous increase in consumer debt in this country.

I do not want to go into too much detail, but I think that the Government are still in denial over important points of principle. We raised three of them in Committee. First, should stigma be attached to personal bankruptcy? Secondly, what would the effects in the real world be? Would we end up with a rogues' charter? Thirdly, would resources be available to deal with those effects? We feel that the best way of testing what the Government are really trying to do is to offer them a straightforward, practical way of distinguishing between business and consumer debtors.

We have received representations from MBNA Europe Bank Ltd, which represents more than 13 per cent. of the UK credit card market and has more than £6 billion in outstanding loans. It is very concerned about the experience of the United States, and how it would apply here. It says

> "In the US . . . it requires on average 33 debtors who pay their debts to cover the cost of one debtor that defaults. In practice, personal insolvency costs every US household $400 per annum in higher prices for goods and services".

It calculates that there

> "will be a minimum of an additional 15-20 per cent. increase on existing bankruptcy levels"

if the Bill is passed unamended.

We heard all the arguments in Committee about the likely effect not only on the industry but on borrowers. We discussed whether it would be more difficult for people to borrow money, and whether—as happened in the United States—we would see the emergence of a predatory part of the lending industry, preying on people who could obtain no credit anywhere else, charging high levels of interest and generally making those people's circumstances much worse in the long run.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) mentioned student loans. An article in the April edition of *Credit Today* states:

> "Government plans to introduce commercial rate loans for better off students may be shelved because of fears the debt would be uncollectable".

It says that the Department for Education and Skills is currently examining the position, and adds that a spokesman for the Department

> "told *Credit Today:* 'We will be putting plans out for consultation later in the year. We are aware that if a student is declared bankrupt they will not have to pay back their student loan and are looking at the impact this might have for student loan legislation . . .
>
> Borrowers who entered higher education prior to 1998 will be able to escape repayments by making themselves bankrupt . . . credit manager of Cornwall County Council, which processes student loan applications, claims students will have nothing to lose by going bankrupt because few are homeowners.
>
> 'I am concerned the student loans system would become so open to abuse it becomes impossible and this would herald a return to the grant system which would be administered by us in local government,' he said."

7.15 pm

Those are just some examples of what we think might result from the proposed changes, across the board. There are a number of possible ways of dealing with them. We have suggested amendments involving a minimum bankruptcy period of a year, for example. There would, of course, be a full investigation in each case. One solution, however, would be a separation between business and consumer debtors.

Amendments Nos. 411 and 412, concerning income payments orders, are strongly supported by the CBI—which, indeed, proposed them in the first place—and are supported particularly by CBI members in the consumer finance industry. They specify a maximum of three years for the duration of an income payments order or income payments agreement. There is no clear or sensible objective reason for the limitation, says the CBI, which thinks that the duration is best left to the court's discretion. Why should an extraneous limit be placed on the period? The CBI says that the amendments are driven by the simple rule that when a debtor can pay, he should pay.

The Minister has talked a great deal about striking a balance, but I think we are in danger of shifting the balance dramatically between debtor and creditor. As I have said, we should not think just about the consumer credit industry, although naturally there will be consequences: if the number of bankruptcies and uncollected debts rises, banks and other lending institutions wil have to make adjustments accordingly, and it will become more difficult for the very people who find it hardest to raise money to obtain credit. As I have said, however, we should always remember the creditors who are not lending institutions—friends and family, for instance, who would suffer far more proportionally than such institutions if someone were unable or unwilling to pay debts.

[Mr. Waterson]

I make no apology for raising again issues that were raised in Committee. We do not think that the Government have taken them seriously enough.

Dr. Pugh: The debate has been dogged by the tendency of many people to regard bankrupts as a homogeneous group. The thrust of the Bill is that they are not. Some people lose money through no fault of their own—for instance, the thousands of victims of the Wall street crash. Not all of them were foolish; many were just downright unfortunate. It has been said that we should distinguish between the reckless, the foolish, the careless and the negligent, but of course there are many shades of grey.

If we look at the whole picture, we see that there is a simple view throughout the House—that, from the moral point of view, not everyone merits the same treatment. What has dogged both sides today, however, is the question whether it is possible to distinguish between the categories. The hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson), indeed, asked whether we should differentiate. Was it worth while? I should have thought that the Tory answer would be no—that there should be no distinction between those who are bankrupt through no fault of their own and those who have lost their money, and other people's money, through negligence of one kind or another. It has been argued that there would be practical difficulties and dangerous consequences and that it would not be worth the candle—that the benefits of better enterprise and greater social justice that the Act was meant to ensure would not outweigh the snags.

The argument of the hon. Member for Eastbourne was reasonably consistent with that, in that he seemed to suggest that differentiation was not possible, but now he is arguing that it is possible to differentiate the consumer bankrupt and the business bankrupt. That differentiation is apparently practical, worth while, in line with the overall objectives of the legislation and not dangerous. He has effectively reversed his arguments.

A consistent view, which the Minister may be tempted to take, is that it is certainly possible to distinguish between bankrupts. If we can differentiate those who have been reckless and those who have been unfortunate in pursuing a business enterprise, it is surely not beyond the wit of man to differentiate those whose bankruptcy is largely the effect of bad consumer spending patterns and those who have suffered from unfortunate business dealing. It would certainly be legitimate for the Minister to consider whether the amendment is worth pursuing.

Miss Melanie Johnson: We tabled Government amendment No. 371 in response to points made by the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) in Committee. It extends slightly the grounds for courts to consider hearing a bankruptcy restriction order application. It takes on board the point about ensuring that the BRO regime has similar grounds to those for wrongful trading for limited companies in section 214 of the Insolvency Act 1986. I hope that the House will support it.

Amendments Nos. 411 and 412 are designed to ensure that an income payments order or agreement can run for any period, potentially until all the bankrupt's liabilities are discharged. I said in Committee—I have heard nothing today to change this view—that it is right for bankrupts who are able to make contributions from their income to be required to do so, but setting a three-year limit to the agreement recognises that there must be a balance between the benefits brought to the creditors and the rehabilitation of the individual bankrupt. Currently, IPOs tend to run until discharge—about three years—and it would hardly be fair or consistent with the Government's aim of helping bankrupts to make a fresh start if we imposed a far more stringent regime, as could be the case under the amendments.

The provisions in the Bill make it clear that the Government support the principle of "can pay, should pay" for bankrupts. The amendments could result in IPOs and IPAs lasting longer than is reasonable. If the intention is to ensure that bankrupts with a high potential future income—for example, those in the professions—make payments to the estate, the amendments are misguided, because they could make all bankrupts entering into IPOs or IPAs subject to the longer time scale. If a debtor wants to make payments for a period beyond the three years provided for in clauses 253 and 254, it would be more appropriate to use the individual voluntary arrangement regime, which would allow flexibility in setting out a programme of payments that is acceptable to the creditors.

Amendment No. 85 was debated at length in Committee, and again today. I remain unconvinced of the case for drawing a distinction between business and consumer bankruptcies for the purposes of discharge. It has been suggested that without such a distinction there is likely to be an increase in bankruptcies brought about by a headlong rush of consumers seeking to take advantage of some perceived easy ride. There is no reason to believe that consumers would act in that way. Bankruptcy is not an easy option, and in some respects the new regime makes it more rather than less severe.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead (Mr. McWalter) said, there is a difference here. In particular, the proposals contain no changes to the assets that will be included in the estate on the making of a bankruptcy order and they do not shorten the period over which the bankrupt is liable to make payments out of income. The proposals make it easier for the trustee to ensure that the bankrupt makes payments out of future income by introducing income payments agreements. Consumers who behave recklessly or dishonestly run the risk of being subject to a bankruptcy restriction order for a longer period than the current discharge period and may damage their credit rating. I do not think that the majority of consumers are as short-sighted as some Opposition Members would have us believe.

The hon. Member for Eastbourne briefly regaled us with the position in the United States, but the comparison with the US is not a valid one. There are many differences between our proposals and the US regime. In the US, there is no real concept of a discharge period and individuals can opt either for an asset-based regime under chapter 7 or for an income-based regime under chapter 13, depending on their circumstances and what would be better for them. There is no investigation to speak of in the US. Our proposals do not allow debtors to choose the option that suits them best. If they can pay, they should pay. We also provide for proper investigation into misconduct and for effective sanctions where necessary. For those reasons, we do not think that bankruptcies here will reach levels equivalent to those in the US. There are significant differences.

We believe that the aim of reducing bankruptcy should apply to the majority of bankrupts, regardless of whether they are in business, where no misconduct or criminal behaviour has been identified. People can have bad luck in their personal lives—the unexpected loss of a job or the breakdown of a personal relationship can often lead to financial problems. The advice agencies all say that those are major reasons why people find themselves in that position. Such people are as entitled to a fresh start as a business person would be under parallel circumstances. It would not be fair or equitable to stigmatise them through a tougher regime.

Dr. Pugh: Although we may not want to distinguish in moral terms, surely the object of the Bill is to make business bankruptcy less of a problem, rather than to deal with consumer bankruptcy. There is a distinction. When the Bill was conceived, there was no thought of making it easier for people to overspend.

Miss Johnson: We are trying to make it easier to distinguish in both areas between those who face bankruptcy unexpectedly, through no fault of their own, and those who have behaved recklessly or wantonly. The distinction suggested in the amendment is entirely artificial, and we think that it would be unworkable in practice. The experience of the official receiver shows that the self-employed do not operate their business and professional lives in conveniently separate compartments—as we discussed at length in Committee, they are often inextricably linked.

For all those reasons, I do not believe that the amendments would work well or that we should accept them. I hope that hon. Members will not press them to a vote.

Amendment No. 86 was also discussed at considerable length in Committee. We do not support it, as it would effectively continue the one-size-fits-all approach. As I said in Committee, early discharge will occur only in straightforward cases where debtors co-operate with the official receiver. In cases where the administrative work is complete and the issue of public protection does not arise, there is no merit in preventing bankrupts from getting through the process as quickly as possible, or in not helping them to promote rehabilitation of their financial affairs. In almost all cases, such administrative work will be completed in under a year. One exception might be cases where the bankrupt has failed to co-operate fully with the official receiver. Such individuals would be subject to the suspension of discharge provisions, and would not be discharged until they have co-operated fully. Similarly, in most cases an investigation decision is made in the first few months after the bankruptcy order. Again, if investigation matters are outstanding, there will be no discharge within the 12-month period.

7.30 pm

Amendment No. 88 was also considered at length in Committee. The Bill will remove provisions relating to summary bankruptcy and introduce instead a general discretion for the official receiver to investigate cases as he or she sees fit. This is not a new concept. Sections of the Insolvency Act 1986 dealing with summary bankruptcy currently provide that, in cases involving unsecured liabilities of less than £20,000, the official receiver need only investigate if he or she sees fit. The advantage of the Bill's proposal is that resources can be used more effectively by looking at each case on its merits, rather than on the current basis of an arbitrary financial limit. The amendment would require an in-depth investigation in all cases, including those currently dealt with under the summary regime. It would therefore seek, for no good reason, to engage the official receiver in investigating cases that do not involve issues of public protection or criminal behaviour. That is at odds with the professed concern of Opposition Members to ensure that the official receiver is properly resourced to carry out his or her functions.

Finally, amendment No. 87, about which I have already spoken, is very similar to Government amendment No. 371.

Mr. Waterson: The Minister's response to amendment No. 85, which deals with the distinction between business and consumer bankruptcies, was extremely revealing. As I predicted, she mentioned the practicalities and difficulties involved. We are prepared to concede that such problems exist, and I am sure that they can be addressed. However, so far as the principle is concerned, she made it entirely clear that there is no intention to distinguish between business and consumer bankruptcies. That seems to undermine one of the few bases on which the word "enterprise" is justified as forming part of the Bill's title. This part of the Bill has consistently been spun over many months as a means of encouraging entrepreneurs. It is not supposed to encourage people to spend far too much on their credit cards, only to find that they cannot pay their debts.

The Minister is of course right to say that the analogy with America is not completely on all fours—no comparison between countries ever is. Major differences exist, but it is clear that a system that makes it easier to become bankrupt, and which removes the associated stigma, will lead to a very large growth in the number of bankruptcies. I challenge the Minister to say that her Department firmly predicts that the passage of the Bill as it stands will not lead to a very substantial increase in bankruptcies.

There is a clear conceptual problem. The Government have rowed back from the suggestion that they are trying to encourage entrepreneurs. I am happy to leave the practicalities of the amendments to parliamentary draftsmen, so long as the Minister is prepared to accept the principle behind them. However, as was underlined by the hon. Member for Southport (Dr. Pugh), it is clear that the Government's commitment to that principle is only skin deep. They do not care that, in fact, many more consumer bankrupts than business bankrupts will be drawn into the system. I suspect that, in practice, the impact on entrepreneurs will be largely negligible. The only effect will probably be that people will escape the net simply because far more bankruptcies will have to be processed. There will be insufficient resources, and the period of examination of bankrupts' assets will again be foreshortened by other provisions in the Bill.

I was very disappointed by what the Minister had to say, but in a sense I was heartened. Her comments support the point that I argued consistently throughout the Bill's passage: that, as the Confederation of British Industry said, the name "Enterprise Bill" is a complete misnomer. However, having made those points, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Schedule 20

SCHEDULE 4A TO INSOLVENCY ACT 1986

Amendment made: No. 371, in page 292, line 32, leave out "himself to be" and insert—

'or ought to have known that he was'.—*[Miss Melanie Johnson.]*

Clause 259

DISQUALIFICATION FROM OFFICE: PARLIAMENT

Mr. Waterson: I beg to move amendment No. 76, in page 177, line 32, leave out clause 259.

I was hoping that the Chamber would fill up at this point, and it has: my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) has appeared. Given that the amendment would delete the clause that deals with the disqualification from office of Members of Parliament as a result of bankruptcy, I thought that more Members of Parliament might have an interest in it, but apparently they do not.

The Government are trying to ensure that, under the new regime, Members of Parliament—and, indeed, local councillors and various other office holders—can be elected and retain office, even if they become bankrupt. If they become subject to a bankruptcy restriction order—in other words, if they are one of those culpable bankrupts whom we hear so much about—the same consequences will be visited on them as are currently visited on them if they become bankrupt. We tested that proposition in Committee for two broad reasons. First, in the real world, can one distinguish, in this or any other context, between two neat categories—culpable, malign bankrupts, and non-culpable, benign bankrupts—even assuming that the stretched resources of the Insolvency Service allow it so to differentiate?

Secondly, should there be a different and somewhat higher test for Members of Parliament? Are the Government really arguing that benign, blundering but basically honest Members of Parliament who have been unlucky in business or in their purchases should not suffer some kind of disadvantage as a result of going bankrupt? I take the view that there should be a higher test for Members of Parliament. Even in the case of "bad luck" bankrupts, their being unwise enough to go bankrupt should be sufficient—as is the currently the case—to justify their disqualification. That is to say nothing of whether we want a Member of Parliament to continue to serve who may have been a rogue, and who recklessly or intentionally left behind debts.

Of course, we have had our share of rogue Members who have gone bankrupt and left behind financial responsibilities. Robert Maxwell, the former Member for Buckingham, and John Stonehouse are two names that come to mind, but it has happened fairly regularly for some 200 years. Indeed, Spencer Perceval, the only British Prime Minister ever to be assassinated, was shot in the House of Commons by a bankrupt called Bellingham—a direct antecedent of my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham).

Even if a "bad luck"—to use the Minister's expression—bankrupt Member of Parliament satisfied all creditors, in this age of intrusive media interest in almost every aspect of our humdrum, mundane lives, the matter would doubtless end up in the public domain. Leaving aside the question of whether the hapless Member had in fact run up such debts in their own constituency—an action that would be unwise—the matter would come out sooner or later, at least in the constituency. Is it really the business of the House of Commons to tell our constituents that no stigma should be attached to being bankrupted for any reason if one is a Member of Parliament or wishes to be one? It is all right for us to tell the rest of the population that they need no longer feel any stigma, but how can we tell them how they should view a Member of Parliament or would-be Member who is in the same position?

As I said in Committee, the proposals assume that bankruptcy has no victims. I make no apology for repeating what I have said today: leaving aside the damage caused to business and the credit industry, many bankrupts leave debts payable to their immediate family and friends. They may even leave friends or relations to go bankrupt themselves as a result. Is it really the Government's view that Members of Parliament—or anyone else—can be wholly innocent when they become bankrupt?

The British population are possessed of a greater wisdom. I do not mean that wisdom that has sent every Member here—that goes without saying—but if an MP has been injudicious enough to run up debts that cannot be paid, leaving many people out of pocket, it is arguable that such a person should not be entrusted with representing constituents' interests. I admit that there, but for the grace of God, go I. Any one of us could make an unfortunate investment, such as in a home in our constituency, because MPs can be subject to bad luck as much as anyone else. However, we must think carefully about whether we should change the rules for ourselves. People expect a higher standard from a Member of Parliament, or someone who seeks to be a Member of Parliament, and there is a strong argument that the current rules should continue to apply.

If the Government are intent on changing the rules for everyone else, because they think that it will encourage entrepreneurial spirit or will be redistributive—whatever their real motives are—they can make it easier for the rest of population to go bankrupt and come out of bankruptcy, and they can remove the stigma. However, no matter how much law we pass here, an MP who becomes bankrupt or a candidate who has been bankrupt will still have a stigma attached to them, and I see no particular problem with that. People will have to weigh up the character and abilities of such a person—including, perhaps, the level of gullibility—before deciding who should represent them in this place. The Government have yet to make out a case, in Committee or elsewhere, for this change in the law.

Miss Melanie Johnson: Amendment No. 76 seeks to maintain the status quo regarding the bankruptcy disqualification of Members. However, under the Bill it would not be possible to do so, because if a Member were subject to a bankruptcy restrictions order, he or she would not be disqualified. The hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) does not appear to have realised the implications of his amendment, although it may be only a probing amendment. Those subject to BROs would not be disqualified, but they are exactly the people who we are saying are the most serious bankrupts and who will be subject to a much more rigorous regime under the Bill than under existing bankruptcy provisions. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will take that point to heart, because his allegations that our changes to the regime are always in favour of leniency are growing a little stale. In truth, the BRO provision will make bankruptcy a suitably serious matter in the appropriate cases.

The last bankruptcy disqualification of a sitting Member of Parliament was in the late 1920s, notwithstanding the more recent names that the hon. Gentleman mentioned. Such disqualification is unusual, but that is not to say that we should not have provision to cover it. Section 427 of the Insolvency Act 1986 currently provides that a person who becomes bankrupt in England and Wales, or Northern Ireland, or has his estate sequestered in Scotland, is disqualified from being elected to this House or sitting or voting in either House or Committee of either House.

7.45 pm

Mr. Waterson: I appreciate the practical point that the Minister has just made, but she must also remember that we are talking about people who might wish to put themselves forward for election to Parliament who currently would not be allowed to do so. The issue would not arise for sitting Members, but would for those who wish to stand and would be allowed to do so, even though they were bankrupt.

Miss Johnson: Former members of the Committee will remember that my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) provided some illuminating insights as to the history of the disqualification of Members and, in particular, whether it is right that somebody who is bankrupt should be disqualified from standing for election to Parliament. I have written to my hon. Friend and other former Committee members confirming that the Bill as currently drafted will enable a person who becomes bankrupt but is not subject to a BRO to be elected to and to participate in this House, but that if a person subject to a BRO were to be elected, the return would be void. However, it is very unlikely that a person subject to a BRO would be chosen as a candidate.

Under section 427 of the 1986 Act, a Member of Parliament would be able to continue to undertake constituency work. However, if after six months he or she remained bankrupt or sequestrated, his or her seat would be vacated. We recognise that arrangements relating to the conduct of Members of Parliament are a matter for Parliament itself to determine and not the Government alone. Therefore, the proposals in the Bill were the result of discussion between the Lord President of the Council and the Chairman of the Standards and Privileges Committee.

The right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young) confirmed that against the background of the Government's objectives it would no longer be appropriate for a Member who becomes bankrupt to be disqualified from sitting or voting, and nor would it be fair to the constituents. The Standards and Privileges Committee also felt that if a Member becomes subject to a bankruptcy restrictions order or an interim order, his or her seat should be vacated. By the same token, only bankrupts subject to a BRO or an interim BRO should be disqualified from election to the House.

The Government are grateful for the Committee's consideration of this matter and accept its advice, which is reflected in clause 259. That position was supported by some of my hon. Friends who spoke to the issue in Committee. The clause also disqualifies a member of the other place who is subject to a BRO, or interim order, from sitting and voting.

Initially, the proposals will apply only to those persons made bankrupt in England and Wales. That is because Scotland and Northern Ireland have their own devolved individual insolvency regimes and until such time as they are amended, Members sequestrated in Scotland or made bankrupt in Northern Ireland will continue to be subject to the current arrangements.

I do not need to go into more detail about the arrangements for the devolved Administrations, but we should recognise that we currently have a lower standard than some other areas because a Member is allowed a six-month period of grace to get either an annulment or a discharge before he or she has to vacate their seat. In other areas, there is no such grace period and disqualification has immediate effect. To leave things as they are, as the amendment advocates, and to take no action against Members who are subject to a BRO would widen that disparity even further. We would be faced with the perverse possibility that bankrupt Members could have to vacate their seats after six months, but could stand for election again and be returned even after their discharge even though they were subject to a BRO.

We should bring the provisions on Members into line with what will happen elsewhere. The order-making power in clause 261 will allow unnecessary bankruptcy disqualifications to be removed or amended. It is already clear that a number of restrictions on bankrupts will be replaced by restrictions on persons subject to a BRO. That is what we will be doing for Members in clause 259.

I will not be accepting amendment No. 76 which would have some, perhaps unintended, undesirable consequences. I believe that the moves that we are making are in the right direction, although the Government entirely accept that this is a matter for this House.

Mr. Waterson: I was merely trying to put the principle before the House. The Minister referred to a probing amendment, and if ever there was one, this was it. I still believe that those outside the House will not look kindly on us giving ourselves this exemption. The Minister has rightly pointed out some practical difficulties and, given her full explanation on at least two occasions, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 263

FEES

Amendment made: No. 323, in page 181, line 10, leave out "or cancel recognition" and insert—

'recognition, or revoke an order of recognition under section 391(1) by a further order.'—*[Miss Melanie Johnson.]*

Schedule 24

TRANSITIONAL AND TRANSITORY PROVISIONS AND SAVINGS

Amendments made: No. 374, in page 304, line 10, at end insert—

'Designation orders under Schedule 4 to the 1998 Act

' (1) Subject to sub-paragraph (2), the repeals made by section 200 do not affect—

(a) the operation of Schedule 4 to the 1998 Act in relation to any application for designation of a professional rule which is made before the commencement date;

(b) the operation of section 3(1)(d) of and Schedule 4 to the 1998 Act in relation to any designation effected by an order made before the commencement date or on an application mentioned in paragraph (a).

(2) No designation order (whenever made) shall have any effect in relation to any period of time after the end of the transitional period.

(3) Subject to sub-paragraph (2) a designation order may be made after the end of the transitional period on an application mentioned in sub-paragraph (1)(a).

(4) For the purposes of this paragraph—

"commencement date" means the day on which section 200 comes into force;

"designation" means designation under paragraph 2 of Schedule 4 to the 1998 Act; and

"the transitional period" means the period of three months beginning with the commencement date.'.

No. 188, in page 304, line 6, at end insert—

'8A Any person who is a member of the Competition Commission appeal panel (but not a member of the panel of chairmen) immediately before the commencement of section 12 is on that date to become a member of the Competition Appeal Tribunal, on such terms and for such a period as the Secretary of State may determine.

8B Any member of the Competition Commission appeal panel who is, immediately before the commencement of section 12, a member of the panel of chairmen under paragraph 26 of Schedule 7 to the 1998 Act is on that date to become a chairman of the Competition Appeal Tribunal, on such terms and for such a period as the Lord Chancellor may determine.

8C Nothing in paragraph 7, 8, 8A or 8B applies to any person who, before the commencement of section 12, gives notice to the Secretary of State stating that he does not wish that paragraph to apply to him.'.—*[Miss Melanie Johnson.]*

Schedule 25

MINOR AND CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS

Amendments made: No. 382, in page 304, line 17, at end insert—

'Registered Designs Act 1949 (c. 88)

A1 (1) The Registered Designs Act 1949 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 11A(1) (powers exercisable in consequence of report of Competition Commission), paragraphs (a) and (b) shall cease to have effect.

(3) After section 11A there is inserted—

"11AB Powers exercisable following merger and market investigations

(1) Subsection (2) below applies where—

(a) section 40(2), 54(2), 65(6), 72(2), 80(2), 132(2), 141(2) or 154(2) of, or paragraph 5(2) or 10(2) of Schedule 7 to, the Enterprise Act 2002 (powers to take remedial action following merger or market investigations) applies;

(b) the Competition Commission or (as the case may be) the Secretary of State considers that it would be appropriate to make an application under this section for the purpose of remedying, mitigating or preventing a matter which cannot be dealt with under the enactment concerned; and

(c) the matter concerned involves conditions in licences granted in respect of a registered design by its proprietor restricting the use of the design by the licensee or the right of the proprietor to grant other licences.

(2) The Competition Commission or (as the case may be) the Secretary of State may apply to the registrar to take action under this section.

(3) Before making an application the Competition Commission or (as the case may be) the Secretary of State shall publish, in such manner as it or he thinks appropriate, a notice describing the nature of the proposed application and shall consider any representations which may be made within 30 days of such publication by persons whose interests appear to it or him to be affected.

(4) The registrar may, if it appears to him on an application under this section that the application is made in accordance with this section, by order cancel or modify any condition concerned of the kind mentioned in subsection (1)(c) above.

(5) An appeal lies from any order of the registrar under this section.

(6) References in section 34, 35, 46, 62, 128 or 135 of the Enterprise Act 2002 (questions to be decided by the Competition Commission in its reports) to taking action under section 40(2), 54, 65, 132 or 141 shall include references to taking action under subsection (2) above.

(7) An order made by virtue of this section in consequence of action under subsection (2) above where an enactment mentioned in subsection (1)(a) above applies shall be treated, for the purposes of sections 88(3), 89(1)(a), 156(1) and 160(3) of the Enterprise Act 2002 (duties to register and keep under review enforcement orders etc.), as if it were made under the relevant power in Part 3 or (as the case may be) 4 of that Act to make an enforcement order (within the meaning of the Part concerned).'".

No. 383, in page 304, line 19, at end insert—

'(1A) In section 19A (action following report by Commission)—

(a) for subsection (1) there is substituted—

"(1) Subsection (2) applies in any of the following cases.

(1A) The first case is where section 132(2) of the Enterprise Act 2002 (duty to remedy adverse effects following market investigation reference) applies and whatever is to be remedied, mitigated or prevented relates to any provision of a scheme or any act or omission of a board administering a scheme.

(1B) The second case is where section 141(2) of the Enterprise Act 2002 (duty to remedy adverse effects in public interest cases) applies and whatever is to be remedied, mitigated or prevented relates to any provision of a scheme or any act or omission of a board administering a scheme.

(1C) The third case is where—

(a) a report of the Competition Commission under section 11 of the Competition Act 1980 (c.21) (references of public bodies etc.), as laid before Parliament, contains conclusions to the effect that—

(i) certain matters indicated in the report operate against the public interest, and

(ii) those matters consist of or include any provision of a scheme or any act or omission of a board administering a scheme, and

(b) none of the conclusions is to be disregarded by virtue of section 11C(3) of that Act (requirement for two-thirds majority).";

(b) in subsection (2)—

(i) the words from the beginning of the subsection to "this section" shall cease to have effect;

(ii) for the words from "those conclusions" to the end of the subsection there is substituted "a report of a committee of investigation had contained the conclusion that the provision of the scheme in question, or the act or omission in question, is contrary to the interests of consumers of the regulated product";

(c) after subsection (2) there is inserted—

"(3) An order made by virtue of this section in a case mentioned in subsection (1A) or (1B) shall be treated, for the purposes of sections 156(1) and 160(3) of the Enterprise Act 2002 (duties to register and keep under review enforcement orders etc.), as if it were made under the relevant power in Part 4 of that Act to make an enforcement order (within the meaning of that Part).".

(1B) For the purposes of the Scotland Act 1998 (c. 46) the amendments made by sub-paragraph (1A) shall be taken to be pre-commencement enactments within the meaning of that Act.'.

No. 384, in page 308, line 44, at end insert—

'Patents Act 1977 (c. 37)

6A (1) The Patents Act 1977 is amended as follows.

(2) After section 50 there is inserted—

"50A Powers exercisable following merger and market investigations

(1) Subsection (2) below applies where—

(a) section 40(2), 54(2), 65(6), 72(2), 80(2), 132(2), 141(2) or 154(2) of, or paragraph 5(2) or 10(2) of Schedule 7 to, the Enterprise Act 2002 (powers to take remedial action following merger or market investigations) applies;

(b) the Competition Commission or (as the case may be) the Secretary of State considers that it would be appropriate to make an application under this section for the purpose of remedying, mitigating or preventing a matter which cannot be dealt with under the enactment concerned; and

(c) the matter concerned involves—

(i) conditions in licences granted under a patent by its proprietor restricting the use of the invention by the licensee or the right of the proprietor to grant other licences; or

(ii) a refusal by the proprietor of a patent to grant licences on reasonable terms.

(2) The Competition Commission or (as the case may be) the Secretary of State may apply to the comptroller to take action under this section.

(3) Before making an application the Competition Commission or (as the case may be) the Secretary of State shall publish, in such manner as it or he thinks appropriate, a notice describing the nature of the proposed application and shall consider any representations which may be made within 30 days of such publication by persons whose interests appear to it or him to be affected.

(4) The comptroller may, if it appears to him on an application under this section that the application is made in accordance with this section, by order cancel or modify any condition concerned of the kind mentioned in subsection (1)(c)(i) above or may, instead or in addition, make an entry in the register to the effect that licences under the patent are to be available as of right.

(5) References in section 34, 35, 46, 62, 128 or 135 of the Enterprise Act 2002 (questions to be decided by the Competition Commission in its reports) to taking action under section 40(2), 54, 65, 132 or 141 shall include references to taking action under subsection (2) above.

(6) Action taken by virtue of subsection (4) above in consequence of an application under subsection (2) above where an enactment mentioned in subsection (1)(a) above applies shall be treated, for the purposes of sections 88(3), 89(1)(a), 156(1) and 160(3) of the Enterprise Act 2002 (duties to register and keep under review enforcement orders etc.), as if it were the making of an enforcement order (within the meaning of the Part concerned) under the relevant power in Part 3 or (as the case may be) 4 of that Act."

(3) In section 51(1) (powers exercisable in consequence of report of Competition Commission), paragraphs (a) and (b) shall cease to have effect.

(4) In section 53(2) (statements in certain reports of the Competition Commission to be prima facie evidence of the matters stated) after "1980" there is inserted "or published under Part 3 or 4 of the Enterprise Act 2002".'.

No. 385, in page 314, line 6, leave out ", (4) and (5)" and insert "and (4)".

No. 386, in page 314, line 6, at end insert—

'(b) in subsection (4), for the words "against the public interest" there is substituted "inappropriate";

(c) for subsection (5) there is substituted—

"(5) In deciding what is inappropriate for the purposes of subsection (4) the Secretary of State shall have regard to the considerations mentioned in section 238 of the Enterprise Act 2002."'.

No. 189, in page 314, line 16, after "(6)", insert "or 111(3)(b) or (4)(b)".

No. 190, in page 314, line 17, after "11B(1)(c)", insert "or (f)'.—

No. 387, in page 314, line 38, at end insert—

'(10) For the purposes of the Scotland Act 1998 (c. 46) the amendments made by this paragraph shall be taken to be pre-commencement enactments within the meaning of that Act.'.

No. 388, in page 314, line 42, at end insert—

'Agricultural Marketing (Northern Ireland) Order 1982
(S.I. 1982/1080 (N.I. 12))

9A (1) The Agricultural Marketing (Northern Ireland) Order 1982 is amended as follows.

(2) For article 23 (action following report by Commission) there is substituted—

"23 Action following report by Competition Commission

(1) Paragraph (5) applies in any of the following cases.

(2) The first case is where section 132(2) of the Enterprise Act 2002 (duty to remedy adverse effects following market investigation reference) applies and whatever is to be remedied, mitigated or prevented relates to any provision of a scheme or any act or omission of a board administering a scheme.

(3) The second case is where section 141(2) of the Enterprise Act 2002 (duty to remedy adverse effects in public interest cases) applies and whatever is to be remedied, mitigated or prevented relates to any provision of a scheme or any act or omission of a board administering a scheme.

(4) The third case is where—

(a) a report of the Competition Commission under section 11 of the Competition Act 1980 (c. 21) (references of public bodies etc.), as laid before Parliament, contains conclusions to the effect that—

(i) certain matters indicated in the report operate against the public interest, and

(ii) those matters consist of or include any provision of a scheme or any act or omission of a board administering a scheme, and

(b) none of the conclusions is to be disregarded by virtue of section 11C(3) of that Act (requirement for two-thirds majority).

(5) The Department shall have the like power to make orders under Article 22 as if a report of a committee of investigation had contained the conclusion that the provision of the scheme in question, or the act or omission in question, is contrary to the interests of consumers of the regulated product.

(6) An order made by virtue of this Article in a case falling within paragraph (2) or (3) shall be treated, for the purposes of sections 156(1) and 160(3) of the Enterprise Act 2002 (duties to register and keep under review enforcement orders etc.), as if it were made under the relevant power in Part 4 of that Act to make an enforcement order (within the meaning of that Part)."

(3) In article 42 (action following report by Commission)—

(a) for paragraph (1) there is substituted—

"(1) Paragraph (1D) applies in any of the following cases.

(1A) The first case is where section 132(2) of the Enterprise Act 2002 (duty to remedy adverse effects following market investigation reference) applies and whatever is to be remedied, mitigated or prevented relates to any provision of a scheme or any act or omission of a board administering a scheme.

(1B) The second case is where section 141(2) of the Enterprise Act 2002 (duty to remedy adverse effects in public interest cases) applies and whatever is to be remedied, mitigated or prevented relates to any provision of a scheme or any act or omission of a board administering a scheme.

(1C) The third case is where—

(a) a report of the Competition Commission under section 11 of the Competition Act 1980 (c. 21) (references of public bodies etc.), as laid before Parliament, contains conclusions to the effect that—

(i) certain matters indicated in the report operate against the public interest, and

(ii) those matters consist of or include any provision of a scheme or any act or omission of a board administering a scheme, and

(b) none of the conclusions is to be disregarded by virtue of section 11C(3) of that Act (requirement for two-thirds majority).

(1D) The Department, if it thinks fit so to do—

(a) may by order make such amendments in the scheme as it considers necessary or expedient for the purpose of rectifying the matter;

(b) may by order revoke the scheme;

(c) in the event of the matter being one which it is within the power of the board to rectify, may by order direct the board to take such steps to rectify the matter as may be specified in the order, and thereupon it shall be the duty of the board forthwith to comply with the order.";

(b) in paragraph (2) for "paragraph (1)" there is substituted "paragraph (1D)";

(c) in paragraph (3) for "paragraph (1)(b)(iii)" there is substituted "paragraph (1D)(c)";

(d) in paragraph (5)—

(i) for "paragraph (1)(i) or (iii)" there is substituted "paragraph (1D)(a) or (c)";

(ii) for "paragraph (1)(ii)" there is substituted "paragraph (1D)(b)";

(e) after paragraph (5) there is inserted—

"(5A) Any order made under this Article in a case falling within paragraph (1A) or (1B) shall be treated, for the purposes of sections 156(1) and 160(3) of the Enterprise Act 2002 (duties to register and keep under review enforcement orders etc.), as if it were made under the relevant power in Part 4 of that Act to make an enforcement order (within the meaning of that Part).".

No. 389, in page 315, line 3, at end insert—

'(2A) In section 13 (licence modification references to Commission), subsections (9) and (9A) shall cease to have effect.

(2B) After section 13 there is inserted—

"13A References under section 13: time limits

(1) Every reference under section 13 above shall specify a period (not longer than six months beginning with the date of the reference) within which a report on the reference is to be made.

(2) A report of the Commission on a reference under section 13 above shall not have effect (and no action shall be taken in relation to it under section 15 below) unless the report is made before the end of the period specified in the reference or such further period (if any) as may be allowed by the Director under subsection (3) below.

(3) The Director may, if he has received representations on the subject from the Commission and is satisfied that there are special reasons why the report cannot be made within the period specified in the reference, extend that period by no more than six months.

(4) No more than one extension is possible under subsection (3) above in relation to the same reference.

(5) The Director shall, in the case of an extension made by him under subsection (3) above—

(a) publish that extension in such manner as he considers appropriate for the purpose of bringing it to the attention of persons likely to be affected by it; and

(b) in the case of a licence granted to a particular person, send to that person a copy of what has been published by him under paragraph (a) above.

13B References under section 13: powers of investigation

(1) The following sections of Part 3 of the Enterprise Act 2002 shall apply, with the modifications mentioned in subsections (2) and (3) below, for the purposes of references under section 13 above as they apply for the purposes of references under that Part—

(a) section 106 (attendance of witnesses and production of documents etc.);

(b) section 107 (enforcement of powers under section 106: general);

(c) section 108 (penalties);

(d) section 109 (penalties: main procedural requirements);

(e) section 110 (payments and interest by instalments);

(f) section 111 (appeals in relation to penalties);

(g) section 112 (recovery of penalties); and

(h) section 113 (statement of policy).

(2) Section 107 shall, in its application by virtue of subsection (1) above, have effect as if—

(a) subsection (2) were omitted; and

(b) in subsection (9) the words from "or section" to "section 64(3))" were omitted.

(3) Section 108(5)(b)(ii) shall, in its application by virtue of subsection (1) above, have effect as if for the words from "the latest" to the end there were substituted "the day on which the report of the Commission on the reference concerned is published."

(2C) In section 14 (reports on licence modification references)—

(a) after subsection (1) there is inserted—

"(1A) For the purposes of section 15 below, a conclusion contained in a report of the Commission is to be disregarded if the conclusion is not that of at least two-thirds of the members of the group constituted in connection with the reference concerned in pursuance of paragraph 15 of Schedule 7 to the Competition Act 1998.

(1B) If a member of a group so constituted disagrees with any conclusions contained in a report made on a reference under section 13 above as the conclusions of the Commission, the report shall, if the member so wishes, include a statement of his disagreement and of his reasons for disagreeing.";

(b) for subsection (3) there is substituted—

"(3) For the purposes of the law relating to defamation, absolute privilege attaches to any report made by the Commission on a reference under section 13 above.

(3A) In making any report on a reference under section 13 above the Commission must have regard to the following considerations before disclosing any information.

(3B) The first consideration is the need to exclude from disclosure (so far as practicable) any information whose disclosure the Commission thinks is contrary to the public interest.

(3C) The second consideration is the need to exclude from disclosure (so far as practicable)—

(a) commercial information whose disclosure the Commission thinks might significantly harm the legitimate business interests of the undertaking to which it relates, or

(b) information relating to the private affairs of an individual whose disclosure the Commission thinks might significantly harm the individual's interests.

(3D) The third consideration is the extent to which the disclosure of the information mentioned in subsection (3C)(a) or (b) is necessary for the purposes of the report."'.

No. 390, in page 316, line 42, leave out from beginning to end of line 2 on page 317.

No. 391, in page 317, line 9, at end insert—

'Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (c. 48)

15A (1) The Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 144 (powers exercisable in consequence of report of Commission) for subsections (1) and (2) there is substituted—

"(1) Subsection (1A) applies where whatever needs to be remedied, mitigated or prevented by the Secretary of State or (as the case may be) the Competition Commission under section 12(5) of the Competition Act 1980 or section 40(2), 54(2), 65(6), 72(2), 80(2), 132(2), 141(2) or 154(2) of, or paragraph 5(2) or 10(2) of Schedule 7 to, the Enterprise Act 2002 (powers to take remedial action following references to the Commission in connection with public bodies and certain other persons, mergers or market investigations) consists of or includes—

(a) conditions in licences granted by the owner of copyright in a work restricting the use of the work by the licensee or the right of the copyright owner to grant other licences; or

(b) a refusal of a copyright owner to grant licences on reasonable terms.

(1A) The powers conferred by Schedule 8 to the Enterprise Act 2002 include power to cancel or modify those conditions and, instead or in addition, to provide that licences in respect of the copyright shall be available as of right.

(2) The references to anything permitted by Schedule 8 to the Enterprise Act 2002 in section 12(5A) of the Competition Act 1980 and in sections 72(4)(a), 80(4)(a), 81(2)(a), 86(1), 154(4)(a), 155(3)(a) and 158(1) of, and paragraphs 5, 10 and 11 of Schedule 7 to, the Act of 2002 shall be construed accordingly."

(3) In section 144(3)—

(a) for "A Minister" there is substituted "The Secretary of State or (as the case may be) the Competition Commission";

(b) after "he" there is inserted "or it".'.

No. 392, in page 318, line 38, at end insert—

'(f) paragraph 8 (exemption from monopoly provisions) shall cease to have effect.'.

No. 393, in page 322, line 47, at end insert—

';

(ii) sub-paragraphs (7) and (7A) shall cease to have effect;

(da) after paragraph 4 there is inserted—

"Further provision about references under paragraph 4

4A (1) The following sections of Part 3 of the Enterprise Act 2002 shall apply, with the modifications mentioned in sub-paragraphs (2) and (3), for the purposes of references under paragraph 4 as they apply for the purposes of references under that Part—

(a) section 106 (attendance of witnesses and production of documents etc.);

(b) section 107 (enforcement of powers under section 106: general);

(c) section 108 (penalties);

(d) section 109 (penalties: main procedural requirements);

(e) section 110 (payments and interest by instalments);

(f) section 111 (appeals in relation to penalties);

(g) section 112 (recovery of penalties); and

(h) section 113 (statement of policy).

(2) Section 107 shall, in its application by virtue of sub-paragraph (1), have effect as if—

(a) subsection (2) were omitted; and

(b) in subsection (9) the words from "or section" to "section 64(3))" were omitted.

(3) Section 108(5)(b)(ii) shall, in its application by virtue of sub-paragraph (1), have effect as if for the words from "the latest" to the end there were substituted "the day on which the report of the Commission on the reference concerned is published.";

(db) in paragraph 5—

(i) for "Director" (in each place) there is substituted "OFT";

(ii) sub-paragraph (5) shall cease to have effect;

(iii) after sub-paragraph (5) there is inserted—

"(5A) For the purposes of paragraph 6, a conclusion contained in a report of the Competition Commission is to be disregarded if the conclusion is not that of at least two-thirds of the members of the group constituted in connection with the reference concerned in pursuance of paragraph 15 of Schedule 7 to the Competition Act 1998.

(5B) If a member of a group so constituted disagrees with any conclusions contained in a report made on a reference under paragraph 4 as the conclusions of the Competition Commission, the report shall, if the member so wishes, include a statement of his disagreement and of his reasons for disagreeing.

(5C) For the purposes of the law relating to defamation, absolute privilege attaches to any report made by the Competition Commission on a reference under paragraph 4.

(5D) In making any report on a reference under paragraph 4 the Competition Commission must have regard to the following considerations before disclosing any information.

(5E) The first consideration is the need to exclude from disclosure (so far as practicable) any information whose disclosure the Competition Commission thinks is contrary to the public interest.

(5F) The second consideration is the need to exclude from disclosure (so far as practicable)—

(a) commercial information whose disclosure the Competition Commission thinks might significantly harm the legitimate business interests of the undertaking to which it relates, or

(b) information relating to the private affairs of an individual whose disclosure the Competition Commission thinks might significantly harm the individual's interests.

(5G) The third consideration is the extent to which the disclosure of the information mentioned in sub-paragraph (5F)(a) or (b) is necessary for the purposes of the report.".'

No. 394, in page 323, line 1, leave out "paragraphs 5 and" and insert "paragraph".

No. 395, in page 323, leave out line 11 and insert—

'(iii) sub-paragraphs (3) and (4) shall cease to have effect;

(ga) after paragraph 8 there is inserted—

"Enforcement

8A (1) The court may, on an application by the OFT, enquire into whether any person ("the defaulter") has refused or otherwise failed, without reasonable excuse, to comply with a notice under paragraph 8(1).

(2) An application under sub-paragraph (1) shall include details of the possible failure which the OFT considers has occurred.

(3) In enquiring into a case under sub-paragraph (1), the court shall hear any witness who may be produced against or on behalf of the defaulter and any statement which may be offered in defence.

(4) Sub-paragraphs (5) and (6) apply where the court is satisfied, after hearing any witnesses and statements as mentioned in sub-paragraph (3), that the defaulter has refused or otherwise failed, without reasonable excuse, to comply with the notice under paragraph 8(1).

(5) The court may punish the defaulter as it would have been able to punish him had he been guilty of contempt of court.

(6) Where the defaulter is a body corporate, the court may punish any director or officer of the defaulter as it would have been able to punish that director or officer had the director or officer been guilty of contempt of court.

(7) In this section "the court"—

(a) in relation to England and Wales or Northern Ireland, means the High Court, and

(b) in relation to Scotland, means the Court of Session.

8B (1) A person commits an offence if he intentionally alters, suppresses or destroys a document which he has been required to produce by a notice under paragraph 8(1).

(2) A person who commits an offence under sub-paragraph (1) shall be liable—

(a) on summary conviction, to a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum;

(b) on conviction on indictment, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years or to a fine or to both.

False or misleading information

8C (1) A person commits an offence if—

(a) he supplies any information to the OFT or the Competition Commission in connection with any of their functions under this Schedule;

(b) the information is false or misleading in a material respect; and

(c) he knows that it is false or misleading in a material respect or is reckless as to whether it is false or misleading in a material respect.

(2) A person commits an offence if he—

(a) supplies any information to another person which he knows to be false or misleading in a material respect; or

(b) recklessly supplies any information to another person which is false or misleading in a material respect;

knowing that the information is to be used for the purpose of supplying information to the OFT or the Competition Commission in connection with any of their functions under this Schedule.

(3) A person who commits an offence under sub-paragraph (1) or (2) shall be liable—

(a) on summary conviction, to a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum;

(b) on conviction on indictment, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years or to a fine or to both.".'

No. 396, in page 325, line 16, at end insert—

'Osteopaths Act 1993 (c. 21)

25A (1) The Osteopaths Act 1993 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 33(2) (competition and anti-competitive practices)—

(a) for the words from the beginning to "orders)" there is substituted "Schedule 8 to the Enterprise Act 2002 (provision that may be contained in enforcement orders)";

(b) for "a competition" there is substituted "an enforcement".

(3) After section 33(2) there is inserted—

"(2A) The references to anything permitted by Schedule 8 to the Enterprise Act 2002 in sections 154(4)(a), 155(3)(a) and 158(1) of that Act shall be construed accordingly."

(4) In section 33(3), for "A competition" there is substituted "An enforcement".

(5) For section 33(4) there is substituted—

"(4) In this section "an enforcement order" means an order under—

(a) section 154 of the Enterprise Act 2002 (orders following failure to fulfil final undertakings); or

(b) section 155 of that Act (final orders following market investigation reports).".

(6) For section 33(5) there is substituted—

"(5) For the purposes of an enforcement order section 83(3) of the Enterprise Act 2002 as applied by section 158(2)(a) of that Act (power to apply orders to existing agreements) shall have effect in relation to a regulatory provision as it has effect in relation to an agreement."'.

No. 397, in page 325, line 19, after "Regulator)" insert "—

(a) in subsection (2)(a), the words from "in cases where" to "market" shall cease to have effect;

(b) '.

No. 398, in page 325, line 21, at end insert—

';

(c) subsection (8) shall cease to have effect.'.

No. 399, in page 326, line 17, at end insert—

'Chiropractors Act 1994 (c. 17)

26A (1) The Chiropractors Act 1994 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 33(2) (competition and anti-competitive practices)—

(a) for the words from the beginning to "orders)" there is substituted "Schedule 8 to the Enterprise Act 2002 (provision that may be contained in enforcement orders)";

(b) for "a competition" there is substituted "an enforcement".

(3) After section 33(2) there is inserted—

"(2A) The references to anything permitted by Schedule 8 to the Enterprise Act 2002 in sections 154(4)(a), 155(3)(a) and 158(1) of that Act shall be construed accordingly."

(4) In section 33(3), for "A competition" there is substituted "An enforcement".

(5) For section 33(4) there is substituted—

"(4) In this section "an enforcement order" means an order under—

(a) section 154 of the Enterprise Act 2002 (orders following failure to fulfil final undertakings); or

(b) section 155 of that Act (final orders following market investigation reports).".

(6) For section 33(5) there is substituted—

"(5) For the purposes of an enforcement order section 83(3) of the Enterprise Act 2002 as applied by section 158(2)(a) of that Act (power to apply orders to existing agreements) shall have effect in relation to a regulatory provision as it has effect in relation to an agreement."'.

No. 400, in page 327, line 20, leave out sub-paragraph (4).—*[Miss Melanie Johnson.]*

Schedule 26

REPEALS AND REVOCATIONS

Amendments made: No. 401, in page 338, line 20, at end insert—

'Registered Designs Act 1949 (c. 88)	In section 11A(1), paragraphs (a) and (b).'.

No. 402, in page 338, line 20, at end insert—

'Agricultural Marketing Act 1958 (c. 47)	In section 19A(2), the words from the beginning of the subsection to "this section".'.

No. 403, in page 339, line 19, in column 2 at end insert—

'Section 84'.

No. 404, in page 339, line 46, in column 2 at beginning insert—

'In section 51(1), paragraphs (a) and (b).'.

No. 405, in page 340, line 4, leave out ", (4) and (5)" and insert "and (4)".

No. 406, in page 340, line 14, in column 2 at beginning insert—

'In section 13, subsections (9) and (9A).'

No. 301, in page 340, line 31, in column 2 at beginning insert—

'In section 54,
subsection (3).'

No. 135, in page 341, line 46, after "In", insert "Schedule 29, in".

No. 136, in page 341, line 47, at end insert—

'Criminal Justice Act 1988 (c. 33)	Section 62(2)(a).'.

No. 407, in page 342, line 12, in column 2 at end insert—

'In Schedule 14, paragraph 8'.

No. 408, in page 342, line 19, after "4," insert—

', in paragraph 4, sub-paragraphs (7) and (7A), in paragraph 5, sub-paragraph (5), in paragraph 8, sub-paragraphs (3) and (4) and'.

No. 192, in page 342, line 47, leave out "and (2)" and insert "to (3)".

No. 409, in page 342, line 48, in column 2 at beginning insert—

'In section 4, in subsection (2)(a), the words from "in cases where" to "market", and subsection (8) .'

No. 193, in page 343, line 11, after "(1)" insert "and (2)".

No. 302, in page 343, line 21, in column 2 at beginning insert—

'In Article 45,
paragraph (3).'

No. 194, in page 343, line 26, after "(1)" insert "and (2)".

No. 137, in page 343, line 26, at end insert—

'Employment Rights Act 1996 (c. 18)	In sections 166(7)(a) and 183(3)(a), the words "or an administration order." Section 189(4).'.

No. 191, in page 344, line 16, after "2(1)(a)", insert ", (3)(a)".

No. 303, in page 344, leave out line 29.—

No. 138, in page 345, line 8, at end insert—

'Finance Act 2000 (c. 17)	In Schedule 7, paragraphs 2 and 3.'.

No. 139, in page 345, line 35, at end insert—

'Finance Act 2001 (c. 9)	In Schedule 5, paragraphs 17(1) and (2) and 18.'.

No. 381, in page 345, line 37, at end insert—

'Stop Now Orders (E.C. Directive) Regulations 2001 (S.I. 2001/1422)	The whole Regulations.'

—*[Miss Melanie Johnson.]*

Clause 272

COMMENCEMENT

Mr. Waterson: I beg to move amendment No. 91, in page 184, line 4, at end add—

'(2) Parts 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 of this Act shall not come into force before 1st March 2005'.

I shall speak briefly to the amendment. We discussed this in Committee but, given our slightly truncated debates last Thursday, I still think it is worth debating the amendment, which would ensure that parts 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 of the Bill, once enacted, do not come into force before 1 March 2005.

I am sure that it is rare to propose amendments to the commencement provisions in a Bill. However, we have received very strong lobbying from the CBI and other organisations which feel quite aggrieved, not unreasonably, that we are revisiting competition law only a very short time after the Competition Act 1998, which was described at the time as the state-of-the-art measure on competition, and an even shorter time after the Act came into effect. We believe that there is a symbolic importance in suggesting that there should be a moratorium before the new provisions on competition come into force.

I am sure that Members want to get on to Third Reading, so I will desist from going through all the provisions that are being proposed on competition matters. We had some debate on it last Thursday. However, this seems eccentric for two reasons—first, it will place extra burdens on business because companies will have to become au fait with these new competition provisions very soon after doing so in respect of the 1998 Act.

Secondly, it was clear from our deliberations in Committee that on certain key issues the regime in this country and the European Union would be moving in opposite directions. That is very unfortunate; there is no doubt that the European regime for competition is developing, and developing quite fast. Again, there seemed to us to be great sense in waiting to see how that regime, to which British companies are subject, developed before committing ourselves to further changes in competition law. That is the purpose of the amendment, and I commend it to the House.

Mr. Carmichael: I can probably beat the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) for brevity. I believe that

[Mr. Carmichael]

there is some force in what he says. I feel as if passing competition legislation is almost like buying a new computer—by the time everything is installed and all the games are up and running, it is obsolete and something better has come on the market. *[Interruption.]* Or, indeed, as my hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Dr. Pugh) says, it has crashed.

I am not convinced that the length of the delay envisaged in the amendment is desirable, but as I have said on a number of occasions in Committee, there is a good reason for having a period of mature reflection on the progress of the Competition Act, which is of two years' vintage only. Before the Bill comes into force in its entirety, it might be possible to commence introducing some of the provisions over a longer period of time.

Miss Johnson: In the interests of brevity, I will not go over all the reasons why we propose to have the Bill. Its provisions build on those of the 1998 Act. There is no real reason for delaying it, as the amendment proposes, until at least 1 March 2005. It would be unusual for the House to introduce legislation, support it and then suggest that it needs to be delayed for so long.

I set out the rationale for each of the reforms on Second Reading and in Committee. Merger and market reforms will depoliticise the process; they will improve the clarity of the framework for decisions and the predictability of the decisions made under it. The introduction of an offence for cartels will create a real deterrent against individuals who enter into cartels, and the effect will be fewer cartels. The civil regime introduced by the 1998 Act imposes civil fines on companies but it does not deter individuals in this way.

I do not believe that there are any grounds for delaying the introduction of this package of important reforms, and I urge the hon. Gentleman to withdraw the amendment.

Mr. Waterson: I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Order for Third Reading read.

7.57 pm

Miss Melanie Johnson: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I thank hon. Members for their valuable contributions to our debates on the Bill, not only on Report but on Second Reading and in Committee. The Bill is set to go on to the other place in even better shape, I believe, than it was on its introduction. That is due to the diligence that many Members of the House have demonstrated in scrutinising the Bill. I am particularly grateful for the constructive approach of Opposition Members to the Bill, their support for the majority of the measures and their determination to improve it.

Hon. Members have asked how much of a difference the proposals will make to people's lives in practice; they have sought reassurance that the Bill will not create new burdens on business and have asked whether sufficient resources will be available to back up the new powers in the Bill. I have sought to reassure them on these points throughout the passage of the Bill and will do so again this evening.

There remains a productivity gap with our key competitors—France, Germany and the United States. My Department's No. 1 public service agreement target is to tackle this productivity gap. The measures in the Bill will boost productivity through promoting stronger competition and an enterprise culture. They will make a real difference to people's lives. It is no wonder, then, that the Bill has wide support. The Federation of Small Businesses says:

> "We do not see anything controversial in these proposals and would urge all party support and speedy implementation through Parliament".

Sheila McKechnie of the Consumers Association said that the measures will

> "put an end to the billions lost to consumers each year from rogue traders".

Digby Jones of the CBI expressed support for the Bill "in the round" and said that

> "we value a very tough competitive regime because it will enhance productivity".

The Bill has also received support from leading competition experts such as Michael Porter and Irwin Stelzer, from the British Chambers of Commerce and other consumer organisations.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): If competition is so good, why are hon. Lady's Government delaying its introduction in the Post Office?

Miss Johnson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry recently made a statement on the Post Office and we are trying to ensure that the Post Office has a secure future. That is not a matter for the Bill, which does not need to deal directly with issues of enterprise and productivity in the Post Office, as they are being fully addressed elsewhere. Indeed, it could be said that insufficient action by the Conservative Government meant that the future of the Post Office was not what it would have been had the organisation been suitably released from the constrictions under which it worked at that time.

The result of our extensive consultation on the Bill is a measure that reforms existing regulatory frameworks for the better. For example, there will be better competition regulation. By removing from Ministers decisions on mergers and market investigations, we are removing a layer of regulation and streamlining the regime. We are ensuring that decisions are taken by competition experts, free from short-term political pressures. By ensuring that those decisions are taken on the basis of a competition test, rather than a public interest test, we are improving the clarity of the framework for decisions and the predictability of the decisions made under it.

Opposition Members have expressed concerns about the manner in which the Office of Fair Trading will investigate markets. The OFT threshold for making references will be no lower than at present. The OFT will naturally want to concentrate its resources on the most serious cases. It will certainly not be in the OFT's interests to refer markets for detailed investigation unless there is a reasonable prospect that the Competition Commission will make an adverse finding. That has not happened in the past, and I cannot envisage its happening in the future.

Some forms of anti-competitive behaviour, specifically hard-core cartels, are highly damaging to consumers and a major drain on the world economy. Those are serious economic crimes and that is why the Bill provides for a criminal offence with the possibility of a maximum five-year criminal sentence.

The Competition Act 1998 already provides civil fines against firms, as I said a moment ago. However, to prevent the formation of hard-core cartels, we need to create real deterrents for individuals. Cartels operate undercover and are notoriously difficult to detect. That is why we are providing for tough but appropriate and proportionate investigatory powers, with significant safeguards.

As well as benefiting from stronger competition, consumers will benefit from effective consumer protection. The stop now orders, introduced last year for certain aspects of consumer protection, were widely welcomed by consumer organisations. The Bill will extend that protection to other sectors—especially the service sector—where consumers' interests are harmed by traders not meeting their legal obligations. The new framework will work better for consumers and for business.

We have heard several calls for the Bill to include a general duty not to trade unfairly. I agree that businesses should trade fairly, but I am not convinced that enshrining a general principle of that kind in legislation is necessarily the best way forward. Policies must be founded on a robust evidence base to ensure that they are effective and necessary, do not place undue burdens on business and serve the purpose of protecting the consumer—the overriding reason for those aspects of the Bill. That is why I shall invite key stakeholders to a seminar to explore their concerns with me in more depth. In the light of that seminar, I shall assess the case for further action.

If we are to build a truly enterprising economy, we must ensure that our insolvency regime supports rather than stifles the development and growth of new businesses. The Bill will deliver that support while striking a balance between the interests of creditors, companies and the public.

In providing early discharge for those who have failed through no fault of their own and by introducing a more stringent regime for the rest, we are drawing a clear distinction between the culpable and the non-culpable. That is vital if we are to move away from our current one-size-fits-all approach to bankruptcy which is inappropriate and unfair.

On earlier occasions and, indeed, this evening, some hon. Members have said that bankruptcy will become an easy option. That is a cynical argument that has no basis in fact. Debtors who can pay should pay and will pay. Trustees will be entitled to realise the same assets and income as they do at present, and that is why we are introducing bankruptcy orders for protection against the most reckless and dishonest people. However, we also believe that the consequences of bankruptcy should reflect the circumstances of the case.

As well as encouraging individual enterprise, we want to ensure that companies facing financial difficulties do not go to the wall unnecessarily. That is why we are restricting the use of administrative receivership and creating a new streamlined administration procedure with a clearer purpose and clear time scales. The procedure will focus on company rescue and better returns for the company's creditors as a whole. We will also ensure that the interests of all creditors are taken into account.

The measures in the Bill are radical and bold, but based on careful consultation. We have developed them to strike the right balance and to reform the existing framework of regulation for the better—without creating additional regulations for business. We will provide the necessary resources to ensure that the measures are effective. Together, the package of reforms will make a real difference to this nation's prosperity and I commend the Bill to the House.

8.6 pm

Mr. Waterson: One might think that it was difficult to say anything new about the Bill by this stage, but I shall do my best—as the Minister and I prepare to stagger back to our respective corners to receive the ministrations of our managers.

We have been considering a long and detailed Bill: 274 clauses and 26 schedules. As I have said before, much of it is common ground. To call it an Enterprise Bill is puzzling, as it is a collection of different Bills—some of which contained sensible provisions—which have somehow become attached to one another. That makes it all the more surprising that the Government wanted to rush it through in such a hurry. I have already referred to the fact that we scarcely had time to draw breath between the coming into force of the Competition Act 1998 and the introduction of these new provisions and their effect on business.

Last Thursday, we managed to avoid any debate of cartels—which are, as the Minister explained, an important aspect of the measure—or market investigations, and there was precious little debate of mergers. That is extraordinary, because it is not as though there were massive party political differences on the entirety of the Bill, although there are some differences between us here and there which we have tried to bring to the fore. There has been relentless pressure to push the measure through. The point that I made on Thursday bears repetition: many people apart from ourselves will have to grapple with the complexities in the Bill when it becomes law.

I am still mystified that the Bill was not considered appropriate for pre-legislative scrutiny, as that would have created an opportunity to deal with many of the practical and technical objections that we have tried to raise in our role as the official Opposition. However, in fairness to the Government, several of our amendments were accepted and the Government have introduced some amendments based on our proposals.

I want to deal with some of the broad issues in the Bill. We welcome, of course, the formal recognition by statute of the ending of political interference by Ministers in decisions on takeovers and mergers. However, as I have explained previously, in theory, that should not make a vast difference to individual cases; since the Tebbit guidelines, Ministers have on the whole adopted that approach—a self-denying ordinance.

I hope that the provisions mean what they say, because the Government have fought like tigers to retain not only a provision about the public interest but also one that allows them to expand the definition of public interest by regulation. They assure us that they do not envisage

[Mr. Waterson]

circumstances in which they might do so, but let us hope that the House can hold a debate, which is as full as the rules allow, if and when the Government want to expand that definition.

I hope that shabby episodes of the sort that we debated on Thursday—the way in which the takeover of Express Newspapers Group by Mr. Desmond's companies was handled by the then Secretary of State—will be a thing of the past. There are still some major unanswered questions about that whole episode, not least about the precise criteria adopted by the then Secretary of State in making his decision on what the Office of Fair Trading called the non-competition issues. Fortunately, the Opposition are not alone in wishing to get to the bottom of those questions. A large and growing number of Labour Members would also like to know on what basis that decision was made and why it was followed only a few days later by a substantial donation to the Labour party.

Of course we welcome the strengthening of the competition regime, although we expressed our concerns in Committee about the apparent divergence between the new regime under the Bill and what is happening in the European Union. That will create extra problems for businesses, and it is completely at odds with this Government's attitude when the Competition Act 1998 was being debated. They then took the view that one should not be able to get a cigarette paper between what was happening in Europe and what was happening in this country. I wonder why.

The issue of criminalising cartels is great for a headline, but not much else. In Committee, we heard about the EU's express reservations about our moving in that direction if it is not doing so. There were concerns about how whistleblowers will be treated in practice and whether they will feel able to come forward if they know that criminal sanctions may await them. There were also concerns about the effect on investigations and, crucially, the effect on exchanging information between our regime and that in Europe or those in countries without express criminal sanctions.

We discussed those countries that very rarely used criminal sanctions even though they were on their statute books. It was interesting that our debate on that subject occurred precisely at the time of the result in the Sotheby's cartel trial. Mr. Alfred Taubman was sentenced to a period in Club Fed, whereas Sir Anthony Tennant will not be subject to criminal sanctions, let alone imprisonment, so long as he does not set foot in America.

In practice, will the directors of major companies be less willing to err or cross the line because criminal sanctions exist? Their existence does not seem to have affected Mr. Alfred Taubman in America, and they will not have the desired effect here. The proposal is a bit of gesture politics, but it will have a serious practical effect on the efficacy of investigations in this country.

We could have had a substantial debate on market investigations if we had had enough time last Thursday. The Government have failed to strike the balance between the need for proper investigations and the extra burdens to be placed on business by the various types of investigations that the OFT will be able to conduct with its new powers, functions and resources. The Government even resisted our modest amendment to place in the OFT's annual report an assessment of the cost to business of the investigations that it carried out in the preceding year.

Of course what really beggars belief is the fact that the regulatory impact assessment of the Bill itself concluded that there would be no effect on business if those provisions were placed on the statue book. I find that very difficult to believe, and have done throughout the proceedings on the Bill.

On consumer protection, we broadly welcome extending stop now orders, introducing super-complaints and the OFT's powers and functions, but we remain disappointed, as do many consumer organisations, that the Government have not been prepared to grasp the nettle of creating a general power to deal with the sort of scams, frauds and abuses that I described earlier today in the debate on those provisions. Despite the Bill's reaching the statute book, it is clear that many of those activities will continue unabated simply because the fraudsters are one step ahead of the law and the Government.

We debated the insolvency provisions at length today. Of course we welcome the abolition of Crown preference. That must be a practical and sensible step. We have significant reservations about the Government's attempts to remove or certainly to reduce the stigma of bankruptcy. It is absolutely impossible to understand how a genuine judgment can be made between culpable and non-culpable bankrupts. Not only do we believe that there is a third category of what I call pathological optimists, but the fact is that it will be very difficult to make those judgments, particularly as the period will be reduced to 12 months or less; as there will be no formal requirement on the official receiver to investigate all cases; and as the Insolvency Service's resources will be stretched to breaking point.

That would be bad enough with the existing number of bankruptcies, which has been steadily rising over the years, but we have predicted—the Government have not challenged this—that there will be a significant increase in the number of bankruptcies following the introduction of the provisions. In fact, we go further than that: there will be an explosion in the number of bankruptcies, as happened when similar measures were put into effect in the United States.

What blows out of the water any pretence that the Government have that the Bill is really about enterprise is the Minister's admission that she sees no theoretical reason to differentiate the length of the bankruptcy period for business and consumer bankrupts. She also made the separate assertion—it was perfectly open for her to do so—that it was difficult and impracticable to make that distinction. It will not be very long before the resources available to deal with the growing number of personal consumer bankruptcies in this country will become obviously inadequate.

The real problem with the Bill is that it has absolutely nothing whatever to do with enterprise, for we are debating it against a background of understandably deteriorating relations between the Government and industry and business. Britain is now 16th in the world competitiveness league tables. Ernst and Young's latest report shows that 52 per cent. of those asked—the sort of entrepreneurs to whom the Government like to feel they are close—thought that the Government gave low priority to entrepreneurship, and a staggering 1 per cent. thought that they gave it high priority. Even if the Government do not understand what they are trying to do, business men and women do.

The Minister quoted the Federation of Small Businesses, but it also had this to say:

> "All the welcome measures have been undone by the increase in National Insurance. For three million self-employed workers, it will mean increases in tax . . . it is a tragedy that the Chancellor has decided that the self-employed will also pay higher National Insurance Contributions".

The Independent—not exactly a sub-department of central office—said this about the Bill:

> "these are largely candy floss measures which fail to address the main problem facing Britain's enterprise economy—namely the growing burden of regulation, especially as it concerns the labour force . . . the Government's pro-business agenda is at odds with its social objectives, for business will always do best if the Government simply gets out of its way."

However, the Government simply and fundamentally fail to understand how business and entrepreneurial activity work. They simply do not understand. When we come right down to it, it is difficult to disagree with the CBI's judgment that the Bill's title is something of a misnomer.

8.19 pm

Mr. Carmichael: It is an unexpected pleasure for me to address the House on Third Reading and from this position in the Chamber. Hon. Members will be aware that my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) usually leads for the Liberal Democrat party on such occasions. Unfortunately, he has been on unavoidable business elsewhere today, and I suspect that he has been caught out by our alacrity and great progress in finishing our debates on Report as early as we did.

If my short speech in this debate is punctuated by a series of dull thuds, I can probably account for that by saying that it is the sound of senior members of the leader's office and the Whips Office throwing themselves out of high windows when they see my name on the monitor at this stage in the proceedings. What I am about to say may or may not be party policy; I merely ask Members not to assume that I say it simply because of where I am standing. The absence of my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham has given me my big chance, however, which I shall take with all the skill and precision of an Irish footballer taking a penalty—*[Laughter.]* As a Scotsman, I feel that I am one of the few people in the Chamber in a position to make fun of anybody else's soccer skills.

On Second Reading, the Liberal Democrats' position was that we agreed with much of the philosophy behind the Bill, and we recognised the contribution that the principles of competition could make to the development of a culture of entrepreneurship. That was our approach throughout the Committee stage and on Report. As is the case with all parties, we will not be forcing a Division on the Bill. We wish it good progress in another place.

This is the second Bill on which I have served in Standing Committee since I came to the House last year. Again, I was impressed at the manner in which the issues raised were dealt with. I pay particular tribute to the Under-Secretary and her colleague, the then Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness, who has been made Minister of State, Cabinet Office in the meantime. I also pay tribute, despite our occasional differences, to the contribution made to the debate by the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson), who was always well briefed and put his points with force and eloquence, and to my absent hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham.

My view of this Enterprise Bill—I wonder whether it might please the hon. Member for Eastbourne were a small amendment made to its title at a later stage, as I suspect that it would save us all a lot of grief—is that it is all right as far as it goes. The Government's approach to competition as presented in the Bill, however, lacks a little imagination. It seems to be driven by a conventional and—dare I say it?—conservative view of competition and what it can achieve. As we have tried to suggest in Committee and on the Floor of the House, it seems that it will not allow sufficiently for concerns to be addressed in relation to local monopolies, for example.

It also seems that the Labour party has a remarkable ideological commitment to competition as a tool of economic management, about which I am surprised and disappointed, as it is a one-size-fits-all approach. There are parts of the country, one of which I represent, where competition alone will not be enough. There is still a role for the Government in economic management. Clearly, they will not have the primary role, but were Governments simply to say, "That is a matter for the market to take care of, and we are not going to deal with it", that would be an abdication of part of the responsibility that voters feel that they entrust to us. The more we abdicate our responsibilities, the more disengaged we will become from our electorate.

I was disappointed that the amendments tabled by the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes)—who, I am pleased to see, is now in his place—were not given a fairer wind. I was pleased that Liberal Democrats were able to support them. On Thursday last week, my hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Dr. Pugh) suggested that the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire was trying to smuggle in social revolution by the back door. It is difficult to see the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire, who is one of the most thoughtful and, at least in his delivery, gentle Members of the House, cast in the role of the foot-in-the-door salesmen whom we were so deprecating earlier today. If he was seeking to use the Bill as a tool for social change however, more power to his elbow. My hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham made the point that the need for accountability underpinned his amendments; it is all very well for Government to use competition as they do but, at the end of the day, there must still be political input. The amendment seeking to introduce the public interest to the considerations underpinning the Bill would have been a useful reinstatement of that accountability. The Bill is the poorer for not having it.

The right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) offered earlier the example of Consignia and the Post Office. Why, he asked, if the Government are in favour of competition, are they delaying its introduction in the Post Office? I would hope that the answer to that is obvious to all Members of the House. It would be an absolute disaster if unlimited competition were introduced to the Post Office. The universal service obligation would disappear like snow off a dike. That ideologically driven approach to competition, which accepts no role for the state, is very dangerous.

Mr. Redwood: Does the hon. Gentleman not know that the introduction of competition to postal services is a

[Mr. Redwood]

requirement under European law, and a very good European policy? Is he saying that he is not a good European? What will he do about the fact that he is at variance with a decision already taken by the European Union?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind all hon. Members that, on Third Reading, we should be discussing the content of this Bill.

Mr. Carmichael: Indeed, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is for others to decide whether I am a good European. I merely point out to the right hon. Member for Wokingham that he poses a different question, because the European proposals for postal services liberalisation operate to a different time scale, and he was asking why the Government were delaying it. It is therefore not the same point.

Unfortunately, we did not discuss the operation of cartels on Report. I am comfortable in principle with the criminalisation of cartels. I have severe reservations, however, about the practical aspects of their prosecution. Were I still in practice as a solicitor, I would much prefer to defend a client on a charge under the cartel offence provisions than to try to gain a prosecution.

I regret that we were not able to make more progress today in relation to the protection of consumers. I welcome, as far as it goes, the Under-Secretary's commitment to a seminar on this issue. I hope that it will produce some inspiration for her, as I feel that that has been slightly lacking.

The amendments tabled by the hon. Member for Eastbourne, although he slightly undersold them, sought to introduce a system based on certain principles. I suggested to him that the great attraction of such a system was that principles are there for application by the court, and that they can be interpreted to defeat new forms of the old evil or mischief. His response was that, as long as that was consistent with current law, that was fine. In Scotland, of course, which has a principle-based system, that is entirely consistent with our current law. Had we never departed from the true principles of Roman law that underpin Scots law, I suspect that we might not be in the mess that we are in today.

In Committee and on Report, the Government made several concessions which I welcome. One of my constant refrains in Committee was that not sufficient account had been taken of what is, in many respects, a distinctly Scottish position. It remains my impression that the Scottish position has simply fallen off the radar screen for a number of Whitehall Departments since devolution. In many respects, the Bill forcefully illustrates the need for that to change.

A great many reserve powers remain at Westminster and they will have a direct impact on Scots law. To that extent, I am grateful for the help that I have had in the deliberations on the Bill from members of the Law Society of Scotland and the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Scotland. I place my gratitude to them on the record. However, if future Bills of this sort do not take on board the Scottish position at an earlier stage, that will be very dangerous for the Union.

Although good progress has been made, a lot more could be done. I shall watch the Bill's further progress in the other place with interest, but I am more than pleased to give it the good wishes of the Liberal Democrats as it leaves the House tonight.

8.31 pm

Mr. Redwood: I have declared my interests in the register.

I welcome the Government's conversion to the idea that competition is a good thing, but my worry is that the Bill is exceedingly schizophrenic. Provisions in it rightly say that competition is the way to produce lower prices, more choice, better innovation and better standards of service; the Bill also says that, wherever possible, we need to find better ways of enforcing that competition message. I entirely agree. However, when we look at the Government's practice in the sectors that they regulate, control and own, we see that they practise the opposite of what they preach. If the Bill becomes an Act, it will allow them to carry on merrily in their bad old ways. It will be a question of "do as I tell you, not as I do".

The Bill will tell the competitive private sector that it needs to be even more virtuous in believing in the benefits of competition, and it will impose even stronger penalties on any director or business person who does not behave and does not understand the need to avoid price rigging, monopoly practice and damaging activities vis-à-vis the market. Yet the Government, in their policies towards regulated businesses, will often move in exactly the opposite direction. The Bill, if passed in its current shape, will allow them to carry on doing just that.

As a former Minister with responsibility for competition, I very well remember attempting to enforce the Tebbit doctrine on the private sector on behalf of the then Secretary of State. I attempted to liberalise and open up those parts of the public and regulated monopoly sectors that needed liberalising, to start to spread some of the benefits of competition to those sectors. For example, we liberalised telecommunications and the results were astonishingly good. I am pleased that the Government do not wish to reverse that. We have much more service, innovation, capacity and choice, and much lower prices, as a result of the liberalisation of telecommunications. Why are the Government therefore unwilling to learn those lessons when it comes to sectors such as the railways, the provision of road space or postal services? If anything, it seems that they are trying to move in the opposite direction.

When I was the Minister responsible for competition, I accepted fully that it was my duty and that of the Secretary of State to come to the House when necessary to explain our activities. I saw nothing wrong with that. However, I have worries about the Bill if the Government are to use the creation of an independent Competition Commission as an excuse to avoid coming to the House to talk about the most sensitive and important business issues that might come up.

I hope that Ministers will recognise that, even if they have delegated more of their authority and power through the Bill to more independent bodies, they will still feel that they have to explain to the House of Commons if things go wrong or are contentious, or if people on either side of the House feel that the decisions taken by that independent body are not right, just, fair or in the wider national interest. It is most important in a democratic society that still pays salaries to many people in the Department of Trade and Industry that we should have the right of access to Ministers even if, under the Bill, some of their activities will be delegated.

I remember that there were occasions when Conservative Members, let alone the then Opposition, rightly wanted to expose to scrutiny and debate the decisions that I and the then Secretary of State had taken in rather tricky merger cases. We had deliberately applied the Tebbit doctrine and tried to provide a fair and sensible regime. However, on occasion, the results seemed perverse to people with constituency interests, with worries about jobs or with other public considerations. It was therefore our duty to come to the House to explain why we had come to the view that we had taken. I hope that we shall still have access to Ministers when difficult decisions are taken under the new regime.

When I was able to work through and with the then Government to liberalise things, it was my experience that liberalisation always yielded much better results. That is why I find the present Government's schizophrenia as regards competition surprising and worrying. For example, transport is covered by the regulation provisions of the Bill, but the Government take a divergent approach to different parts of that sector.

The Government are proud of following a strongly pro-competitive approach to air travel services. They promote more competitive airlines, they welcome ever cheaper fares and the additional services offered by low-cost airlines, and they are vigilant about ensuring that the major players do not have an unreasonable advantage. If they do, the Government may even intervene to move against those who they think have an unreasonable advantage, so as to open up the market to a wider number of players. I fully welcome that. It has brought visible benefits and means that many people can go to exotic destinations to which they could not have afforded to travel 10 or 15 years ago. An explosion in jobs, success and prosperity has followed on the back of that obviously competitive market working well, with the encouragement of Her Majesty's Government.

Why then is the railway industry treated so differently that the Government want to take away the rather modest elements of competition that the previous Government introduced? The Government do not appear to want to strengthen them and take them further in the way they wish to in other sectors. Why do they want only one train operating company to go into each London terminus? Given the strong statements in the Bill about the advantages of competition, it will be a great pity if and when the Government decide to use the obvious windows in the regulated provisions to allow a restriction of the competition and choice going into each major London terminus. For reasons that we do not understand, they think that that is better for this industry, even though it demonstrably does not work in any other industry where monopoly or cartel has been allowed. Their approach is clearly against the spirit of the general thrust of the Bill.

Why are there no worries about the monopoly over the railway network—Railtrack itself—when the Government support the opening of other networks and encourage competitive challenges to them in much more interesting ways? Why do the Government seem not even to be keen to encourage proper competition for proposals to replace Railtrack in administration with something rather better? They have come up with the monopoly solution that Railtrack should become a company limited by guarantee, a vehicle not before attempted on such a scale for anything so heroic without first encouraging proper debate and proper canvassing of the marketplace to determine what alternative options might produce a better result under a more competitive challenge. Why do the Government fully support a monopoly canal system entirely under their control? Have they not noticed that that system has continued to decline, with its high prices and inability to attract any commercial use of the assets? Things might be different under a competitive challenge in the private sector.

In the case of road transport, why are the Government keen on promoting ever more competition for the provision of road vehicles? Although I welcome that—it is producing phenomenal choice and lower prices—when it comes to the provision of road capacity, we have to face a solemn public monopoly that never builds any roads. Indeed, it seems to be proud of the fact that there are not enough roads and then blames the people who want to use them for the fact that the roads are so awful. The Government go even further by encouraging a reduction in road space from the limited amount that is available by a stunning array of road works, impediments, chicanes, blocks, humps and traffic lights that ensure people cannot use the network properly.

When I challenged the Minister on postal competition, she said she could not understand what it had to do with either the fundamental purpose of her Department, as she called it, of improving British productivity, or the Bill, but it is central to both issues. Postal competition is clearly governed by the Bill because it has to exempt restricted competition areas, such as post or road supply, thus showing that the Government clearly want to exempt themselves from the competition that they urge on everyone else.

The Minister should also understand that getting more competitive postal services or, for that matter, a much better road and rail system, is fundamental to raising British output and productivity. Does she not understand that some of the main problems holding Britain back from achieving even higher levels of prosperity, productivity and commercial success are the services that are delivered as monopolies by the state in the public sector? What are we worst at? Roads and railway lines, and they were provided by the state for most of the last century. Railway lines are even going to be provided badly again by the state through the administration and then the back-door renationalisation of the company limited by guarantee—technically a private sector company, but I am sure a pensioner of the state in all but name.

The Government are finding it difficult to provide health services as a centralised planned monopoly, however much money they tip in. There is a shortage of supply and people are not happy with the service. We notice that the Government have considerable difficulties in supplying a high-quality education service to the standards everyone would like, because once again they wish to frustrate choice. They do not want parents to have a real choice of school and are not prepared to expand the more popular schools so that they can give places to the children of parents who seek them.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): Does the right hon. Gentleman advocate dismantling the national health service?

Mr. Redwood: No. I have set out my views on the NHS at considerable length in print and the hon. Gentleman is welcome to read them. I suspect that I would be out of order if I wandered too far into the bigger health debate under the pretext of the Third Reading of this Bill. My point is that people are not offered a choice in those great public services, which are either removed from the Bill or, in the case of the regulated monopolies and regulated public enterprises, are covered by it but differently from anything else in the private competitive enterprise sector.

The aim of the Department of Trade and Industry—raising productivity and getting us up to the standards of the best in the world—is thoroughly laudable. I also agree that the prime method of sharpening competition even further, as recommended in the Bill, is the natural way to bring that about, because it will happen by the activities of people competing in the marketplace. However, the Government must think again on those parts of the economy that are Government owned, Government monopolies, or regulated in a way that makes them into cartels.

The Government should tell the House why they are deliberately trying to limit competition in the railways, where it is only just beginning to emerge, by reducing the number of companies offering services. They must tell us why they are not prepared to try out competition in a range of other public sector areas. They must also tell us why the areas in Britain that are furthest behind our foreign competitors are practically all in services and goods that are supplied by the public sector, usually through a monopoly, a cartel or a heavily hedged-about operation in which the Government are directly involved.

It is well known that the Government are the biggest monopoly in the country and that the Chancellor of the Exchequer is the biggest exploiter of monopoly in the country through his phenomenal powers to tax, with occasional support from people in this House. He is certainly not shy about proving beyond doubt that monopolies with too much power always overcharge and always deliver a lousy service for the money that they charge. We have seen that in the huge increase in taxation and the lack of improvement in public services.

We should also note—this is entirely relevant to the Bill—that in the most crucial ways of improving our productivity and business success, such as our transport and postal services, the Government do not practise what they preach: far from it. Instead, they are moving in the wrong direction by going towards monopoly cartel and protection and further away from the competitive model, which would produce better results.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. I am sorry to interrupt the right hon. Gentleman. I have allowed him a little scope, but I must remind him that on Third Reading we should be discussing the contents of the Bill, and he is tending to make remarks that would have been more suitable for Second Reading.

Mr. Redwood: I am very grateful for your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I welcome the Bill's thrust towards more competition in the private sector, but I do not like the possibility that Ministers will use the Bill as an excuse to evade proper accountability to the House on difficult business issues. I certainly do not like the different treatment for the regulated businesses, because I believe that the Government will use that route to develop their public enterprises in a less competitive direction, which will be deeply damaging to overall productivity and to the success of the freely traded competitive sector, which in turn has to rely on many of those crucial public enterprises. For that reason, I do not welcome the Bill. It comes too fast on the heels of the Competition Act 1998.

The Bill seems to avoid the obvious point made by my Front-Bench colleagues, which is that we are, for these purposes, a vassal state. We are primarily under a European competition regime, which has been considerably strengthened in recent years. It is therefore strange to see the Government wandering further away from the European regime in this Bill, so shortly after the passage of the 1998 Act, when we were told that it was crucial to follow that regime in every twist and turn and that that was the sole purpose of the Act. Indeed, we were told that so perfectly had the Act mimicked the European system that we were in sync, and Europe would take most of the big decisions.

Apparently, that is not so. That shows that old Labour is beginning to come back, and it wants certain regulatory and monopoly activities to move in the other direction.

David Winnick: I would hope so.

Mr. Redwood: I am pleased to see that there are hon. Members present, representing old Labour, who know that they are on a roll. This Parliament is much more interesting because there are lively Back Benchers behind what was new Labour and is now rather tired-looking old Labour. It is now having to recognise that there are many people in the party who want to go in a rather different direction from the punk-Thatcherism that is sometimes sketched out by the right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) and others.

I cannot say that I welcome the Bill. It is bizarre because it does not recognise European realities; it is dangerous because of the way in which it treats regulated monopolies. Let us hope that it at least increases competition in what remains of the free trading sector, because that would be a modest advance.

8.47 pm

Mr. Mark Field: It is a great pleasure to follow my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), who took what I hope he will forgive me for describing as a broad-brush approach to many of the issues.

One of the difficulties of having been in Committee and having gone through the mill on the Bill, as I have with several other hon. Members present, is that sometimes one cannot see the wood for the trees. I certainly do not think that my right hon. Friend could be accused of that. He made valid points about a range of competition issues, not least on the clear dichotomy between public sector and private sector competition. As he pointed out, it is clear that the Bill has several intentions that many Conservative Members would support as they affect competition in the private sector, but it is a shame that they have not been replicated for our public sector monopolies. I also share a number of the concerns expressed about accountability, and I shall turn to those in a moment.

Many of the Bill's provisions are positive reforms that will receive support from the Conservative party, and I understand that we will not be voting against Third Reading. However, it seems that it will have little effect on the British enterprise culture as long as the Government continue their policies of high tax and over-regulation. The Government seem to think that they can pick winners. An example is their help for the small business sector. I accept that they have been positive about entrepreneurialism, particularly in the capital gains tax regime that they have put into place over the past four or five years. However, the main effect of the policies, as we have seen from the Finance Bill, which is currently in Committee, is to encourage expensive avoidance measures and complicate the entire commercial framework.

Returning to competition, the Government are proposing ferocious new criminal powers. Those were brought into being under the Competition Act—even though it became an Act in 1998, many of its provisions came into effect only 18 months or two years ago. The Government's approach appears to be confused, but the penalties are draconian. Perhaps, as we have argued both today and in Committee, there should be a more meaningful assessment of the impact of the 1998 Act before we go though another set of wholesale changes.

My view is that the super-complaints procedure epitomises some of the worst aspects of what we might suffer in coming years. I am not convinced that Ministers will not utilise the spurious elements of consumer protection to undermine business certainty and add to commercial costs. When he was Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, the right hon. Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers) conducted a misguided and cynical campaign against supermarkets as part of the "Rip-off Britain" campaign in 1999. I am glad that that has been put to one side.

One of the concerns expressed about many of the competition and Office of Fair Trading aspects of the Bill is that there will be insufficient accountability in the House. I have made it clear that I have some sympathy with the idea that certain competition decisions should have a political element, although I know that that view is no longer in vogue on either the Opposition or the Government Front Bench. It strikes me as invidious that decisions might all too often be made behind closed doors, with Ministers making representations away from Parliament, with the consumer none the wiser and no better off.

On bankruptcy, especially individual bankruptcy, there have been several debates on the way in which the Government seek to remove the stigma of bankruptcy. There are real dangers in their approach—dangers that we have articulated repeatedly. One need only look at the United States experience in the past decade or so of consumer-led bankruptcies. My main concern is not merely that the Bill will adversely affect a range of lending institutions, but that smaller businesses, which will be the main creditors in such cases, are the most likely to suffer from the relaxation of the personal bankruptcy rules. We fear that in the next few years we will receive significant representations from the very small businesses that are supposed to benefit from the Bill, but that are the worst to suffer from aspects of its insolvency provisions.

When the Government introduced the Bill, they referred to a regulatory impact assessment. With a wry smile, one reads that, in terms of the impact on businesses, the overall costs arising from the competition and consumer reforms would be neutral, and that the insolvency reforms and proposals on the employment of insolvency practitioners would have only a minor impact on business. One has to be somewhat cynical about the assertion that business will pay nothing directly.

We were told that there would be costs for Government—both sides of the House were approving of the fact that £70 million to £100 million a year was likely to be lost from the Government purse because of the changes to the Crown preference rules. We broadly support those changes, despite the concerns articulated by hon. Members on both sides about the fact that many small businesses find that the Government, in the form of the Inland Revenue or Customs and Excise, are often able to take a moderate view of debts built up when a business encounters difficulties during the early years of its existence, whereas the ending of Crown preference might mean that those institutions now try to get their money sooner, not later, rather than risk losing out entirely if bankruptcy results.

Apparently, the Bill will impose no costs on consumers. However, if our worst fears are realised and businesses have additional costs, undoubtedly consumers will suffer, because businesses will to a large extent pass on those costs to consumers where they can. We will have to wait to see the longer-term overall costs and benefits. I think I speak for many Opposition Members in saying that I support a number of provisions in the Bill which, however, is not simply an enterprise Bill, but an enterprise and regulation Bill. In the context of enterprise, we must ensure that we have proper scrutiny in the House of competition policy, which is inevitably political with a small "p" and always controversial. However, I hope that the Minister will reflect on the matter tonight, when the Bill becomes an Act, and as business develops in different ways in future. I wish the Minister godspeed in getting the legislation onto the statute book; I hope that she retains an open mind about the things that we have discussed tonight which we will no doubt continue to discuss both when statutory instruments are introduced and on the Floor of the House in the months and years ahead.

8.55 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): I wish to make two small points. First, I thank the Liberal Democrat spokesman—a temporary spokesman on this issue—for his kind remarks, which I shall spread across north Derbyshire so that people will be aware that there is at least some appreciation of the matters that I sought to propound on Thursday. Secondly, I wish to pick up a point made by the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) which he also made in Committee. He talked about pathological optimists, a phrase that I shall use in a different context.

I am still trying to appeal to the Government to take into account public interest considerations and perhaps I am a pathological optimist to believe that they will

[Mr. Harry Barnes]

introduce such measures in the Lords. However, strong representations have been made which have been only partly heard in the Chamber. The TUC and major trade unions are greatly concerned about the withdrawal of public interest considerations which, indeed, they want to expand. Instead of being enabling measures, as they were in the Fair Trading Act 1973, they should be matters which we should be obliged to instigate and act upon. The least that we can do is to try to hold on to what was introduced under the Heath Government in 1973. It seems that new Labour will not go beyond that stage, but as it becomes more mature, I hope that it will take into account the points that I have made. However, I am sorry that the Government have lost interest in the public interest.

8.58 pm

Mr. McWalter: I want to say something about a defining characteristic of the Bill. A lot of people complain that the Bill is not quite there and say that things are missing from it. For example, it does not include anything to contradict the assertion of the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) that we are introducing a Tebbit doctrine for the unalloyed operation of competition as an economic force. One of the great strengths of the Bill is its provisions on anti-competitive practices, including stop now orders and the attempt to try to produce a culture in which people challenge an existing business regime to develop new enterprises that produce services and goods in new ways. It is a jewel within a crown, as it were—*[Interruption.]* No doubt, this is a popular analogy in jubilee year. The crown itself is the raft of policies that the Government are introducing, not to produce Tebbitised competition, but to produce fair competition.

I think that that is tremendously important, because fair competition is not achieved only by introducing a measure such as the Bill. Among other things, it is achieved by bearing down on enterprises that cheat. That is the case whether they cheat their customers—there is a strong desire to ensure that consumer law is amplified and improved—or whether they cheat the environment, by polluting it, or their workers, by underpaying them. The Government have introduced legislation to try to ensure that companies cannot cheat their workers too much. They cannot do so, for example, in respect of the minimum wage and the right to be recognised by a trade union. The effect is to create an environment that makes competition between companies fairer than it would ever have been under a Tebbitised doctrine. So the first thing that the Bill does is contribute to an environment in which entrepreneurial activity is given a genuine boost, and that is how it should be read.

The second issue is what the Bill does not do, in terms of the contribution of the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood): it does not propose in a Tebbit or Redwood way that competition is the answer to every economic puzzle. It manifestly is not the answer. For example, to cite the recent report of the Select Committee on Science and Technology, of which I happen to be a member, it is clear that to establish wave and tidal power systems that achieve non-carboniferous energy generation, there may be a need for a time scale of, say, 50 years, and an investment plan far exceeding anything that the normal market would be willing to produce and develop. That is a role for Government as assuredly as the delivery of health services to people who are poverty stricken is a function for Government.

Let us be clear: the Bill is saying not that every economic problem has a competitive answer, but that where competitive elements are possible, they should be fostered, encouraged and nourished. For instance, if the Government start along the path of major long-term investment in wave and tidal power, and start to issue many subcontracts as part of that grand scheme, it would be utterly inappropriate for them to try to cosset and keep to themselves all those contracts and all that activity, ingenuity and capital. It would be absolutely right for them to try to find partners, in whatever sector, and whether that involved other countries, companies and so on, to bring forward such a project as effectively as possible.

The Bill does not do what some hon. Members—they include the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland, in his way, and some Labour Members—have suggested, and propose an agreement with my right hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson), who said that we are all Thatcherites now. If the Bill is read as a component of a strategy for fostering business and enterprise, but one that does that in a way that maximises social responsibility and uses appropriate economic instruments for the multifarious economic problems with which this country and its people are faced, I believe that it should be very much welcomed by all hon. Members.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

FEES AND CHARGES

That the draft Consular Fees Act 1980 (Fees) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 13th May, be approved.—*[Mr. Jim Murphy.]*

Question agreed to.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Wednesday 19th June, the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of Mr. Robin Cook relating to House of Lords Reform (Joint Committee) not later than three hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Motion; such Questions shall include the Questions on any Amendments selected by the Speaker which [illegible] be moved; the Questions may be decided, though opposed, after [illegible] expiration of the time for opposed business and the Order of 28th [illegible]001 relating to deferred Divisions shall not apply to them.—*[Mr. Jim [illegible]urphy.]*

House of Lords Reform

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Jim Murphy.]*

9.5 pm

Mr. Eric Joyce (Falkirk, West): One of the more enduring legacies among many that the Government will pass on to future generations will be their constitutional reform programme, which has achieved a great deal to date and is an evolving process that continues apace. The Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly and the Northern Ireland Assembly have been considerable successes in their own way. There have been significant teething difficulties in some respects, but by and large the great majority of people who live in those parts of the United Kingdom believe them to be considerable successes. The roll-out of regional democracy looks set to continue in England, both through new mayoral elections and the introduction, I hope, of regional assemblies.

At a different level of government, there is a need to reform the House of Lords, and that, too, is moving ahead apace. I want to stress why House of Lords reform must take place in a way that is complementary to, not competitive with, the roll-out of regional assemblies and subsidiarity across the United Kingdom. A couple of months ago, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House took part in a conference in London on that subject organised by the Scottish Forum for Modern Government. The matter has been the subject of some discussion, but I want to air one or two points that I fear otherwise might not see the light of day.

The first of those points is timing. Notwithstanding the work of the Joint Committee of both Houses that will be formed this week, we seem to be moving towards a timetable for Lords reform that suggests that the new-look Chamber could be in place at the time of the next general election, if not before. That would mean a Bill passing through this House in 2003 or 2004. If it is decided that the second Chamber should have a directly elected element of as much as 50 per cent., and assuming that the Lords Chamber is around the same size as this one, about 300 newly elected Members of the Lords would take their seats following an election in 2005 or 2006. That timetable would run virtually concurrently with the roll-out of regional assemblies, where regions chose to have them. It could therefore reasonably be assumed that the two processes would influence each other—positively or negatively, depending on how they are carried out.

It is important to bear in mind the fact that the level of representation on putative regional assemblies, if they were to operate at about the same level as the Greater London Assembly, could be lower than the level that each region would provide to a reformed House of Lords through elected Members under a 50 per cent. election plan. It can be predicted that some political and media interests will campaign for a no vote, presenting new political jobs as a jamboree for the regional political classes. In view of that, there is a fairly strong risk that the creation of 30 or 40 new political jobs in each region will have a seriously detrimental effect on the results of referendums on regional assemblies that would probably be taking place at around the same time.

It is worth considering two points in more detail. It is likely that payments for new, elected Members of the Lords will be lower than for full-time Members of Parliament. The Government and the Public Administration Committee have presented arguments on that. However reimbursement, remuneration or payment is structured, it will probably be more attractive than that for a councillor. It may even compete with being a member of a regional assembly when and if assemblies are established in different parts of the country.

The Public Administration Committee suggested that, in view of greater journey times and distances and the possible higher administrative costs of travelling from Scotland or the north-east, the total package for a Scottish Member of the second Chamber could exceed £30,000. I believe that the figure would be more, given that flights would cost approximately £10,000 for a weekly attender.

It will be hard to argue that the new appointments are meaningful and valuable but to pay a daily rate that is substantially lower than that of non-departmental public bodies. That problem must be solved. The Senior Salaries Review Body would probably recommend a sum that approached that offered by non-departmental public bodies: perhaps £200 or £300 a day. Perhaps the figure would be half that, but it would still be significant.

Regardless of the rate and the costs of the current system, the fact that £1 million per annum or more has been committed to a new layer of regional party politicians would make winning a referendum on a new regional assembly harder work than it would otherwise be. That is possibly a fatal blow to assemblies, for which polling suggests a tight result. The problem would be exacerbated by the almost inevitable compensation that would have to be paid to current life peers who would have to leave the Chamber to keep the numbers manageable under a plan to elect 50 per cent. or more. I presume that the public would prefer that money to be spent on public services such as health and education.

I have not heard the second point that I want to stress in a debate on reforming the Lords until now. It is the function of the other Chamber. I have read the Government's comments and those of the Public Administration Committee. I have also read previous debates. Perhaps hon. Members will make similar comments later about clearly defining powers. One could say that the other Chamber is primarily for revision and scrutiny. That is all very well, but unintended and unforeseen consequences may ensue from immediately having a substantially elected element of new Members of another Chamber. I want to illustrate that through my experience and that of my colleagues in the context of otherwise successful devolution in Scotland.

Some list Members of the Scottish Parliament have taken on roles as shadow constituency MSPs in ways that people did not foresee when the Scotland Act 1998 was passed. I suspect that some of the same practices would operate in a Lords or a senate, or whatever the second Chamber happened to be called. I believe that many practices would be imported. Let me refer to a couple that happen regularly in Scotland and perhaps in Wales and Northern Ireland.

In Scotland, a d'Hondt system was used to provide proportionality in the legislature. Hon. Members were elected through that system to provide fairness when passing legislation; they did not have a constituency role. Indeed, many who were elected as list Members stood unsuccessfully for constituencies. In almost all cases, list MSPs have set themselves up as shadow constituency

[Mr. Eric Joyce]

MSPs. When I conduct my weekly surgeries, I see posters for "your local MSP". They do not refer to the local constituency MSP, but the list MSP who is working the patch. Indeed, Opposition list Members divide up each region according to their own party's political interests and work that patch. I suspect that that activity was not foreseen, and it could easily be replicated by a substantially elected membership of the other place, if such there were to be.

People sometimes say to me that there would be a limit to what people could do if they were elected to the other Chamber, because they would have a clearly delineated function, and if they stepped outside that they would be slapped down. In fact, it is not as simple as that. For example, I have a large Child Support Agency office in my constituency, which looks after the north and Scotland. I recently paid a visit to the parliamentary questions section of the agency, and was told that quite a high proportion of the work that is referred to it came from MPs. I said, "Surely it is all referred by MPs, as it is a reserved area", but I discovered that that is not the case. MSPs can put in cases to the CSA and are treated in the same way as MPs. I presume that there is a good reason for that, and that it has something to do with the fact that a CSA case will often dovetail with issues relating to social services, housing and so on. That might well be the reason for that working practice having developed, but the fact remains that that movement across a boundary was not foreseen.

Mr. Russell Brown (Dumfries): My hon. Friend makes an important point. In such circumstances, he and an MSP might end up pursuing the same case, which could lead to correspondence being duplicated or triplicated, because everyone wants in on the act. I agree that the issue is likely to be compounded by an elected second Chamber.

Mr. Joyce: My hon. Friend is quite right. Of course, the public have a right to go to whichever elected representative they think appropriate. It is then efficient for that representative to point the constituent in the direction of the person who can best help them. People often come to Members of Parliament with housing issues, for example, and it is much more efficient gently to direct them towards the appropriate councillor, and to help whenever possible with any related issues.

In Scotland, that does not always work as efficiently as it might, but I would stress that that is a matter of the whole process bedding in. We must not be depressed about looking towards the future, because the reality is that things are getting tidier, more efficient and more effective all the time. Scotland has learned a great deal in the last couple of years, and I suspect that, when a few more years have passed, these issues will dovetail and work quite well. The question is how quickly that learning process takes place, and how quickly we introduce an element of democratisation—in this case, to the other Chamber.

If there were to be a substantially elected second Chamber, a substantial chunk of its Members would still not be able to ensure proper proportionality for Scotland. That is a reason to commend the idea of an elected component, because it will enable us to ensure that different parts of the country are properly represented. Before the last reform of the House of Lords—the temporary reform, if I may call it that—there was a system that ensured a certain number of Scottish peers. In fact, there were too many, and they held a ballot to see which ones would come down. Under an appointment-only system, we would not be able to guarantee proper representation for the regions, so that commends an element of election. Not all my similar-thinking colleagues agree with that, but it is important to have that relationship with the regions, and it is therefore important to have an elected element. That proportionality remains distinctly important.

I shall conclude my remarks, because one or two of my colleagues might wish to speak. My intention tonight is not to say that the roll-out of devolution in Scotland has been anything other than a considerable success—quite the contrary. My intention is to convey the point that the speed at which we introduce what could be described as democratisation to the Lords is something about which we must be extremely careful. If we get it wrong—if we do it too quickly—that could have an impact on another important element in the roll-out of constitutional reform across the country.

Mr. Stephen McCabe (Birmingham, Hall Green): My hon. Friend mentioned possible duplication. Surely there is a requirement for representation to address different functions, roles and responsibilities. There is no evidence that the public want to pay for duplication of representation.

Has my hon. Friend given any thought to the size of a second Chamber? The White Paper on regional assemblies recommended a standard size of between 25 and 30 members per region.

Mr. Joyce: Those are both important points. I can see that a second Chamber could have a function, although there are a number of alternative models. Regional assemblies, the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly and the Northern Ireland Assembly would provide scope for a scrutiny function that would not involve a second Chamber. It would be possible to have a unicameral system here that would broadly work.

I agree with the Government that, given our tradition and our constitution, it makes sense to have a revising Chamber here; but, as my hon. Friend says, the case still needs to be justified. If we are not careful, we may end up simply duplicating what goes on elsewhere. We want regional assemblies to have a meaningful function, rather than being merely talking shops.

As for my hon. Friend's second point, I understand that the regional assemblies will have about the same number of members as the Greater London Assembly. My concern about the roll-out of democratisation of the Lords revolves around that. As I said at the outset, there might well be more representatives from a region in a reformed House of Lords than there would be in a regional assembly. There could be competition for appointments between the same types of people. There is a grave danger that if we bring in too many elected peers in the first instance—I think 50 per cent. is too large a proportion; in the first instance there should be about 20 per cent.—we will create a hostile, or at least negative, environment for a referendum. Such hostility might be stoked by a hostile media, or people might simply be fed up with the idea of elections, knowing that there would be elections for the Lords.

I think that the best idea is to adopt the Government's original recommendation of about 20 per cent. for one full term—to "suck it and see", and then decide whether the experiment has been a success and whether further democratisation is needed in the light of the roll-out in the regions. We should evaluate the first four years of the experiment before considering its expansion.

9.23 pm

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Joyce) on his choice of subject, and on his interesting speech.

I go further than my hon. Friend in my anxiety about the possible consequences of what could be called the ultra-democrat or deadlock-democrat approach to reform of the House of Lords. I do not think we need two elected Chambers or one elected and one substantially elected Chamber, because we could, by accident, find ourselves with an unworkable political system.

From time to time there have been power struggles between the lower and upper Houses in Germany, because they are elected on a different basis. Eventually it has been difficult to get Budgets through, for example. There have also been power struggles in other countries between first and second Chambers.

I agree with my hon. Friend about the need to consider carefully the implications of the proposals. The Government made various proposals and then we had the Wakeham recommendations, but I do not think that Wakeham seriously considered the best option, with the second Chamber acting as the cement that holds together the United Kingdom. I agree, too, that we must recognise that devolution makes a difference.

My preference would be for a small second Chamber of perhaps a maximum of 100 Members, made up of indirectly elected Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly and the English counties, initially, or the regions, when that system is established. It would not have to meet continuously, as in the present system, but could assemble on a regular programmed basis to bring together the institutions of the devolved United Kingdom to act as a constitutional safeguard and revising Chamber to air issues of concern to all parts of the country, in conjunction with the driving democratic force of this Chamber. Anything else would be dangerous.

I am a democrat. I believe that we should get rid of all aristocratic influences in politics, whether direct or indirect. I am also against a new aristocracy being established, based on influence and friendship. That is always the danger when people are appointed to any organisation, whatever the motives. We should have a legitimate second Chamber that can question Ministers, but my preference would be for all Ministers to be elected Members of this House, although they could appear before Committees or the plenary session of the upper Chamber, whatever we call it—senate, second Chamber—which would act as a cement to bring together our democratic institutions.

Similarly, no judges or Law Lords should be members of the second Chamber by right, nor should we have any bishops—although I understand that that is controversial. We should have a Chamber that reflects the diversity of the United Kingdom by indirect election from the regions and Parliaments within our UK structure. In that way, we could act as a modern, efficient Parliament and, for the first time in our history, we would be able to say that we live in a real democracy, not a quasi-democracy, which is what we have today.

9.28 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office (Mr. Ben Bradshaw): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Joyce) on securing the debate and giving me an early opportunity to discuss reform of the House of Lords. I thank him for putting his concerns on the record.

It may be helpful if I set the current debate in some historical context. The Government embarked on the process of House of Lords reform in the last Parliament. My hon. Friend was not a Member at that time, but I am sure he recalls that, with the enacting of the House of Lords Act 1999, the Government removed nine tenths of the hereditary peers.

We proceeded with Lords reform in two stages, because experience had shown us that trying to do it in one stage had never worked. We need to finish now what we started then, but we should never forget that the 1999 Act was a historic achievement in its own right.

Our White Paper of November last year followed on from the royal commission report of January 2000, and both exercises prompted widespread discussion—inside this House and beyond. The public consultation on the White Paper received more than 1,000 responses, including 112 written responses from Members of this House. In addition, we received a thoughtful report from the Public Administration Select Committee, the members of which must be congratulated on preparing a significant piece of work in such a short time. All those contributions are valuable and will inform the next stage of reform, as will this evening's contributions.

As my hon. Friend knows, the Government have decided that the search for consensus can best be pursued through a Joint Committee of both Houses. Its first job will be to prepare options for the Chamber's composition, which will be considered in each House on free votes. The terms of reference for the Joint Committee have already been debated in the other place, and will be debated in this House on Wednesday.

Some people have claimed that the Joint Committee is a way of allowing the momentum for reform to run out, but that is not so. The Government want reform to proceed as quickly as possible. Nobody should pretend that major parliamentary reform is easy, but this Government have a strong record of modernising our democratic institutions, as the Public Administration Committee's report acknowledged.

It has also been suggested that the establishment of the Joint Committee shows that our earlier initiatives have been wasted. I reject that analysis completely. The royal commission, the White Paper and the public debate that they generated are valuable contributions. They provide a baseline of knowledge and discussion that is vital to making progress, and I am sure that they will be an important source for the Joint Committee. Although differences of opinion remain, important agreement on some fundamentals has also emerged from these debates, and I will say a little more about that later. Where disagreement remains, it primarily concerns the composition of the second Chamber.

[Mr. Ben Bradshaw]

The Government's proposal for a Joint Committee has been widely welcomed, but in that regard I am left in some difficulty in replying to the debate. The Government have made it clear that we should not seek undue influence over the Joint Committee's deliberations, so it would be inappropriate for me to offer a detailed policy statement on where the Government think the answer might lie. What I can do, however, is to set out some areas in which the general thrust of public comment seems to be in agreement.

Let me start with the question of elected Members. I do not wish to make any statement that could be construed as "steering" the Joint Committee, but I hope that my hon. Friend will not mind my pointing out that, in the light of the debates in this House, the responses to the public consultation, the Public Administration Committee's report and numerous opinion polls, his solutions—if not his concerns—put him in the minority. I remind him that 89 per cent. of respondents to the consultation favoured a largely or wholly elected upper House. More than half the world's second Chambers are wholly elected, and a significant proportion of the rest are largely elected.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, West, my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South (Mike Gapes) expressed the concern that creating a large number of elected Members of the Lords would undermine the role of this House. However, many who responded to our recent consultation said that such fears are overstated. As my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House said of the second Chamber in his statement of 13 May:

> "There is, we believe, a consensus that its main role should continue to be that of a revising, scrutinising and deliberative assembly, with the power to delay, but not to . . . veto, legislation."

The powers of the second Chamber are already set down in the Parliament Acts of 1911 and 1949, and are strictly limited in statute. There seems to be a general consensus that they are about right as they are. It will of course be up to the Joint Committee to decide whether it concurs with that belief or whether it wants to propose some change, but we must remember that the powers of the second Chamber cannot be altered without the express approval of this House through legislation.

In his statement on 13 May, my right hon. Friend went on:

> "There is, we believe, broad agreement that the Commons should retain its role as the pre-eminent Chamber and that the test for any Government should continue to be whether it can command a majority in the House of Commons."—[*Official Report*, 13 May 2002; Vol. 388, c. 517.]

There has been no suggestion, from any quarter, that that fundamental constitutional principle should change.

I would also draw the attention of my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, West to some of the other modern democracies that include significant numbers of elected Members in their second Chambers. In Australia, Japan, South Africa, India, Spain, France, Austria and Ireland, to name but a few, the Government continue to be responsible only to the lower House. Various restrictions apply to the powers of the second Chamber over legislation—from a short delay to a veto power. The choice depends not on whether the Chamber is elected but on the political traditions of that particular country. How we manage such relationships within the British tradition is no doubt something that the Joint Committee will wish to consider.

I believe, as does my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, that it is an important principle for the two Houses of this Parliament to remain distinct in order that each can make its own contribution. There are other factors that the Joint Committee may wish to consider to allow that. For example, both the royal commission and the White Paper proposed long terms of office for Members, which would reduce the immediacy of any mandate. That was supported both by the consultation in general and by the Public Administration Committee. Similarly, elections in tranches—so that not all elected Members enter the Chamber at once—would enable the upper House to include a democratically elected element without ever giving it an equal or greater mandate than this place enjoys.

My hon. Friend raised some other specific issues that I shall try to address, with the caveat that they will be matters for the Joint Committee and that it would be rash to make too many assumptions about the timing and the make-up of the Chamber after reform. My hon. Friend mentioned timing and said that he understood the reform would be on the statute book in time for the next general election. The only comment that has been made on the record on that point was when my right hon. Friend said that he hopes that the issue will be dealt with in this Parliament. I am sure that the House and the members of the Joint Committee will have heard what my hon. Friend said about his fears about clashing with the roll-out of regional assemblies. If that might be a problem, I am sure that the Committee would wish to avoid it.

My hon. Friend seemed to assume that the upper House would be about the same size as the House of Lords is now. Few other people think that, and my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South went to the other extreme by suggesting a membership limited to 100. The figure mentioned by the PAC was 350, but a coalition is building around the need for a Chamber smaller than the current one. The roll-out of elected Members—if that is what is decided—would be gradual, because of the need to reduce the overall membership at the same time. The problems that my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, West mentioned about competition for money and talent—in Scotland in particular—will therefore not be a problem.

On regional representation and obtaining a good cross-section from Scotland, the PAC report and previous reports all came to the conclusion that large electoral areas, if not regions, would be needed. Scotland might even constitute one electoral region, which would make it possible to obtain a good cross-section from Scotland for any elected element. Those reports are already in the public domain.

In its deliberations, the Joint Committee will also want to bear in mind the risk raised by my hon. Friend of a possible clash between the work of constituency MPs and MSPs and Members of a reformed upper House. I do not think that that is a danger but it is certainly something of which members of the Joint Committee will be cognisant.

The Joint Committee will also want to consider the options for including an appointed element in the new second Chamber. Most Members of the House accept that there are good arguments for including some appointed Members, as that would add expertise to the House and the ability to include Members who are independent of any political party. The inclusion of appointed Members would also be an additional reinforcement of the greater legitimacy and democratic mandate that this place enjoys.

The terms of reference for the Joint Committee which the Lords have proposed to us, and which we shall debate on Wednesday, reflect the importance of the issues raised by my hon. Friend. The Committee is specifically charged to consider the second Chamber

> "and its role and authority within the context of Parliament as a whole, having regard in particular to the impact which any proposed changes would have on the existing preeminence of the House of Commons".

My hon. Friends can thus be assured that we share the same objective. I am confident that there are various ways in which their concerns can be addressed, and I think that we all look forward to hearing the Joint Committee's proposals.

My hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, West has done the House a service in drawing attention to some of the difficult aspects of how best to sustain the proper relationship between this House and a reformed and, we hope, reinvigorated second Chamber. I am sure that when the Joint Committee is appointed, as I hope it will be in the very near future, it, too, will note with interest the points that have been made here tonight.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at nineteen minutes to Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 18 June 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

HEALTH

The Secretary of State was asked—

Mental Health

1. **Mr. Edward Davey** (Kingston and Surbiton): What plans he has to implement the proposals in the Wanless report to create a world-class mental health service; and if he will make a statement. [59118]

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): The NHS plan and the national service framework for mental health will, when implemented, go a long way to creating a world-class mental health service, as proposed in the Wanless report. Targets set out in the NHS plan are on schedule to be reached by 2004. Details of our additional investment will be given [illegible] due course.

Mr. Davey: I thank the Secretary of State for that answer. In implementing the Wanless proposals for a world-class mental health service, will the right hon. Gentleman ensure that users and carers have a much greater role in setting local priorities and strategies? Has he shared my experience that in many aspects of mental health, including minor and moderate illnesses, users and carers can help to build cost-effective community self-help solutions, if they have resources and support? Will he ensure that the forthcoming mental health Bill places a new statutory duty on NHS trusts dealing with mental health services to involve users and carers far more extensively in the planning of local services?

Mr. Milburn: The general proposition that the hon. Gentleman advances is perfectly reasonable. If we want a service—including a mental health service—that is properly built around the needs of the people who use it, they should have a greater say in how the service is provided. That goes for their carers, too. People caring for those with a mental health problem do a sterling job: without them, the NHS could not do its work.

The hon. Gentleman will have to wait to see the provisions of the forthcoming mental health Bill, but I accept the proposition, which applies equally to mental health services and to the national health service in general.

Liz Blackman (Erewash): Wanless anticipated an increase in the prescribing of anti-psychotic atypicals for mental health patients with schizophrenia. May I take this opportunity to congratulate the National Institute for Clinical Excellence on its timely approval of the guidance? Not only will that decision make those drugs more available to patients with schizophrenia and lower the cost of in-patient care but, more important, it will drastically reduce the terrible long-term and irreversible side effects suffered by so many schizophrenia patients currently taking typicals.

Mr. Milburn: NICE's decision has been broadly welcomed, not only within the service but by users and carers. The atypical anti-psychotics are certainly a real step forward, not only for their safety and lack of side effects but for the good that they do. NICE is often in the news for—as it were—the wrong reasons. There is much criticism of NICE, which has a difficult job, but people should stand back and consider what it has done: it has made available more—or more cost-effective—services in the national health service. It has driven up the drugs bill in the health service, but I do not think that is a bad thing if it means that we are getting more cost-effective and more clinically effective treatments to more patients—and, in this case, that is certainly so.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): But we are getting less effective treatment to fewer patients. On 29 April, I wrote to the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith), to point out that the brand new mental health service in Avon and Wiltshire has inherited a £500,000 deficit; that clinical judgment is that GPs cannot provide the necessary service; that the rehabilitation service is under threat; and that there is a six-month wait for an appointment with the alcohol and drug advisory service. The good lady who is the chairman of that trust—a very nice Labour councillor—came to see me in Salisbury to apologise, but why should she take the flak when the resources are not in the service?

Mr. Milburn: I am absolutely delighted to hear that there are such creatures as nice Labour councillors—I bet the hon. Gentleman was even more surprised.

On the overall position with mental health services, of course there are real problems and my hon. Friend the Minister and I are the first to acknowledge them. However, the national health service and mental health services are moving forward; there is more capacity than there was.

The issue for the hon. Gentleman is extremely straightforward, however: if he wants his local health service to expand, he needs to commit more resources to the national health service and agree to do what we have done—to put more money into the national health service over a longer period than has ever been done before. I bet my bottom dollar that the hon. Gentleman was one of those who voted against the extra money for the national health service.

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): As someone whose mother worked in the psychiatric unit at Kingston hospital, I can tell my right hon. Friend that mental health services have increased by leaps and bounds under the present Government. South West London and St. George's mental health NHS trust is a pioneer in the field of care for mentally ill people. It is a centre of excellence and an example of the best practice that, with the support, money, investment and reforms that the Government are putting in, can be spread around the country.

Mr. Milburn: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's comments. As I go around the country visiting mental health or other services, I am the first to acknowledge that there are considerable problems. Indeed, it is better to be straight about such things and to say that it will take some time for the problems to be put right. However, what is completely wrong is to say—as the Opposition do—that there is no progress in the national health service. We should be clear about why they say that: they want to run down the national health service. They want to see it fail, whereas we want it to succeed.

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire): Is not the task for the Secretary of State to match the rhetoric with action? How can the Government hope to create a world-class mental health service when the experience on the ground is one of service reductions, as my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) says? Will the right hon. Gentleman comment on the fact that the Buckinghamshire Association for Mental Health wrote to me saying that

> "not only is there now no new money but there is less funding available and therefore service cuts"?

I received a letter from Manchester about cuts of £820,000 in mental health services. Cuts are planned in Shropshire. In north Cumbria—my Chief Whip gave this letter to me—there is talk of the patients counselling service being under threat. The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy said that that was

> "bad for patients, bad for doctors".

So why are there service reductions all over the country, despite Ministers talking about money going in and improvements being made? Is not that just another case of Labour not telling the truth about what is happening in this country?

Mr. Milburn: No, it is not; it is a case of the Conservatives running down the national health service. I point out to the hon. Gentleman that almost 500 extra secure beds have been created in the health service and that there are more than 320 extra 24-hour staffed beds and 180 extra assertive outreach teams because of the extra investment in the NHS. Finally, more than 50 crisis resolution teams are available in communities throughout the country, dealing with some of the most vulnerable people in the community, precisely because of the extra investment in the NHS. There is a simple choice for the country: either we continue to invest—as we promise to do not for one year, but for five or six years at record levels—or we do what the Conservatives now propose and cut investment in the NHS.

National Alcohol Strategy

2. **Nick Harvey** (North Devon): When he expects to publish a national alcohol strategy. [59119]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): The NHS plan makes clear our commitment to implement a strategy to address alcohol misuse by 2004, and we remain on target.

Nick Harvey: I thank the Minister for her reply, but during the four years in which the alcohol strategy has been imminent, the Government have pursued a number of other priorities. Does she accept that, during that time alcohol services on the ground have been visibly disintegrating? Is she aware that, in my constituency, we have one long-term counsellor and two suppliers of specialist accommodation to cover a population of more than 150,000? Does she share my concern that 39,000 admissions annually to accident and emergency departments result from alcohol misuse, that it is causing untold misery in the home through jobs lost and that the Treasury is losing revenue because of those lost jobs? Will she now commit herself to a timetable for the strategy and make absolutely certain that there is no slippage on it? Does she accept that alcohol misuse has been wrongly falling down the list of priorities?

Ms Blears: I think that I made it clear to the hon. Gentleman that we have set out a timetable in the NHS plan to implement the strategy by 2004, and that we are on target to meet that timetable. I certainly do not accept that services are falling apart. Primary care trusts spend about £95 million a year on commissioning alcohol treatment services, but this is not just a matter of treatment services; it is crucially also about prevention, and therefore we have been investing an extra £23 million on substance misuse education in our schools—drugs, alcohol and tobacco—to try to send out the message that it is better to prevent those problems from occurring in the first place. We have also sent out a very effective sensible drinking message to try to prevent some of the binge drinking, which is clearly a problem.

I recognise the fact that accident and emergency departments are caused tremendous problems by people who turn up drunk. That is why we have a zero tolerance policy towards any kind of violence against anyone in the NHS. We encourage prosecutions against people who turn up drunk and assault people in accident and emergency departments. Prison sentences have been imposed recently on people who have behaved in that unacceptable way. Clearly, there is a problem with alcohol misuse in this country, but it is not simply a matter of having strategies; it is about tackling the problem on the ground.

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): Does my hon. Friend agree that alcohol causes far more damage to people's lives and the economy than illicit drugs and that it is implicated in a wide range of crimes? Will she contact our right hon. Friend the Home Secretary about the impact of alcohol on crime? Does she also agree that a more urgent strategy than she suggests is desirable?

Ms Blears: My hon. Friend is right: it is not a matter of action against drugs or action on alcohol; it is a matter of tackling both issues in our communities and in our society. The Home Office has issued an action plan on alcohol-related crime, and the Department of Health is fully engaged in those issues, too. It is also a question of treatment. About 500 treatment centres in this country concentrate not just on drug treatment but on alcohol treatment. A strong case exists for bringing together some of our policies on substance misuse. My hon. Friend makes some extremely constructive points, and I reassure him that the Department of Health takes these issues extremely seriously. That is why we want prevention and treatment, especially in respect of the misuse of alcohol and binge drinking by young people, for whom it has been shown that brief interventions by health professionals can have an impact. We are currently training general practitioners and nurses in those brief interventions to get people out of the cycle of binge drinking—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think the hon. Gentleman gets the point.

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): The hon. Lady spoke of the importance of strategies on the ground and gave a long list of policies, but she excluded complementary and alternative medicine, which must surprise the House given the effectiveness of complementary therapies in reducing the problems of those who suffer from alcohol abuse and drugs problems in particular. No doubt she will have received reports of how therapeutic touch and the use of herbal remedies can reduce the time that it takes a heroin addict to come off heroin by about 50 per cent. Many clinics up and down the country now use these different treatments. When will the Government put their weight behind the range of therapies that are available and make sure that they are available not just for middle-class people but for those who are very badly off and who are addicted?

Ms Blears: Question Time would not be the same without an intervention from the hon. Gentleman. I shall not be taking up what was perhaps an offer of therapeutic touch, but I shall consider it in due course.

The hon. Gentleman makes an important point: complementary therapies can be useful for a whole range of conditions, and he has raised these issues on many occasions. He will be aware that work is ongoing in the Department to consider the effectiveness of complementary and alternative therapies to see whether we can provide a wider choice for people, in relation not just to drug and alcohol problems but to a whole range of conditions. It is important that the research is ongoing, and we will have an opportunity later this afternoon to discuss further issues in this area.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): Despite what the Government have done and are doing through the national alcohol strategy, there is a perceptible belief among those who have to deal with the victims of alcohol abuse, day in and day out, that such abuse is not as high up the list of Government priorities as they would wish. Is more than one Department still engaged in the strategy? Special attention must be given to the increasing problem of teenage alcohol abusers.

Ms Blears: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that the strategy must engage many Departments, because it is not simply about picking up the pieces through long-term health treatment: crucially, it also involves education and the Home Office. I assure her that consultation on the strategy is already under way across the relevant Departments. We hope to come up with a strategy that does not simply consider one aspect of the problem but considers it across the community.

There is a particular problem with young people—my hon. Friend will be aware of the chief medical officer's recent report on the increase in liver cirrhosis, especially among young women. We therefore need to direct our education policies in a much more targeted and focused way to make sure that we reach the young people who are increasingly the victims of binge drinking, which, in some cases, is out of control.

Hospices

3. **Sir Nicholas Winterton** (Macclesfield): What proposals he has to increase his Department's funding for hospices. [59120]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on the honour that he received at the weekend. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I am sure that it is a timely acknowledgement of his work over many years in Parliament and elsewhere in the community.

The Government have pledged in the NHS cancer plan that funding for specialist palliative care services, including hospices, will increase by £50 million a year by 2004. We announced recently that the full basic salary costs of specialist registrars in palliative care in voluntary hospices will now be met centrally, and we clarified that the NHS should not charge hospices for support services, such as pathology and ambulance services, and that agreed drug costs should also be reimbursed by the NHS.

Sir Nicholas Winterton: I thank the Minister and the House for their generous and kind sentiments.

May I advise the House that, 12 years ago, my wife, the hon. Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton), and I jointly opened East Cheshire hospice in the presence of the then Bishop of Chester? Sadly, the council of the hospice very recently announced that it will have to close four of its 15 beds, because it can no longer afford to pay the staff necessary to man a 15-bed hospice. Will the Government look at the matter urgently and make proposals to speed up the release of additional funds to the hospice movement—not least the East Cheshire hospice—because the beds and the services that hospices provide are urgently needed?

Ms Blears: I thank everyone in the hospice movement up and down the country for their tremendous work, which has made the United Kingdom a world leader in palliative care. I am aware that East Cheshire hospice has an excellent, nationally recognised facility for specialist child bereavement counselling.

In 2001–02, the hospice received funding of £292,000, which increased this year to £302,000, and an additional £20,000 is available from the palliative care strategy funds. Therefore, there has been a 10 per cent. uplift, but I acknowledge the increasing pressures on hospice services. I shall certainly ensure that we see whether we can do more to ensure that the increased investment announced as part of the cancer plan reaches front-line services, where it is desperately needed. Statutory funding for hospices has increased in by 14 per cent. over the past two years. We are making progress, but I acknowledge that there is much more to do.

Mr. Andy Reed (Loughborough): I am sure that my hon. Friend is aware of the excellent work of Rainbows children's hospice, which is in my constituency but which looks after the east midlands. Is she aware of the difficulties faced by such hospices, which receive only about 10 per cent. of their funding from the NHS, with the remainder coming from the generous support of people in Leicestershire and the east midlands? Hospices find it difficult to work with the increased number of primary care trusts, so will she ensure that a co-ordinated approach is taken to the problems? It would be easy for a small number of hospices to drop out of the system, because their PCT might think that they were not absolutely necessary in any particular financial year. That, of course, would have an enormous knock-on effect on the fund-raising activities of places such as Rainbows.

Ms Blears: My hon. Friend makes the important point that the voluntary sector needs to be properly co-ordinated to make sure that its voice is heard in its negotiations with PCTs. We gave the national hospice movement funding of £54,000 last year to make sure that the voluntary sector's voice is heard and that PCTs are fully aware of its needs. PCTs are now drawing up proper service level agreements to ensure a more formal relationship between the hospice sector and the NHS.

Children's hospices are relatively new. They have developed in the past 20 years and are now getting on to a proper footing. Increasingly, however, more funds are available through the "quality protects" programme and through the carers grant, which funds short-term care in children's hospices. The situation is improving.

Lady Hermon (North Down): Will the Minister kindly explain what progress has been made in exempting hospices, such as those run by Marie Curie Cancer Care, from VAT?

Ms Blears: The issue of irrecoverable VAT that faces cancer charities, such as Macmillan, and the voluntary sector as a whole is currently being considered by Customs and Excise and the Treasury. Macmillan has specifically brought the matter to my attention and I am currently in discussions and considering the issue extremely closely. I know of the difficult effect on the future investment decisions that Macmillan is considering, and I am keen and anxious that we enter into close negotiations with the Treasury and Customs and Excise to see whether progress can be made.

Mr. Bill O'Brien (Normanton): I welcome my hon. Friend's statement on the additional support that is being given to the hospice movement, but may I appeal to her to release money immediately? About £60 million has been requested to help to save some of the beds that will be closed if additional resources are not available within a short time. The PCTs cannot provide additional resources at the moment and Wakefield hospice in my constituency faces the threat of bed closures if additional resources cannot be made available. I therefore appeal to my hon. Friend to look generously at the release of additional funding immediately.

Ms Blears: I am aware of the excellent work of Wakefield hospice and of how much that hospice is valued by the local community. My hon. Friend makes an important point. As I said to the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Sir Nicholas Winterton), there is concern about getting the funds announced in the cancer plan, which are in the NHS baseline, through to the front line. I intend to see whether we can put further mechanisms in place to strengthen the release and availability of that money. However, my hon. Friend should also be aware that the moneys for palliative care services are not confined to hospices. Importantly, they are also used to provide care at home and in the community—services that are increasingly valued. People ought to have a choice in such delicate and sensitive matters.

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): Does not the Minister see the paradox? The Government might be increasing the amount of money for hospices—albeit too slowly to stop bed closures and to prevent them from refusing to take some terminally ill people because of a lack of money—but from next April they will increase the burden on hospices through national insurance contributions. Has the Minister calculated what it will cost the hospice movement to pay those increased contributions?

Ms Blears: National insurance contributions are not simply an issue for hospices—

Mr. Burns: How much?

Ms Blears: I take the point. National insurance contributions will be an issue for many organisations that contract with the health service. We have said that primary care trusts need to take account in their commissioning arrangements of the fact that hospices and other organisations will face increased costs. That needs to be included in their negotiations for the services that will be available to them. We are contemplating that matter, which will be dealt with by the primary care trusts.

Mr. Burns: How much?

Ms Blears: I understand that it is 0.7 per cent. of the current funding for hospices.

Digital Hearing Aids

4. **Mr. Ben Chapman** (Wirral, South): If he will make a statement on the availability of digital hearing aids on the NHS. [59121]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Jacqui Smith): We are committed to extending the benefits of digital hearing aids provided as part of a modernised service. We have invested more than £30 million in the modernising hearing aids services project over the past three years. This will bring the number of sites providing the service to 50 by the end of this financial year, with a further 15 ready to start from April 2003. By the end of April this year, the services had fitted more than 30,000 digital hearing aids.

Mr. Chapman: I thank the Minister for that response; it will be welcome news to my constituents. However, can she say when the hearing aids will be available and whether her Department plans to issue guidance to PCTs on funding modernised hearing aids so that national roll-out can proceed as quickly as possible? Will she comment on the steps she has taken to ensure that there are sufficient trained audiology staff to deliver the service in all regions?

Jacqui Smith: I am sure that my hon. Friend is pleased and reassured to hear that Wirral hospital is part of the second wave of those included in the project. The project management team, which is managed on behalf of the Department by the Royal National Institute for Deaf People, has contacted each of the 30 sites that will join the project this calendar year and is in the process of visiting each service.

To assess the current service—obtaining, for example, details of the sites involved, staffing and information technology needs—the team will discuss the new service and implement the timetable for modernisation, including the timetables to ensure that new technological systems and new staff training are in place so that the necessary staff are available to fit digital hearing aids. I assure my hon. Friend that the first of the new-wave sites will be fitting digital hearing aids by the beginning of October and all 30 will be fitting them by the end of March 2003.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): Would the Minister care to tell the House when VAT first became payable on digital hearing aids?

Jacqui Smith: The important point is that whereas a Tory Government would introduce charges, when, under this Government, people receive a hearing aid on the NHS, it is free.

Mr. Tom Levitt (High Peak): The NHS is the largest purchaser of hearing aids in the whole world, so it can get a good deal by bulk-buying digital hearing aids, which reinforces my hon. Friend's point. Is she aware, however, that some PCTs do not provide their own hearing aids but buy them from trusts outside their local area? Even when those neighbouring trusts are within the new wave and are providing digital hearing aids, they are not available to people who live outside the trust area. It is therefore vital that the roll-out continues. Will the Minister tell the House the time scale for the national roll-out so that we know when those services will be made available to people who do not live in an area where the PCT currently provides them? Some 4 million people could benefit from that.

Jacqui Smith: My hon. Friend makes an important point about the purchasing power of the NHS. We have worked very closely with the RNID on contracting, and we have had some success in reducing the price of hearing aids to the NHS, ensuring that we will be able to develop that roll-out as quickly as possible.

My hon. Friend will know that introducing a modernised hearing aid service is not just about changing from an analogue to a digital hearing aid. It is also about ensuring that the new methods necessary for fitting digital hearing aids are in place. That is why we are working with the Institute of Hearing Research to evaluate the current programme, so as to ensure that we are able to roll it out as quickly as possible, while giving the best service to people who will receive digital hearing aids in future.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): Will the Minister confirm that by next March it will still be the case that only one third of people in England will have access to digital hearing aids through their local hospitals? When will the national roll-out be completed so that all our constituents have access to that vital service?

Jacqui Smith: I can confirm that in just three years it has been possible to ensure that digital hearing aids will be available on the NHS for a third of patients. As I pointed out to my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Levitt), however, this is not a simple process of shifting from one type of hearing aid to another; it is important that the trained staff and necessary infrastructure are in place so that we can make sure that people get the quality service from the NHS that they expect. I certainly want the success of the pilot scheme to be rolled out as quickly as possible, and clearly we will consider investment for that as part of the spending review, but we must ensure that quality is maintained as we roll out the service.

Anti-TNF Treatments

5. **Mr. Mark Todd** (South Derbyshire): What steps he is taking to secure availability of anti-TNF treatments in line with NICE recommendations. [59122]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): On 22 March, the National Institute for Clinical Excellence recommended the use of anti-TNF drugs for the treatment of juvenile idiopathic arthritis and rheumatoid arthritis. Primary care trusts have been directed to provide the appropriate funding for NICE-recommended treatments. However, supplies of one of those drugs, Etanercept, have been restricted worldwide since the beginning of 2001 due to high demand and limited production capacity. I am glad to say that those capacity restrictions are now being addressed by the manufacturer, and in the meantime rheumatologists in the NHS have established arrangements that aim to ensure equitable access to the treatment for as many new patients as possible.

Mr. Todd: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. I am sure that it is a relief to my constituents as well as those of many other hon. Members. May I question the process by which PCTs are having to deal with the consequences of NICE judgments? One difficulty is that they have to anticipate not only when the judgment will be made but guess what it will be, and it may not be clear what the outcome of a NICE investigation will be. They also have to take account of the implications of a judgment for the financial year for which they have budgeted, and dealing with those financial consequences leads to inequity and the slow delivery of some of those judgments to our constituents.

Mr. Hutton: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for those observations. He is right; we are undertaking a new process, and when NICE issues its recommendations and guidance for new treatments, it is important that the arrangements are in place to allow primary care trusts to respond reasonably to those judgments. That is why, under the directions, we have given PCTs three months to make the appropriate funding available. The key to making the policy work is to keep the investment flowing into the national health service. That provides the practical means whereby primary care trusts can respond to the recommendations of the national institute. The simple choice facing us in the House is to build up the NHS, as the Government want to do, or run it down, which Opposition Members want to do.

Medical Training

6. **Mr. James Plaskitt** (Warwick and Leamington): If he will make a statement on the number of training places established for students who wish to become doctors and surgeons. [59123]

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): Between 1999 and 2001 almost 2,150 new medical school places were announced in England, an increase of 57 per cent. over 1997 medical school intakes. That is the largest increase in medical school places since the NHS was established, and includes, as my hon. Friend knows, four new medical schools—the first for many decades.

Mr. Plaskitt: Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating the Leicester Warwick medical school, which was founded in March 2000 and which next year will take in 400 students, playing its part in reversing the decline in available places under the previous Government? Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is vital that there should be close links between the universities and the new structures in the NHS?

Mr. Milburn: I very much welcome the establishment of the new Leicester Warwick medical school in my hon. Friend's area. It is one of a number of medical schools that have been established. Not only will it provide an expansion in the number of doctors in the future, but the new medical schools have been innovative in the way that they are recruiting their medical students. For example, they are trying to broaden the social base of the medical students whom they take in. That means that in future the NHS will have a broader range of doctors from a broader range of backgrounds. That is good news for the NHS, but most importantly, it is good news for NHS patients.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): Does the Secretary of State accept that students need teachers, and that extra medical students need extra consultants to teach them? Can he explain why, in London medical schools, academic consultant posts and other training posts are being lost because of cuts? Can he also explain why he does not use the opportunity of the extra funding to expand the number of consultant posts available to teach, by allowing doctors currently languishing in staff grade and trust grade posts—mainly ethnic minority, black and Asian doctors—at least to apply to re-enter training to become consultants and help to train the consultants of the future?

Mr. Milburn: As the hon. Gentleman knows, there are some problems in some medical schools in some parts of London, but not in all. That comes about because of the uneven distribution of a growing resource as a consequence of the research assessment exercise that now takes place in universities, so that we get the money into the universities capable of best using it.

When we agreed with the individual medical schools—for example, the one in the area of my hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington (Mr. Plaskitt)—that they would take on extra medical students, each and every one of those schools gave an assurance that it would be able to recruit the teaching staff necessary to train properly the doctors of the future. They have fulfilled that assurance. In each and every year since 1999, the number of medical students coming into the new medical schools has exceeded the plans for each of those medical schools. That is very good news indeed.

There are some issues to consider, as the hon. Gentleman is aware. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State will be meeting the Minister for Lifelong Learning in the Department for Education and Skills and representatives of the British Medical Association to discuss some of them. If there is more that we can do, we will do it. Again, we come back to the question of investment. We believe that we should put more investment into medical student training and medical schools, and we have committed the resources for it. The question for the Opposition is whether they are prepared to match that level of investment.

Hugh Bayley (City of York): May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on choosing York and Hull universities for one of the new medical schools? They have just published their first prospectus. The university of York has consistently come in the top 10 universities for the quality of research. It already has a world-class track record in research in health economics, epidemiology and social policy, which it will integrate with the clinical studies in the medical school. May I offer my right hon. Friend an open invitation to stop off in York some time when he is on the train from London to his Darlington constituency to meet the new dean of the medical school, Professor Gillespie, and see what York will be offering?

Mr. Milburn: After that fulsome tribute, I dare not say no, so I suppose that I had better take up the offer. The Hull York medical school has a very good reputation, as my hon. Friend rightly points out, and is one of the new wave of medical schools. It has been doing a very good job so far, and I am sure that it will continue to do so. As a consequence of the expansion in the number of medical school places, almost 1,700 extra medical students are being trained as future doctors for the national health service. That is an important break with the past, when adequate investment did not go into medical schools, causing the major shortages that we still experience today. We now have an opportunity to put that right.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): How can the medical profession have any confidence in the Government's headline commitment to recruit 15,000 new doctors by 2008, when the Council of Heads of Medical Schools reports that 80 per cent. of the medical schools that it has surveyed are having to freeze the academic staff recruitment needed to train those doctors, and when the BMA has reported that there are already vacancies for 79 professors and more than 320 lecturers in those medical schools? We now hear that the Secretary of State wants a new medical educational standards board that is answerable directly to him and not to Parliament. The document containing the proposal is described by the president of the Royal College of Surgeons as

> "potentially the most sinister document to emerge from this government."

As the BMA has asked, do the Government really want to deliver 15,000 more doctors of the future, or is that just a sop to the political media?

Mr. Milburn: It is true what they say: empty vessels make the most noise. This is an Opposition who have precisely nothing to say, no policy to talk about and no resources to commit. Indeed, the one policy that they have is the one that they do not want to talk about: charging patients for their care. Forget all this talk about caring, compassionate conservatism—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I want to hear about the Minister's policies.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): I welcome the figures that my right hon. Friend announced a moment ago. Does he recognise that in some parts of the country, because of the failure to train enough doctors a few years ago, prior to the change of Government in 1997, we will have serious shortages of doctors until the new ones who are now training are fully qualified and take their place in the national health service? Are the Government prepared to take action, especially in areas where there are shortages, to ensure that the short-term gap is filled until the new doctors to whom he referred are on line?

Mr. Milburn: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Figures that were, I think, published under the previous Government show that in the four or five years up to 1996–97, the number of doctors in training for family practice and to become GPs fell by about 44 per cent. That number fell for five consecutive years. Since Labour came to office, the number has grown in every single year and by 20 per cent. This is a long-term business, and as my hon. Friend rightly says, that means that there is a need in the short term. When we can get suitably qualified applicants to come to this country from abroad, that is what we should do.

I can report to the House that in respect of the effort that is being led by Sir Magdi Yacoub—there could be no better ambassador for the national health service—although we expected about 50 international fellows from Europe, America and Australia to come in the first wave and work in the national health service, 400 have applied. I think that 200 have now been through the medical royal college standard assessment process and a number of them are now being appointed to posts throughout the country. That is very good news for hospitals, but most importantly of all, it means that we can get more treatments more quickly to more NHS patients.

Suicide

7. **Peter Bottomley** (Worthing, West): If he will make a statement on the recent trend in the incidence of suicide; and what assessment he has made of the prospects for achieving his target for its reduction. [59125]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Jacqui Smith): We have set a challenging target to reduce the death rate from suicide and undetermined injury by at least a fifth by the year 2010. The target is monitored with a three-year moving average from a baseline using 1995–96–97 figures of 9.1 deaths per 100,000 population. The latest three-year average available is for 1998–99–2000, which shows a level of 9.4 deaths per 100,000 population. While that is disappointing, the single year rate for 1999 and 2000, following the announcement of the targeted action, fell and is now lower than in 1995. We published a national suicide strategy for consultation in April and will continue to work to ensure that the target is met and lives are saved.

Peter Bottomley: The Minister will have the backing of Members on both sides of the House in trying to cope with the consequences of the misery, caused mainly by depression, felt by adolescents and people in their early adult years. The fluctuating figures from one year to the next are not important, but will the Minister ensure that there are specialist centres and that there is a greater understanding of what is normal mental health for young people and what is abnormal, and of what people can do to get help?

Jacqui Smith: The hon. Gentleman has made an important and sensible point. It is certainly worrying that young men are the group in which there is a growth in suicide. The Government's investment in child and adolescent mental health services is therefore important, both for the specialist services and increasingly for lower-tier services that enable work between mental health professionals, schools and other agencies to identify mental health problems in young people much earlier. For example, early intervention teams are being set up to treat the development of psychosis in young people. The target is to ensure that by 2004, 7,000 young people with early signs of psychosis receive support from those teams.

Furthermore, the Government recognise the need to tackle stigma to ensure that young people access services when necessary. The "mind out for mental health" campaign, supported by the Government, specifically targets young people in youth groups and universities but we plan to extend its remit. We must ensure that we both offer services and break down barriers, especially on stigma, that prevent young people from accessing services when they need them.

Mrs. Lorna Fitzsimons (Rochdale): Does my hon. Friend agree that a crucial plank in that strategy, which will help us to meet the target, is to ensure that the children's national service framework on mental health and medical services looks at the way in which vulnerable children are supported? Sadly, for many decades, in certain regions there has historically been under-acknowledgment of the funding needed for core services for that fragile group of young people. May I make a plea to the Minister to look at core services before we look at developing them further in some regions? Many young children desperately need our most special care.

Jacqui Smith: My hon. Friend is right. Children with mental health problems certainly deserve our special care. The Government have made some progress following the £105 million extra investment in child and adolescent mental health services. However, I certainly agree that while there is excellent provision in some areas, it is not spread as well as it could be across the country, which is why, as my hon. Friend pointed out, an important component of the children's national service framework is developing standards in child and adolescent mental health services. I assure my hon. Friend that that is an important part of the work that is going on. With the extra investment that is going in, there will be better and more consistent services in future.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I welcome what the Minister said about children's and young people's services. However, is she concerned about the growing number of suicides in rural communities and whether we have faced up to pressures on our farming communities?

Jacqui Smith: Yes, we are concerned. The hon. Gentleman will see from the suicide strategy that we identify certain high-risk groups, including farmers. We also outline action that the Government have already taken, such as supporting the rural stress action plans and working with the National Farmers Union and other voluntary organisations to identify and support people in our rural communities who find life difficult. That will ensure that we minimise the risks to them and tackle depression and stress, which will contribute to our target of reducing suicide.

Royal United Hospital

8. **Dr. Andrew Murrison** (Westbury): If he will make an assessment of the reliability of waiting list data at the Royal United hospital, Bath. [59126]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): The National Audit Office raised concerns last December about the accuracy of waiting list information at the Royal United Hospital Bath NHS trust. Those concerns were well founded. Since the publication of its report, the trust, the health authority and the regional director of health and social care have taken steps to ensure that waiting list information is reported strictly in accordance with the 1996 guidance. As a result of those and ongoing measures, I am confident that waiting list information that is reported from the trust is now accurate and reliable.

Dr. Murrison: I thank the Minister for that reply. The Royal United hospital is clinically excellent, but administratively it has not been so. If the administrative problems at the RUH were replicated in just small part across the country, the Government's recently announced figure of an increase of 23,000 for the total number of people waiting for treatment in the NHS would be a serious underestimate. Does the Minister agree that ministerial pressure on officials to come up with politically acceptable figures is unhelpful at the RUH and elsewhere? Will he assure me that he has personally taken charge of the dire situation at the RUH, and will he please respond to my letter of 7 May in which I asked for a meeting with him to discuss progress?

Mr. Hutton: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for those observations, and I am of course more than happy to meet him. I must say that I have not yet seen his letter of 7 May, but I am not surprised by that.

It is hugely important that information about waiting lists and times is accurate and reliable—not only for the benefit of the NHS, but for that of the public and Members of Parliament. That is why a considerable amount of effort is put into ensuring that the data are accurate and reliable. For example, we recently asked the Audit Commission to conduct a series of spot checks. We will continue to look carefully at how the information is collected to make sure that it is accurate and reliable. That is an absolute obligation, and we intend to discharge it.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): A significant number of my constituents noted the assurances that only two patients waited for longer than 15 months for an operation with mounting anger, because they knew perfectly well that they had waited that long for treatment at the Royal United hospital. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the significant problems at the RUH are not the fault of the medical and nursing staff, nor of the local population that is served by it, and that it should not be saddled with a history that prevents its staff from providing the improved level of care that we can reasonably expect in the Somerset area?

Mr. Hutton: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. No one is calling into question the commitment and dedication of the health care staff at Bath—they clearly do a fantastic job for their patients—but there have been serious management failures at the trust. We all have an overall responsibility to ensure that those failures are tackled, not brushed under the carpet, and that is what we are determined to do. However, it is fundamentally a matter for the local trust to bring any disciplinary action against the individuals who have been involved in this sorry business. That is the right way forward. I do not want to comment on the disciplinary aspects of the case—that would be inappropriate—but no one should doubt our determination to ensure that such episodes are not repeated and that the public and Members of Parliament have absolute confidence in the credibility and reliability of this important information.

Breast-feeding

9. **Mr. David Kidney** (Stafford): What advice his Department gives on the health and developmental benefits of breast-feeding. [59127]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): The Department advises that breast milk is the best form of nutrition for infants to ensure a good start in life. Breast-feeding confers significant short-term and long-term health benefits for both mother and infant beyond the period of breast-feeding itself. Infants who are breast-fed have a lower risk of infections and of developing obesity in childhood. Breast-feeding for a prolonged period can reduce the risk of mothers developing pre-menopausal breast cancer and may help them to lose the weight that they gained during pregnancy.

Mr. Kidney: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Does she accept that many mothers who start breast-feeding give up earlier than they wish because of the many obstacles that they encounter? During the recent awareness week, the summit that I co-hosted with the National Childbirth Trust revealed surprising ignorance among employers about the needs of breast-feeding mums returning to work. Will my hon. Friend consider forming alliances with employers' organisations to spread the advice that she has given us to employers and, through them, to their workers?

Ms Blears: My hon. Friend is right that there is a marked drop-off in breast-feeding in the early weeks by women who want to breast-feed but encounter a range of difficulties. Some are caused by not having role models or the influence of family and friends. It is especially worrying that 91 per cent. of women from the highest social class—social class 1—breast-feed, whereas only 59 per cent. of women from low-income households, who could perhaps benefit most from breast-feeding, do so.

The Health and Safety Executive currently issues advice to employers to set aside quiet areas for women to breast-feed at work. I am delighted to say that we are working with employers to ensure that as many women as possible can breast-feed for as long as possible and thus gain the benefits for themselves and their babies.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): The Minister mentioned the need for role models. Does she therefore believe that there should be better facilities in the House of Commons?

Ms Blears: That is clearly a matter for the House authorities, but I understand that steps have been taken to provide more facilities, not only for hon. Members but for visitors. That means not only that the Department of Health is encouraging breast-feeding, but that we can make facilities available.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): With all the advantages of breast-feeding that my hon. Friend mentioned, does she believe that women who wish to breast-feed should be able to do so in public without embarrassment to them or to passers-by? Can she take any action—apart from breast-feeding a baby—to try to make breast-feeding more commonplace and acceptable?

Ms Blears: In May, we held the breast-feeding awareness week, which was incredibly successful. Its excellent slogan was, "Mother's Milk: the perfect take-away". We are constantly trying to raise awareness. In my constituency, we have a project with our local cafés to ensure that breast-feeding women are welcomed into them and can breast-feed in an acceptable and normal way. More work needs to be done. We have also funded an organisation called Breast Mates, which enables women who have breast-fed to talk to their friends and colleagues and encourage other women to breast-feed and get over some of the initial technical difficulties so that they can continue for as long as possible.

Information Technology

10. **Dr. John Pugh** (Southport): If he will make a statement on information technology within the NHS. [59129]

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): We urgently need to reverse almost two decades of underinvestment and failed attempts to modernise the core IT infrastructure. Later this summer we will provide details about a nationally run IT programme for the NHS backed by large-scale investment.

Dr. Pugh: Given that the Wanless report stated that getting IT strategy right was essential to fulfil NHS targets, and given that the Government have had three reports about it and three attempts at doing that, what guarantees can they give that the available resources will be used to meet the Government targets and will not be re-routed, which happened previously?

Mr. Milburn: There are some important lessons to be learned, not only in the NHS but throughout the public sector and in large private sector organisations that have tried to implement new IT programmes. First, we need proper standardisation of IT procurement. Secondly, we need competent leadership, which we now have and can take further forward. We are currently advertising for a national IT director. Thirdly and crucially, we must ensure that IT investment reaches those whom it needs to reach. It is fair to say that that has not always happened in the past. I assure hon. Members that the programme will be centrally run in future so that we can ensure that we avoid some of the piecemeal solutions of the past.

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): How many of the new primary care trusts will be able to use electronic patient records?

Mr. Milburn: A proportion of them will be able to do that.

Dr. Fox: Five?

Mr. Milburn: No, it is more than five. I believe that 98 per cent. of GP practices are now connected to the NHS net, thanks to the investment in improved health service IT. We have made the investment available. Would the hon. Gentleman match it?

Dr. Fox: The Secretary of State has been promising for five years to meet the investment targets for putting into the health service the IT necessary to deliver many of the pledges that he set out in the national plan. I can give him the answer to my question, as he is unable to provide it. Only five trusts appear set to meet their targets, although the initial target was 35 per cent. of trusts by April 2002. The right hon. Gentleman is well behind that target. This problem has been reported on round the country, not least by Mr. Howell Huws, the IT director at Hammersmith hospitals NHS trust, who said that, last year, many health authorities raided supposedly ring-fenced IT budgets to meet service pressures and political imperatives, and that suggestions were emerging that the pattern may be repeated this year.

Under political pressure from the Secretary of State, money is being taken out of IT programmes, mental health, and many other areas that deserve investment, to meet abstract ministerial targets and to distort the figures to make things look better for Ministers. Under this Government, the control of information, the setting of targets and the health of the Government are more important than the health of the public.

Mr. Milburn: I do not think that that is the case. It is certainly true that there have been some problems with IT investment. That is why it is important that, when we direct investment into parts of the national health service, we make sure that it gets through. As I said in an earlier answer, that is precisely why we shall have a centrally run IT programme, to ensure that we have a modern health service with modern IT. The simple fact is this: we are prepared to commit the investment. We have identified not only the level of investment but the sources of the investment. The problem for the hon. Gentleman is that he complains about IT, but he does not complain about the shortage of cash. If he is concerned about the lack of IT, it is about time he put his money where his mouth is. He had the opportunity to do so on 1 May, but he explicitly voted against extra resources for the national health service.

Home Safety

3.32 pm

Ms Claire Ward (Watford): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to promote the use of accident prevention and safety measures in the home; to reduce the cost of such measures by reducing the rate of VAT levied on them; and for connected purposes.

Each year, about 4,000 deaths occur as a result of accidents in the home—more than 10 every day. We all know how dangerous our roads are, with more than 3,600 deaths a year resulting from traffic accidents, yet that number is smaller than the number of accident-related deaths in the home. Our railways are more than five times safer than our roads, yet there are always calls for public inquiries and fresh investment on the mercifully rare occasions when accidents occur. The number of people killed on our railways is, however, a tiny percentage of the number who lose their lives in accidents in the home.

Almost 3 million accidents requiring medical treatment occur in the home each year. Some involve serious injuries resulting in long-term disabilities, and each of those represents a personal tragedy for the person involved, and for their family and friends. These accidents also place a huge burden on our health service, and particularly on our emergency services.

Many of the deaths resulting from accidents in the home could have been prevented if householders had followed simple rules or installed safety equipment. Some of the worst tragedies are accidents suffered by children, and it is worth noting that this is child safety week. Every day, 10 under-five-year-olds are severely burned, and the disfigurement and pain that result can cause terrible mental and physical trauma in a child throughout the rest of his or her life.

Every parent knows how difficult it is to keep a constant eye on a two-year-old and how quickly their hands can reach the flex of a kettle or the handle of a pan of boiling water or milk. It is easy to give simple reminders to parents to keep all pans to the back of the hob and kettle flexes secured, but the figures suggest that too many children are still being badly hurt.

The Bill would place a statutory requirement on local authorities to promote safety awareness in the home. This could be done by means of public information being sent to every home annually, with the council tax notices. Local authorities could co-ordinate the work of other agencies to ensure that homes in which there is a higher risk, such as those in multiple occupation, or those where elderly residents or children live, were targeted with advice and offered the installation of safety devices at a discounted cost.

By introducing a Bill that will reduce the cost of safety measures, I hope that we can reduce the number of accidents and deaths. Statistics complied by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents suggest that the number of accidents in the home can be clearly linked to income and deprivation levels. For example, the injury death rate for children in unskilled families is five times greater than that for children from professional families. Residential fire deaths are 15 times greater for children in social class V than for children in social class I. Houses in multiple occupation tend to have low incomes, and are also more likely to have fires and suffer resulting loss of life.

Lower-income households often have to choose between investing in safety equipment or purchasing the other necessities of life. Given the correlation between income and accidents in the home, it seems that the choice is not always made in favour of the equipment. Too many people assume that accidents will never happen to them. Each year, there are 45,000 accident and emergency admissions for under-five-year-olds who have fallen down stairs. A safety gate can be used to restrict the movement of young children around the home, particularly into the kitchen area, and thereby help to reduce the number of accidents. Such a gate costs about £20, which is roughly 20 per cent. of the weekly income of a single parent on benefit with one child. The removal or reduction of VAT would offer a further incentive to purchasing this essential equipment. Further statistics from RoSPA suggest that more than 10,000 accidents each year involve a fireplace, a grate or a fender. A fireguard costs a minimum of £20.

It is not just children who can fall victim to accidents in the home: the elderly and disabled are also vulnerable. Each year, about 1,100 over-75-year-olds die as a result of accidental falls in the home. In addition, there is the risk of hip fracture and the resulting loss of mobility and restriction on quality of life. That risk is especially high in older women, who are more likely to suffer from osteoporosis and to live on their own. A useful piece of equipment is a hip protector, worn by those most at risk from a fall, which disperses a fall's impact on the hip bone. Hip protectors have proved highly effective in reducing the number of injuries, but they are also fairly expensive, as each person requires three or four sets. An average cost of £30 per set can be a significant sum for many pensioners or disabled people.

Each year, nearly 500 people in the UK are killed in house fires. The numbers have fallen in recent years, but even one preventable death is too many. More than 18,000 people are injured as a result of fires. Most fires occur in the home, most are avoidable and most affect those who are society's vulnerable. The installation of domestic smoke alarms has significantly reduced the number of deaths. Where a functioning detector is present, early warning of a fire is given and the likelihood of escape is dramatically increased. However, in some cases it was discovered that, although a smoke alarm was present, the battery had been removed or was no longer working. Reducing VAT on smoke alarms would help to promote alarms that are tamper-proof or mains-wired.

The final element of the Bill is the requirement that all new domestic properties be fitted with a fire sprinkler system. As a condition of building permission, developers would have to fit sprinklers as well as smoke alarms. I suspect that the construction industry would raise the issue of cost, but who can put a price on a person's life? We know that no one in the UK has ever lost their life through a fire when a full sprinkler system was present, which surely shows that the benefits outweigh the costs. Furthermore, if the Bill's other provisions were approved, the removal or reduction of VAT on such systems would be of great assistance.

Sprinklers are a proven method of reducing the number of deaths caused by fires. Automatic sprinkler systems are used more than any other fixed fire protection system, with more than 40 million sprinklers fitted worldwide every year.

[Ms Claire Ward]

In June 1986, the city of Scottsdale, Arizona in the USA passed a local regulation requiring all new residential and commercial property to have sprinkler protection. A report was published 10 years later on the impact of the regulation. The findings concluded that 35 per cent. of single-family homes and 50 per cent. of multi-family homes in Scottsdale had sprinkler protection. Over that period 598 fires broke out in homes in the city. Of those, 44 resulted in sprinkler activation. The fire was contained by only one or two sprinkler heads in 41 of the 44 cases. There were no fatalities in the sprinkler-protected homes. In the other dwelling fires, 10 deaths occurred in eight fires. The average cost of a sprinkler fire was $1,544 and that of other fires was $11,624. The facts speak for themselves.

The Government have a target of reducing the number of fire deaths by 20 per cent. by March 2003. The Bill could help to achieve that. I realise that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor may not be enthusiastic about any measure that would reduce VAT and hence the revenue over which he has control. However, I hope that he and the Government will recognise that the Bill would encourage and stimulate demand for safety measures, as a means of reducing the millions of accidents that occur each year, and that he will take this opportunity to discuss the matter with the EU to review the lists of goods and services that could benefit from a reduction in VAT.

I wish to thank the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents and the Fire Protection Association for their assistance in the preparation of the Bill, and the fire and rescue service, especially in Hertfordshire, for its support for the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Ms Claire Ward, Phil Hope, Mr. Huw Edwards, Lawrie Quinn, Mr. Gareth Thomas, Mr. Stephen Hepburn, Mr. Ian Davidson, Mr. Ivan Henderson and Mr. Andy Reed.

HOME SAFETY

Ms Claire Ward accordingly presented a Bill to promote the use of accident prevention and safety measures in the home; to reduce the cost of such measures by reducing the rate of VAT levied on them; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 19 July, and to be printed [Bill 149].

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

CRIMINAL LAW

That the draft Criminal Justice Act 1988 (Offensive Weapons) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 15th May, be approved.—*[Jim Fitzpatrick.]*

Question agreed to.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 119(9) (European Standing Committees),

RECEPTION OF ASYLUM APPLICANTS

That this House takes note of European Document No. 8351/02, draft Council Directive laying down minimum standards for the reception of applicants for asylum in Member States; supports the Government's efforts to secure agreement on a Council directive for reception conditions for asylum applicants which will promote a balance in the provision of reception arrangements throughout the Union; and notes the Government's commitment to secure agreement to the asylum measures within the time period envisaged by the Treaty of Amsterdam.—*[Jim Fitzpatrick.]*

Question agreed to.

European Affairs

[Relevant documents: The Thirty-first Report from the European Scrutiny Committee, Session 2001–02 (HC 152-xxxi), paragraph 2, on the Broad Economic Policy Guidelines, and the Twenty-third Report from the European Scrutiny Committee, Session 2001–02 (HC 152-xxiii) paragraph 3, on the Stability and Convergence Programmes.]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—[*Jim Fitzpatrick.*]

3.43 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): The Spanish presidency will host the next meeting of the European Council of Heads of Government in Seville on 21 and 22 June. Today the House has its customary six-monthly opportunity to debate the Government's priorities for the summit. Five years into this Government's period of office, I believe that we have been able to re-establish the United Kingdom's influence in Europe.

Re-engagement has enabled us to set new priorities for the EU. For example, on economic reform, the so-called Lisbon agenda is now at the centre of the EU's work programme. We have strengthened European co-operation against crime and terrorism. We are at the forefront of efforts to establish a common asylum policy and in the fight against illegal immigration. With the French, we have promoted the development of a European security and defence capability for use in crisis management, and we have championed the enlargement of the European Union, which will root stability and democracy throughout our continent and should generate up to an estimated £1.75 billion per year in additional business for British companies.

All those achievements have improved the quality of life and security of British people. They demonstrate that this Government are realising the aspiration of a former Conservative Prime Minister to put Britain at the heart of Europe. *[Interruption.]* I am glad to hear that Conservative Front-Bench Members treat their former leaders in the way they have always done—with disdain and contempt.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): We are all Thatcherites now.

Mr. Straw: I thought that someone might say that. In fact, it was not Baroness Thatcher who said that but the much more recent Conservative Prime Minister, who I thought would be regarded with some kind of affection by his party, at least for a short while—namely Mr. Major.

At Seville, we will be seeking to secure further benefits for British and European citizens. In particular, we believe that the summit should send a signal of our determination to make progress on asylum and immigration and on the reform of the Council of the European Union, to make the whole system work better. I want to concentrate my remarks on these two important issues, as well as talking about two important foreign policy matters that will unquestionably arise at Seville.

First, the current levels of asylum and illegal immigration are Europe-wide phenomena that affect all EU nations. Britain is by no means alone in facing this problem—we rank eighth out of the 15 European Union member states in asylum applications per person. The official statistics significantly understate the problem of illegal immigration in a number of southern European countries where, for reasons of geography and history, they do not tend to count the number of illegals within their borders with the same assiduity as we do. Indeed, there are practical problems in doing so. In addition, because of the nature of the informal labour markets, hundreds of thousands, if not millions, are at large in France, Italy and Spain without having made an application for asylum in the first place.

Austria, which does count, receives two and a half times as many asylum applications as the United Kingdom in per capita terms. Belgium and the Netherlands receive significantly more than we do. Since the collapse of the Berlin wall, and the first increase in asylum applications that came in that first tranche from the Balkans, Germany has had almost three times as many applications as the UK in the past 10 years.

At Seville, we want member states to push for the faster introduction of a common asylum policy and for tough action against illegal immigration. In preparation for this debate, I entertained myself to some lost tablets—the Conservative party's manifesto for 2001. Those who remember the past year's events will recall that no sooner had the Conservative party lost the election than it excised its manifesto completely from its website. We now have to resort to the old-fashioned methods of paper and ink, printing and books, to find the manifesto. It is replete with claims of a pick-and-mix approach to Europe in which, apart from the single market, there were to be new treaty flexibility provisions. The Conservatives were simply going to impose those on Europe—they ignored the minor difficulty of having to obtain the approbation and agreement of the other 14 member states. Under those new treaty flexibility provisions,

> "Countries need only participate in new legislative actions at a European level if they see this as in their national interest".

Opposition Front-Bench Members are obviously still signed up to that—*[Interruption.]* Well, the shadow Leader of the House remains signed up to that statement, but evidently the other Members on the Conservative Front Bench are not. Some things never change—including the visceral divisions on the Conservative Front Bench and, indeed, the poor taste displayed by the ties worn by the shadow Leader of the House.

Thinking Opposition Members will at least agree that there is cross-party agreement about the need to take firmer action throughout Europe to deal with the problems of asylum and immigration flows that affect all countries in Europe. If we are to do that, we have to achieve a level playing field—to use a cliché—so that we end asylum shopping. We all have to accept the same principal definition in the 1951 convention, but member states operate differing interpretations of the convention and different administrative practices. The only way to deal with that is to have a common policy commonly applied across Europe. That would not and could not have been possible had the Conservatives won the last election and allowed individual member states to suit themselves as to whether they opted in or out of all legislation affecting the EU.

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): While the right hon. Gentleman was rooting around for previous manifestos, did he have a chance to check the 1983 Labour manifesto

[Mr. Michael Ancram]

on which he was elected? Will he remind us of his party's position at that time and tell us whether he still adheres to the manifesto on which he was elected?

Mr. Straw: Not only do I remember almost every page of the 1983 manifesto, but also every page of the 1982 Labour programme which was very much longer and even more at error than the 1983 manifesto. I am surprised that I was not asked about that programme, as it illustrates the infection that had overtaken the Labour party at that time. Happily, the only way to cure such an infection is to pass it on to another party, and the Conservatives have now caught it. On page 79 of that programme, three paragraphs set out Labour's detailed commitment to establish a system of local authority licensing of horse dealers. That was in 1983, not 1883.

I mention that because it illustrates the mindset that infected the Labour party at that time—[HON. MEMBERS: "What about the answer?"] The answer is that I do not agree with what we said then—[HON. MEMBERS: "Ah."] That is the answer; I thought it would have been obvious. The important question is about whether the Conservative party subscribes to a manifesto that is only 13 months old, not about a manifesto written for an election 19 years ago.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): Earlier, my right hon. Friend said that he hoped that, after the summit, we would have a common policy in Europe on asylum seeking and illegal immigrants. I thought that we already had a common policy, and that the problem was that it was not implemented. Is not the basis of that common policy the idea that people have to register their status as asylum seekers in the country where they first arrive? Is not the problem for us the fact that our partners in Europe do not implement that existing common policy?

Mr. Straw: That is part of the problem. However, it is one thing to set out the principle and another thing to ensure that it operates in practice. One of the difficulties that I faced as Home Secretary from October 1997 was that at that time, thanks to decisions made by the Conservative Government during the previous seven years about which I could do nothing, the former gentlemen's agreement on asylum seekers who ended up in the United Kingdom was finished. Under that agreement, if we could establish within a seven-day period that someone had come from France—regardless of the EU country of their original entry—we could send them back. That agreement finished and in its place came the Dublin convention, which has turned out to be a bureaucratic nightmare. We are now seeking to renegotiate it, but funnily enough, that requires the agreement of the other 14 member states.

Mr. Field *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I should tell my right hon. Friend—I shall then give way again—that, meanwhile, under articles 62 to 67 of the Amsterdam treaty, with which he will be familiar, it was agreed, not least on the United Kingdom's initiative by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, that there should be more detailed provisions requiring the introduction of what amounts to a common application of the asylum policy and common rules of procedure.

Mr. Field: I appreciate the fullness of that reply, but during the general election campaign and since, the view of many of my voters has been that the country that offends most against the common policy is France. As the Government are trying to get the French to play on a level playing field, I wonder whether they have considered sending our immigration officials to French camps so that the processing can take place on French soil. The two Governments could then agree on what to do with those people who are not asylum seekers, but are, quite understandably, economic migrants whom we may or may not wish to have.

Mr. Straw: During my period as Home Secretary and under my right hon. Friend the current Home Secretary, we have certainly been ready to send all kinds of advisers to France and other countries. Indeed, there is a great deal of contact between the two immigration and asylum services. I should add that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has already met his opposite number M. Sarkozy, the new Interior Minister, and is due to meet him again next week. I have had a series of discussions with my new opposite number Dominique de Villepin. The new French Administration is so far—it is early days—showing a constructive approach to trying to resolve this issue in a mutually acceptable way.

There is however a difficulty in the proposal of my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field). I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary does not dismiss it out of hand, but the difficulty is that, if we were to process applicants in France, we would have to accept responsibility for them, even though the appropriate country for them to apply for asylum in would be either France, because they were there, or the original EU country in which they arrived if that was not France. They might have arrived in a country further to the east.

I should also tell my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead that, as every EU country knows, even when a decision has been made to reject applicants, the question then arises of what to do about those applicants and how to get them back to the country whence they came. Unless such people were to be incarcerated in increasing numbers—

Mr. Field: They are in a camp at the moment.

Mr. Straw: I understand that, and it is a very suitable camp, too. As I say, I do not rule out my right hon. Friend's proposal. Obviously, all constructive suggestions, including my right hon. Friend's, are being considered by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Will the Foreign Secretary give way?

Mr. Straw: Yes, and then I shall make some progress.

Mr. Foulkes: I thank the Foreign Secretary for the representations that he has made regarding security at the Frethun camp. Will he give an indication of when he expects the French authorities to have adequate security protection at Frethun, so that the disruption to freight services to the continent from the United Kingdom can be ended?

Mr. Straw: I cannot give my hon. Friend an exact time scale, but I can say that my right hon. Friend the Home

Secretary and all other Ministers, and their equivalents across the channel, are well seized of the urgency of taking action. My hon. Friend will be aware that the European Commission has threatened to take proceedings against the French Government for their failure properly to protect the freight terminal at Frethun, as well as to take other action to protect the channel tunnel's assets, and the Commission is quite right to do so. I am pleased that the present French Government have so far shown a constructive approach. I have to say that I found dealing with their predecessors extremely frustrating on this issue, because they did not deliver that which they said that they would.

I ought to make a little progress. The need for the new approach to a common asylum policy and to take tough action against illegal immigration is not about the creation of a fortress Europe. Immigration has made and continues to make a vital contribution to European cultural and economic life. We all now recognise, however, that if we fail to manage the flow of illegal immigration and unfounded asylum seekers, we risk destroying the consensus that we should provide refuge for those genuinely fleeing persecution. As we have seen in recent months, politicians on the far right across Europe have been only too willing to exploit this issue for electoral gain. In response, it is incumbent on us all to deal with the issue responsibly and sensibly.

As I have indicated, we have long recognised the importance of moving towards a common asylum system. Britain played a leading role in framing the action plan on asylum at the Tampere summit in 1999, in Finland, which I was privileged to attend; but the EU has since been unable to achieve many of the milestones that were agreed there almost three years ago. For all EU member states, progress has been slow on returning failed asylum seekers to their countries of origin, and in implementing measures to strengthen the EU's external frontier.

At Seville, we intend to inject new urgency into the Tampere commitments. We must reduce the numbers of illegal immigrants seeking to come to Europe in the first place, return more of those whose claims fail, and tackle the criminality behind this trade in human misery. We need a common asylum policy, a stronger external border for the EU, and a new approach to source and transit countries.

Again, as I have indicated, a common asylum policy would mean uniform standards for receiving asylum seekers arriving anywhere in Europe, and fixed procedures for dealing with those applications. That would prevent asylum seekers from "shopping" for the best point of entry and from making multiple claims in different countries. That also requires a co-ordinated information base and co-ordinated fingerprinting systems to track the claims.

At Seville, as well as arguing for a common administrative system and common standards, we will be calling for urgent action to strengthen the EU's external border. That should include joint work to identify weak points in the current and future external border, and on key transit routes for illegal immigrants into Europe; and joint operations to strengthen any such weak links. That should enable us to target trafficking gangs and track down forgers and transporters.

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): Three weeks ago, I was in Bulgaria with the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. I had discussions with the Interior Minister there. The Bulgarians in particular, because of their location and their potential in a few years to be the eastern border of NATO and the EU, will face great pressures. Can my right hon. Friend talk to his colleagues in Government about strengthening the support that we give to Bulgaria, Romania and other countries in the Balkans on these matters?

Mr. Straw: Indeed, I can. I was going to come on to say that we will also be calling for the strategic use of Community funding to assist countries, especially those on the eastern border—or what is likely to become the eastern border—of the EU. The cost of defending that border in an expanded EU should not fall disproportionately on those least able to afford it.

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): My right hon. Friend has talked about extra Community funding for countries in eastern Europe. Would he consider whether there might be a way in which the Government can provide more support and help for boroughs such as mine in inner-city areas? Not a single person in my borough of Lambeth now has a chance of being rehoused, because every single empty flat is being allocated to an asylum seeker or an economic migrant. Surely the real problem is that we treat our economic migrants much less harshly than France does. No wonder they want to come to this country.

Mr. Straw: First, I will ensure that my hon. Friend's concerns for her constituency are followed up. I happen to be one of her constituents, along with many thousands of others, and if I may say so, she does a brilliant job as our Member of Parliament, and is held in high regard by all her constituents. I am also my own Member of Parliament, but I shall not comment on the kind of service that I receive from myself.

The question of why people come to this country is complex. It has to do with some factors that we cannot do anything about, or do not want to do anything about. For example, they include the fact that English is our language, that our economy is doing better than those in other countries, that the London economy, in particular, is doing very well, and that a quarter of the people in London are drawn from ethnic minority communities of one kind or another. There are a whole range of issues—and yes, we also treat people decently.

In France the number of asylum seekers is, and has been, rising but I accept the case that my hon. Friend makes for taking the pressure off places such as inner London boroughs and south coast resorts. That is one of the reasons why I introduced the dispersal policy, which I happen to think was a relative success.

Mr. Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford): Throughout our discussion of what are, after all, the central issues for this country—the control of asylum seekers, border controls and immigration—the Foreign Secretary has spoken about the essential importance of commonality across the European Union. Can he tell the House what the Government's exact position will be on giving away a little control, in the form of qualified majority voting, on such issues? Does he intend to do that or not?

Mr. Straw: On asylum, the hon. Gentleman will probably be aware that under article 67 of the Amsterdam treaty, the House approved—

Mr. Prisk: What about Seville?

Mr. Straw: Seville is not an intergovernmental conference, so there is no issue of treaty renegotiation. The powers necessary to apply the policy are in the treaties. Under article 67, there is provision by which the Council can move by unanimous vote to qualified majority voting in certain areas of asylum and immigration policy. We wish that to be used for certain areas of asylum policy, but that is quite separate from the issue of whether our veto and our opt-out in respect of our border controls for immigration purposes are maintained. The position on that is absolutely clear. We shall maintain our veto and opt-out for border controls and for normal immigration purposes.

I know that Members on both sides of the House sometimes confuse the two issues, but they should not be confused. They are two very separate issues. One is about the routes of legal immigration into this country, for which we need our own controls. The second is about the routes for illegal immigration into this country and the rest of Europe, and there it is very much in our interests to have a common application of common principles—to which we are, in any case, signed up under the 1951 convention.

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North and Sefton, East): My right hon. Friend said that Britain's economic success was one of the reasons why people wanted to come to this country. On the point about Britain's economic success, may I ask, as one old Eurosceptic to another, whether he agrees that the argument about whether it is right in principle to join a single currency was largely dealt with during the debates on the Maastricht treaty and the Single European Act? It is now a technical rather than a political matter. That being so, does my right hon. Friend agree that in addition to the Chancellor's five tests, it might be a good idea to ask the Governor of the Bank of England to take advice from wherever he thinks it appropriate and advise the Government and Parliament as to when the time might be right to enter the single currency?

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend is a good and old friend—and I may say, between friends, that there was no necessity to drag out my previous convictions in that way. I will draw his views and suggestion to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The Government's position was well set out in my right hon. Friend's statement of 27 October 1997, and that remains our policy as stated.

We must tackle the long-term causes of illegal immigration and asylum seeking, such as the poverty and instability that lead to migratory pressures into Europe. That means the development of an effective policy towards source and transit countries for illegal immigration. Our goal is to strengthen the European Union's partnership with such countries, confronting the problems at the point of origin and, where necessary, providing targeted assistance.

We also need to take more immediate action. We have to make it clear to source and transit countries that co-operation with the EU in this field is of the utmost importance, and that working with us will strengthen their relationship with the EU and create the advantages that they want. As my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary said, we are proposing a positive conditionality. For example, if source countries are prepared to take back their own nationals, many of whom will have valuable skills and experience, then we are prepared to help.

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): I welcome the recognition of the need for a common asylum policy, and what my right hon. Friend says about source and transit countries. Just as we work with countries within the EU, it is also important that we work collectively with countries outside the EU to regulate migration flows. In the respect of framing a common asylum policy, will my right hon. Friend look closely at the experience of previous Italian Governments who have worked with countries in north Africa to develop a three-pronged approach? First, they have worked closely with the security forces in north African countries; secondly, they have accepted a quota of legal migration; thirdly, and importantly, they have provided investment and assistance to help the economic development of those countries to abate the pressures for economic migration in the first place.

Mr. Straw: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend's work on European co-operation. I will definitely take forward his positive suggestion, which is based on much experience of southern Europe.

The EU's tardiness in acting on the Tampere agenda shows that even with just 15 member states it does not act as effectively as it should. Our public wants a Europe that delivers. If we are to meet that demand, the Union's institutional structure must be overhauled.

Britain has taken the lead in the debate on institutional reform. Almost two years ago in Warsaw, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister mapped out his vision of how the EU should develop in the 21st century. In The Hague earlier this year, I set out specific proposals for EU reform to prepare not just for the challenges of enlargement, but for the here and now—for the changes that we need to make now if the EU is to work better. We have to make the Union more effective, more democratically accountable and better understood. We should spell out more clearly for the public what the EU is for, what it is not for, and how it enables nation states to achieve more together than they can achieve alone.

Reforms requiring treaty change will be taken by the next intergovernmental conference in 2004. The IGC will, of course, be informed by the report of the convention on the future of Europe. I am glad to see in the Chamber my right hon. Friend the Minister for Europe, who sits as the Government's representative on the convention, my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart), who is one of the two parliamentary representatives from this House, and the right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory), who represents the official Opposition. I pay tribute to all three for their work, which I know has involved considerable effort. I also pay tribute to the work of Lord Tomlinson, Lord Maclennan, who sits on the convention for the Liberal Democrats, and Baroness Scotland, who is one of the alternates representing the Government.

A key issue before the convention is the presidency of the Council. We believe that we need a more consistent and co-ordinated approach than the current six-monthly rotation allows. We have advocated the appointment of national chairmen for each of the specialist Councils for a longer period of, say, two and a half years. Those chairmen might act as a sort of team presidency to ensure that the strategic direction given by the European Council is properly followed through.

Although the Seville Council, which will take place soon, cannot itself take any decisions on reforms requiring treaty change, we will press for the adoption of several other measures to improve the efficiency of the Council and make the Union more accessible to the public. The Secretary General of the Council, Javier Solana, has made a series of proposals for Council reform and they will be the basis for discussion. His recommendations focus on injecting greater strategic coherence into the Council, splitting the General Affairs Council into a foreign affairs council and then separately into what is called a horizontal council, which co-ordinates across the work of the functional councils, reforming the presidency system, and increasing transparency. That is largely our agenda.

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend's work on the reform agenda in Europe. He will know that when the Prime Minister and Chancellor Schröder wrote to the Spanish Prime Minister on 25 February, they set out 20 points for reform, which they hope will be implemented by the European Council meeting in Seville. How many of those points does my right hon. Friend think will be met at that meeting?

Mr. Straw: I am grateful for the tribute, as well as for the difficult question that followed. I cannot give my hon. Friend an exact figure—[Hon. Members: "Oh."] My excellent Minister for Europe will give the answer in his winding-up speech, and as I know that all right hon. and hon. Members who are here at the beginning of the debate will show proper respect to the Chair and be here at the end, too, there will be no punishment involved in waiting for my right hon. Friend to give that answer. Although I do not have the exact number, I can tell my hon. Friend (Mr. Vaz) that a significant proportion of those 20 points, which are capable of non-treaty implementation, will be agreed at Seville. *[Laughter.]* The mockers will become the mocked. If Conservative Members want the European Union to work better, they should be supporting these changes, including the one that I am about to talk about.

One thing that has tended to jam up the agenda of the European Council of Heads of Government is that it has become a court of appeal for the functional councils. A member state in such a council, facing a defeat under QMV, can effectively veto a proposal by saying that they will take the matter to the European Council where, notwithstanding the requirement in the treaties that the matter be dealt with by QMV, it has to be dealt with by consensus. That means that the agenda of the European Council has become increasingly constipated by items that could and should have been sorted out by a functional council, or certainly—because the treaties say so and because it is sensible—should have been decided by QMV. We support the recommendation—it is one of the 20—that the European Council should adopt QMV for issues that have been subject to QMV in the functional councils.

We also share Mr. Solana's concerns about transparency, and at Seville we will be supporting the introduction of television cameras into councils when they are legislating. Those are important reforms. They tell voters that the politicians whom they elect and can dismiss set the agenda and take the decisions, and that is an important part of the public presentation of Europe. It is not the oft-reviled and misunderstood Brussels bureaucrats who make decisions; it is elected politicians, and so it should be.

Angus Robertson (Moray): I fully support the Foreign Secretary's point about increasing transparency in the Council of Ministers, which will provide access and information and allow the public to understand how European policy is made. Why do the Government not support that within the UK, and reform the concordats covering European business between the UK Government and the devolved Administrations, so that we can fully understand the discussions that take place between Ministers in London, Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast?

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman raises a serious question, which we discussed at some length during the many debates on the Freedom of Information Bill of blessed memory, which is now an Act. It is important to balance transparency against the opportunity to be involved in confidential discussions while alternatives are being developed.

Everybody accepts that argument as it applies to their own party, because parties could not operate if their key decision-making bodies had to work in the full glare of publicity. I dare say that applies to the hon. Gentleman's party as well as to any other. UK Cabinet Government could not operate in that way, nor could the Executives in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland—nor, indeed, could the General Affairs Council, as was pointed out yesterday in its discussions. The natural give and take that is essential if decisions are to be reached, whether by majority or by unanimity, must take place in a rather informal setting. That could not happen if every judgment and every contribution that we made was written down and could be played back against us by Oppositions. This is a matter of balancing the way in which decisions are developed with the way in which they are made formally.

We accept that when we change the law of Europe, and therefore, by definition, the law of individual nation states, that process ought to be transparent and in public. However, if we followed the hon. Gentleman's route, there would not be more transparency and accountability but less, because the real decisions would then be made in informal meetings outside the formal rooms. That would produce the opposite result from the one that he seeks.

Mr. Robert Walter (North Dorset): I am a little worried about the Foreign Secretary's qualification concerning the presence of the television cameras in the Council. He seems to be suggesting that they will be there just for the formal vote, not for the debate, so we will not know what positions various member Governments have taken in the Council in arriving at that decision.

Mr. Straw: The cameras would be there not just for the formal votes, but for the points of legislation. As for negotiations over text, I defy anybody who has had any experience of negotiations over texts to say how having television cameras recording every last detail of the negotiation of texts would assist the process of negotiation. It simply would not be possible. Everybody

[Mr. Straw]

who knows about negotiations knows that to be the case. It would not be possible under a Conservative Administration, and it is certainly not possible under the present Administration. We are not in favour of it.

The case for institutional reform of the kind that I have just described would be clear-cut even if the European Union were forever to be just 15 strong, but it becomes urgent with the impending expansion of the EU into southern, eastern and central Europe. I do not want to pre-empt the decisions on enlargement due later this year, but I hope that the Seville Council will reiterate our commitment to the conclusion of negotiations with the 10 applicants by this December, allowing them to join in 2004.

In Berlin last month I set out the case for a large enlargement. Experience tells us that we need more, not fewer, partners to tackle the issues that concern our citizens—more countries working in an EU framework in the fight against illegal immigration; more resources to defeat global terrorism; and more co-operation to shut down drug and people-smuggling routes.

We have all gained from previous EU expansions and I believe that we will gain in the future. In the 1980s enlargement underpinned the reintroduction of democracy in Spain, Portugal and Greece. It has encouraged growth and mutual prosperity both in those countries and across Europe. For those of my generation, it is worth remembering that 35 years ago Spain, Portugal and Greece were fascist dictatorships. Many of us refused to visit them because of the politics of those countries, but none of us could have anticipated that 35 years later they would be fully active members of the European Union.

Since the accession of Spain to the EU, its trade with the UK has increased by over 400 per cent. Expansion has led to considerable migration, but more from the old member states to the new than vice versa. That makes the point that we must all acknowledge: the principal motor of migration is economic imbalances. As the imbalances between the Iberian peninsula and the rest of the European Union have changed, so migration patterns have changed. The figures for France and Spain are interesting. In 1986 when Spain joined the EU, there were 109,000 Spanish workers in France; by 1994 that had fallen to just 35,000. People went back to Spain for work.

For all EU member states, enlargement should not just be about an historic obligation to reunite Europe. It is also a matter of enlightened self-interest. If we want to deliver economic prosperity, a cleaner environment and safer streets for our citizens, we should embrace enlargement, not postpone it.

Before I close my remarks I should add that, as usual, there will be a discussion of major foreign policy and security issues at Seville.

Roger Casale: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way again. May I draw his attention to the forthcoming report of the Select Committee on European Scrutiny, which will be published later this week, on democracy and accountability in the European Union? I shall not anticipate the findings of the report, but my right hon. Friend will know that part of its remit was to consider the role of national Parliaments. Does he agree in principle that if we upgrade the role of the Council of Ministers and the role of Governments, we should also upgrade the role of national Parliaments in EU decision making? Does he also agree that national Parliaments can be a very good bridge to citizens in terms of involving and engaging them in EU decision-making processes? Will he give his support to any appropriate practical measures that can be considered to improve and upgrade the role of national Parliaments in EU decision making?

Mr. Straw: I answer with an emphatic yes, as I am very strongly committed to strengthening the role of national Parliaments in the decision-making and supervisory processes of the European Union. I believe that that is one of the most important ways of ensuring that the European Union not only stays connected to its electors at an institutional and supranational level, but is increasingly better connected to them. I think I am right in saying that my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart), as a representative of the national Parliament, is on a working party on the role of national parliaments as part of her job as a member of the praesidium of the convention. If I am wrong, I am sure that someone will correct me.

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston): I am chairing it.

Mr. Straw: I was wrong, but happily so. I congratulate my hon. Friend on holding that position.

I look forward to the report to which my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Roger Casale) referred. I hope that the whole House will pay careful attention to the constructive proposals from the convention and from his Select Committee about how we can better insert the national Parliaments into the operation of the European Union.

I now want to deal with two important foreign policy matters. First, the middle east will feature on the convention's agenda for sure. Yet again, discussion about it will be overshadowed by a further terrorist outrage: the suicide bombing that took place this morning. As I left the Foreign Office, 17 people had been reported killed and 40 injured, and it is quite possible that the toll is rising. I should like to place on record our belief about the totally despicable nature of this attack, in which so many innocent people have again lost their lives: the detonation of a bomb on a bus carrying schoolchildren is an act of evil beyond words. I am sure that the whole House will want to join me in sending out our condolences and sense of grief to the victims' families, to those who were injured and to those who are trying to tend to them.

All of us understand the depth of feeling that exists on both sides in the middle east conflict. In our view, none of us should ever seek to justify—indeed, it cannot be a matter of justification—the use of terror against innocent civilians to advance a political cause. Yes, I note that the Palestinian Authority has condemned the attack, but it has to demonstrate to the international community that it is making effective efforts to crack down on terrorism and deal with the utterly evil people who organise the suicide bombers. Yes, they send other people to their death, including the bombers, but they never send themselves to death. They are willing to use the deaths of their own people, as it were, as well as the deaths of innocents on the other side, to seek to advance their cause. The last thing that I shall say about this matter is that their cause cannot be the true cause of the Palestinians. Every time such terrorism takes place, it reduces the support and understanding in the rest of the world for the true cause of the Palestinians—a peaceful settlement of this terrible dispute with Israel.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): In identifying Opposition Members totally with what the Foreign Secretary has said about suicide bombings, may I ask whether he will advise the House during the next few minutes of what his policy and that of the EU is likely to be on the construction of a fence and trench dividing Palestinian land from Israeli land?

Mr. Straw: We had a brief discussion yesterday on the middle east, including that issue. We decided to delay comprehensive discussion, which will probably take place on Friday at dinner, as we anticipate a major statement by President Bush on the issue. Obviously, we will make a full report, or a full report will be made by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on that part of the discussion in his statement on the conclusions of Seville next Monday.

I shall now deal briefly with the other major issue—Kashmir. I set out our position on Kashmir in a statement to the House on Monday last week. Since the resurgence of violence in recent months, the issue has been high on the European Union's agenda. There has been intense diplomatic activity by the EU countries, as well as the United States and the United Kingdom, and Commissioner Chris Patten visited the region last month. I welcome assurances from President Musharraf that he is taking steps to crack down effectively on cross-border terrorism, and I am pleased that in recent days India has taken significant steps to reduce tensions.

I hope that at Seville, EU leaders will underline the need for Pakistan to take visible, decisive and verifiable steps to seal the line of control, to stop supplies to militant groups and help to restrain their violent activities, and to close the militant training camps on Pakistan's side of the line of control. I hope that EU Governments will also support our call for the Indian Government to improve the human rights situation in Jammu and Kashmir, and to ensure that free, fair and inclusive elections take place there this autumn.

Let me now come back to the central agenda for Seville. The EU has now been in existence for 45 years, and the UK has been a member for two thirds of that period, since 1973. It is a political institution without parallel in history, and has rightly aroused huge debate and controversy here and in continental Europe—long may that continue. I am in no doubt, however, that its historic achievement, alongside NATO, has been remarkable. It has secured long-term peace with prosperity across a continent whose previous normal experience was conflict and turmoil. None the less, if the Union is to develop further it has to look forward and respond not to yesterday's problems but to the challenges of today and tomorrow.

The Seville Council is a chance to show European voters that we are determined to deliver outcomes for our citizens within the framework of a Union that can earn and maintain popular support. As usual, we will be working with our European partners to achieve our goals through negotiation, not confrontation. Our experience in Europe shows that by building partnerships and working wholeheartedly with our friends in the European Union we can deliver—we have done, and will do so in future—practical reforms and benefits for the British people.

4.32 pm

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): I congratulate the Foreign Secretary on his choice of debate today, as 18 June commemorates one of the most comprehensive defeats for European integration and the creation of the European superstate—the battle of Waterloo. He may well recall that on that occasion unexpected intervention by one of our European partners helped us to win the day.

Mr. Straw: There is a much more recent anniversary—18 June is the thirty-second anniversary of a victory that the Conservative party wishes to forget. On 18 June 1970, Sir Edward Heath won the election that led to Britain going into Europe.

Mr. Ancram: It is a date that I remember very well, as that was the first time that I stood, unsuccessfully, for election to the House. It is therefore engraved on my heart.

One of the better developments in the six months since we last debated European affairs is the warming of relations between Russia, Europe and the United States. We welcome the new framework of relations between Russia and NATO, which will allow deeper and more fruitful co-operation between the present NATO countries and Russia. Closer ties between Russia and the rest of Europe may lead to greater security but could also act as a catalyst for greater prosperity in Europe and beyond. It was therefore right that the European Union recognised Russia as a market economy.

Also in the past six months, in the Balkans, Serbia and Montenegro have moved peacefully and uniquely towards a new constitutional relationship. Conservative Members welcome President Kostunica's ratification of the new federal agreement between Serbia and Montenegro. Everything possible must be done to help to ensure that Serbia and Montenegro stay on a course of peaceful political development and that the political changes taking place in Yugoslavia are not allowed to stand in their way.

The Foreign Secretary mentioned enlargement. As he knows, we support enlargement and believe that it is one of the most important European developments. Our support stems from our experience in government when the communist bloc in the east finally collapsed, and we made it clear to the peoples of eastern Europe that Britain was their friend. Enlargement is an opportunity to promote peace and prosperity among all the nations of Europe, but it does not come without problems.

Kaliningrad remains a serious problem, and progress on devising suitable arrangements for that Russian enclave seems to have halted. The region already endures enough misery from unemployment, pollution and AIDS without the European Union adding to it by isolating it from the main mass of Russia. We must ensure that that difficult matter does not harm the relations of the Baltic states and Poland with Russia or their economies, nor should we allow Kaliningrad to become a gateway to Europe for crime. I hope that the Foreign Secretary will do all that he can to ensure that that problem is turned into an opportunity both for the European Union and for Russia.

Mike Gapes: The right hon. Gentleman referred to his party's policy of having for many years favoured

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[Mike Gapes]

enlargement of the European Union. Can he therefore explain why Conservative Members consistently opposed measures to introduce institutional reforms such as majority voting, without which effective enlargement would be impossible?

Mr. Ancram: I sometimes wonder whether the hon. Gentleman ever listens to debates in this House, because we have covered this topic on many occasions. Sometimes the Government tell us that the Nice treaty is necessary for enlargement, and sometimes they tell us that it is not. As the hon. Gentleman knows, Nice was about much more than enlargement, and later I shall turn to other matters about which Conservative Members have genuine and justified concerns.

The opportunity that enlargement presents is not guaranteed. Signs of opposition have recently arisen in the European Union, and those reservations must be addressed. If the target of 2004 is missed, many eastern European countries will justly feel that the European Union made promises to them in bad faith, and some may be disinclined to carry on with what is proving a costly and burdensome administrative process. That would be regrettable, and we should seek to reverse that trend.

Time and again we have warned that the current structure of the European Union—the vast, inflexible mass of the acquis—is not conducive to building a wider Europe that delivers the jobs and wealth that its peoples want. Nor does it make accession to the EU easy. It is universally acknowledged that enlargement will be financially unsustainable if the common agricultural policy and structural funding are not reformed. For instance, unreformed enlargement will increase expenditure on structural operations from £20.73 billion to £43.539 billion by 2010. There has still been too little movement towards reform.

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): Does my right hon. Friend accept that the situation is made much more difficult by President Bush's determination to make the American farmer the most subsidised farmer in the world by increasing by 60 per cent. the amount of money that he receives? That undermines the position of those of us who have sought reform in that context in the European Union and does great damage to developing countries.

Mr. Ancram: I share my right hon. Friend's concern, but President Bush's actions will not bankrupt the European Union as could unreformed enlargement.

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): Farming communities in Poland are deeply worried that they could be flooded with cheap, subsidised produce from western Europe instead of benefiting from the CAP. Does not that necessitate fundamental reform of the CAP?

Mr. Ancram: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making the point better than I could have. If enlargement is to work, it is essential to tackle the CAP.

It was worrying, if all too predictable, that the General Affairs Council on 10 June decided to postpone until the autumn talks on the amount of aid to be offered to the candidate countries I am aware that some progress may be apparent in the mid-term, but we face the prospect of keeping to the Berlin budgetary limits only by treating the new states of the European Union as second-class members for their first 10 years while doing nothing to push through the necessary fundamental changes. That is unacceptable.

I hope that the Foreign Secretary will affirm that it is essential that the outlines of CAP structural funding reform are agreed before 2004. We cannot afford to allow the CAP to continue as it is—never at the top of the EU's list of priorities—or to become entrenched by enlargement. That would do damage almost all round.

Roger Casale: The right hon. Gentleman claimed that institutional reform was not necessary for enlargement. Not only the Government but the House said that such reform was important for enlargement when hon. Members debated the EU scrutiny report that recommended it. Every Government and Parliament that I can think of in Europe also believes that. Most important, the applicant countries believe that institutional reform is necessary. The right hon. Gentleman is in a minority. If he does not accept that institutional reform is necessary for enlargement, does he accept that it is necessary for reforming the CAP? Or is he, once again, willing the ends without the means?

Mr. Ancram: I am rather puzzled by that. I said that the Nice treaty was not necessary for enlargement. At one stage, the President of the Commission agreed with that. However, I did not say anything further. Fulfilling the target of enlargement by 2004 is a challenge; failure to achieve it would rightly lead to harsh judgments of the member states' Governments.

The second challenge is that of making enlargement a success. We must ensure that the effect of accession on the new member states resembles that on Portugal rather than that on East Germany. It would pose problems for old and new members if enlargement's main consequence was to encourage a mass movement of workers from east to west rather than a mutually beneficial enrichment of expanded markets for us, and a helping hand to greater prosperity for them.

The Foreign Secretary spoke about the European meeting in Seville this weekend. I was disconcerted by his admission that he was setting off for Seville without being quite clear about what he intended to achieve when he arrived. I look forward to hearing about his intentions when the Minister for Europe has received the benefit of advice and can tell us what his officials have written in the communiqué, if not yet in the Foreign Secretary's brief.

We will watch events in Seville closely this weekend to ascertain, for example, whether the Government believe in a Europe of nations or are determined to lock Britain into a centralised, supranational union. The Government appear confused. In November, the Foreign Secretary wrote:

> "Nation states are and will remain the foundation of international order".

I concur with that. However, a month later, he signed up to a political union in Laeken that would establish a supranational Europe. He cannot have it both ways.

We will also watch for the Government's attitude in the summit to the urgent reforms that the European Union acknowledges it needs.

Mr. Straw: The right hon. Gentleman quoted me accurately the first time, but will he cite the part of the text of Laeken on which he relies, and explain how I signed up to it?

Mr. Ancram: It is my understanding—[HON. MEMBERS: "Ah."] Perhaps hon. Members will listen. The Laeken agreement constituted the first time that political union was stipulated in terms of a treaty. The Government signed up to it. The right hon. Gentleman should check that or take advice so that perhaps the Minister for Europe can clarify the matter at the end of the debate. He will find that I am right.

Mr. Straw: If we are to have effective debate, it is important to present the sources. No one signed up to the idea of a supranational Eurostate; we would not have done that. The Laeken declaration simply sets a rather discursive agenda for the convention on the future of Europe. It contains nothing that could form the basis for the right hon. Gentleman's claim.

Mr. Ancram: Is the Foreign Secretary telling us that there is a difference between a political union and a supranational state? He will have to be a casuist to prove that point.

I return to what I was saying about the second challenge. We shall also watch to see what attitude the Government take in the summit towards the urgent reforms that the European Union itself recognises it needs. We hope that that issue will not be ducked. As we have heard today, the Government have proposed a number of reforms to the European Council. When I first heard some of them, I thought that the right hon. Gentleman was joking.

The Government's answer to the popular feeling of alienation from European institutions is, apparently, to create an even more remote and more permanent presidency. That may bring some short-term comfort to the retirement plans of the Prime Minister, but it will do nothing to bring Europe closer to its peoples. If we look at the sum of the rest of the proposals that we heard about today, they merely tinker with the problem faced by Europe. By contrast, one of the few decent ideas that the Government have put forward—the creation of a subsidiarity panel—is one that they have taken from us, and we are most appreciative of the compliment.

We have also heard that the Foreign Secretary is going to discuss asylum, with which he dealt at some length in his speech. I welcome—along with their seeking a workable common approach—the Government's plans to discuss the implementation of bilateral agreements such as the one that we had with France until 1997. We have been calling for that for the last eight months. A higher level of co-operation between European Governments on asylum is a necessity, and bilateral agreements are one of the most effective ways forward.

The Council will also provide an opportunity to take in hand the Commission's paper on the reform of EU governance. We welcome some of the proposals. We support, for example, the plans to consult sooner and more deeply with interested parties on legislation. That policy is long overdue, and needs to be extended to other institutions within the Union. We certainly endorse the need to simplify and shorten the acquis communautaire. Indeed, we would go further. However, if the Commission can cut it from about 80,000 to 60,000 pages, that will at least be a start. If that had been done earlier, it would have made enlargement easier.

The Commission's proposals on the future shape and powers of European institutions, however, show little understanding of the need for more democracy in the EU. They fail to recognise that the nation states, not supranational bureaucracies, are the fundamental elements of the European Union. Surprisingly, the Government have said that they are "very relaxed" about the proposals. Are they seriously happy with the general centralising drift that has come out of the Commission?

Mr. Foulkes: I want to know whether the shadow Foreign Secretary is serious in what he is saying. Will he remind me which Prime Minister, and which Government, forced the Maastricht treaty and the Single European Act through the House on a three-line Whip and a timetable motion?

Mr. Ancram: It is a pleasure to be able to congratulate the hon. Gentleman on being appointed a Privy Councillor. His voice is no quieter from the Back Benches than it was from the Dispatch Box in his time there. I have to say to him, however, that what we are seeing from the Commission—there is no point in ducking this—is essentially a move further to centralise the way in which Europe works, at a time when it should be moving in the opposite direction. I am alarmed that the Government say that they are relaxed about this, and I hope that we shall hear more about their real view of what is happening.

The Government like to claim that they are constructively engaged in Europe; I think that they used to refer to that as winning for Britain in Europe. As usual, the claims and the reality are very different. The Lisbon process—to which the Foreign Secretary referred in glowing terms again today and which is good for Britain—is badly behind schedule. In some areas, the Government are positively working against the goals of Lisbon. With the active connivance of Labour's MEPs in Brussels, unnecessary, burdensome and costly European legislation continues to flow in our direction, undermining the Lisbon process. The vibrations directive is a good example of such interference from Brussels. Nor did signing up to the social chapter do Britain's competitiveness any favours.

The Government are hardly winning the battle of ideas in Europe. We were assured by the Minister for Europe's predecessor—the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz), whom I am pleased to see in his place—that the charter of fundamental rights would not be legally binding. However, it is increasingly being used in European Court of Justice jurisprudence. That flies in the face of undertakings that were given about its nature.

Mr. Vaz: The language that the right hon. Gentleman has adopted today in respect of the convention that was created to reform the European Union is exactly the same as that used by his predecessor, the right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude), in talking about the European

[Mr. Vaz]

charter of fundamental rights. The charter is not legally binding; all that it is, and will remain, is a set of rights that the citizens of Europe are entitled to expect.

Mr. Ancram: I have not mentioned the convention—I will in due course—and the hon. Gentleman cannot pre-empt what I am going to say about it. I repeat that the European Court of Justice is a European institution, and its jurisprudence now uses the charter of fundamental rights. To describe it as not legally binding is to indulge in semantics. If it is being used by the European Court of Justice as part of its jurisprudence, it is essentially part of the law by which we are being governed.

The Government keenly support the European security and defence policy, but yet again there is a lack of real effectiveness. At Laeken in December, the Belgian Foreign Minister said that the ESDP

> "must declare itself operational without such a declaration being based on any true capability",

and that it was being put into action without being able to deliver. What, therefore, is the point of it? That is a further classic example of the gap between European rhetoric and European reality. As we know, this Government are past masters of such matters.

Nowhere is the Government's drift towards further integration clearer than in the common foreign and security policy. Of course, the benefits of foreign policy co-operation are clear where such co-operation is in all member states' interests. However, attempts to enforce co-operation are flawed and ultimately unworkable, as is any attempt to coerce what is naturally incoercible. Instead, we should be seeking to entrench flexibility, the value of which we saw after 11 September. This Government were realistic about what was required to meet that threat. The Prime Minister helped to build an international coalition that allowed nations to contribute at the level at which they felt happiest. Europe was able to react at different levels of enthusiasm and participation. The attempts of the most ardent European integrationists to seek a common policy—which, on that occasion, would have involved sailing at the speed of the slowest ship in the convoy—were rightly resisted. Various countries had different views on the most appropriate response, so in practice a common line or policy was impossible. The farce of the mini-summits—not least the famously gate-crashed Downing street dinner—also showed that, quite understandably, smaller European countries would not stand for having their foreign policy dictated by larger ones.

Likewise, the varying responses to the crisis in the middle east illustrate that European nations' views on what is the proper reaction differ greatly. I am glad that the crisis will be discussed in Seville, and I endorse the Foreign Secretary's comments on the outrage that took place in Israel this morning. We agree with the Government's current position on the middle east, but in recent EU discussions on this issue, only Germany took the same view. We were in a minority, and if a real working common foreign policy with a single voice had been in place, we might now be imposing sanctions on Israel. Would the Foreign Secretary really have been happy to go down that route?

From the outset, the common foreign policy has been marked by a lack of direction. Much play was made of the EU's decision at the beginning of February to impose targeted sanctions on the Mugabe regime in Zimbabwe. The Foreign Secretary famously described it as "clear, unambiguous and unanimous". So what happened? Just last week, the International Crisis Group issued a report on Zimbabwe. Its author says:

> "Britain and the EU talk tough and do nothing. It's a joke. They threatened Mugabe that if he stole the election they would come down hard on him. Mugabe must be laughing at them".

What an indictment. Yet again, the contrast between the rhetoric of an effective common foreign policy and the reality could not be clearer. If Europe is being tough on Zimbabwe, why are not the targeted sanctions being made to work? Why can prominent Mugabe aides visit Europe? Why are the families of those on the travel ban permitted to visit Europe? The Foreign Secretary will remember telling the House on 21 March:

> "We have taken the action that it has been necessary to take because of the illegitimacy of the Mugabe regime."—[*Official Report*, 21 March 2002; Vol. 382, c. 449.]

That action clearly has not worked, with Augustine Chihuri in France last month and Mugabe in Italy this month. It is a farce. What steps will the Foreign Secretary take to convince his European colleagues to extend the sanctions regime and to ensure that it begins to bite? Will that be discussed in Seville? If it is not, that would be a disgrace.

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): Is my right hon. Friend aware that 8 August is off-the-farm day for all white farmers in Zimbabwe? Does he agree that Seville would be the ideal opportunity to discuss further sanctions?

Mr. Ancram: I agree wholly with my hon. Friend that further sanctions should be discussed, but more must be done. We want effective action from the EU. That is what we were promised in February. It has not happened and a disaster is now unfolding in Zimbabwe. The EU has a role to play and it should start playing it now.

Ms Stuart: I am not clear whether the right hon. Gentleman thinks that we should have a common European foreign policy or not. He seems to be arguing on the one hand that it is not effective enough and on the other that we should not have one.

Mr. Ancram: The hon. Lady should have listened to what I said earlier. I said that there will be times when co-operation on certain matters will be beneficial, and Zimbabwe is an example of that. I want that co-operation to work, because there is no point in the Council of Ministers uttering brave declarations if they achieve nothing. I hope that we will see some effect on this occasion.

In recent weeks, we have seen in the press the chaos that characterises European foreign and security policy. Convention chairman Giscard D'Estaing has called for a common European diplomatic service. That is quite an advance. Romano Prodi wants to push ahead with a single European foreign policy. The Foreign Secretary, in a recent speech, appeared to want to redefine sovereignty better to fit that model. But at the same time we are told that the Government really support the concept of a Europe of nations. Which is it? Whom should we believe? The message is now so unclear and the language so confused that it is no wonder that ordinary people feel cut off from their European masters and are suspicious and mistrustful.

The Europe that we need, and that people in Europe want, is one that is modern and decentralised, that trusts its members and does not constantly try to aggregate more of their powers to itself. We want an EU that is outward looking. We believe that Europe must change in a way that brings it closer to the people who live in it. The idea that seeing Ministers voting on television will achieve that is laughable. That belief in change is now matched by a realisation throughout Europe that the old EU, driven from the top down, will no longer achieve it. Recent referendums and other electoral tests have demonstrated the growing sense of alienation. If Europe is to carry true democratic legitimacy and accountability, it must find a way to reconnect with its peoples. Europe itself has realised the need for that.

For a start, there is now the convention on the future of Europe. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) for representing our parliamentary party so effectively on it. *[Interruption.]* Two Members from opposite sides of the House represented this Parliament. I am thanking my right hon. Friend for the splendid job that he did. I am happy to pay tribute also to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart).

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Denis MacShane): For the splendid job she did.

Mr. Ancram: The hon. Lady may well have done a splendid job, although that might by judged by different lights on either side of the House. At least the convention represents a realisation of the need for consultation in building the future European Union. However, that consultation cannot be narrow in scope or agenda. It must address all the fundamental problems facing the EU today—in particular, the glaring democratic deficit. Early experience, even from a distance, suggests that it will not do so. That is why we need a more fundamental reform and review of how the EU currently works. Such a review is necessary before genuine constructive reform can take place. It must be robust and comprehensive. It must be ready to root out that which is not working, and strengthen that which needs to be improved. It must be ready to revisit and re-examine the directives and treaties that make up the acquis if it is to do the job that must be done. There can be no sacred cows, no no-go areas, no sealed vaults. Anything less would be not just a massive missed opportunity, but an abdication of the chance to deal with the real issues in Europe today.

The EU stands at an historic crossroads. Britain would not benefit from standing aside from the process of change; withdrawal from the European Union would not be to our advantage. We would lose jobs and influence. But this Government's determined pursuit of a supranational union with ever more powers and responsibilities assigned to it is not the answer either.

Our view is clear. It is a view of a Europe that is constructive, responsive, positive and forward-looking; a Europe that seeks to work in partnership with the United States rather than in rivalry with it; a Europe that abandons its current anti-American rhetoric and its unreal aspirations to be a superpower itself.

Europe needs to change to bring itself back in touch with the peoples and Parliaments of the nations of Europe. They are the original and abiding source of its legitimacy. Reform should aim to put them back at the heart of the European Union. Yet even today Romano Prodi has signalled his determination to take more control from EU Governments, and to give the Commission more powers. That is the very opposite of what is needed to deal with the democratic deficit that lies at the heart of Europe's problems today.

We need a partnership of sovereign nations, bound by the single market and the rules of free trade—a partnership that deals at European level with issues best dealt with at that level, such as pollution, but in other respects works at different levels of participation and involvement, tailoring common ventures and aspirations to the national interest and doing things in the way that is best for each nation. We need a Europe that recognises and maximises national strengths constructively.

"Top-down" Europe has failed. We must return to the concept of a "bottom-up" Europe, a Europe that starts and finishes with the needs and aspirations of the people of Europe rather than the ambitions of its bureaucrats. That is the challenge of Europe today. That is the challenge that we are ready to take up. That is the challenge that even France's new Prime Minister, Mr. Raffarin, seems ready to adopt in relation to France.

Our Government are so obsessed with their place and status in the Councils of Europe that they have turned their back on that challenge. We urge them to think again before it is too late.

5.2 pm

Mr. Peter Mandelson (Hartlepool): One area of policy in which we are patently not all Thatcherites now—along with almost every other—is Europe. Today's debate gives us a chance to take stock of the topical challenges that face the European Union.

In terms of the EU's current achievements, I think the smooth and efficient introduction of notes and coins in Europe's single currency suggests that that arm of European integration is on track for success—which is not to say that I think Britain should rush in and join other eurozone countries; I happen to think that Britain's caution, and the Government's caution, is right. I think that the Chancellor of the Exchequer's tests are the right tests to apply to any decision by this country, and I strongly believe that, whenever it takes place, the economic assessment of those tests must be absolutely objective. I for one would not want any other political consideration to intervene and to influence the undertaking of the assessment that will take place some time in the next year.

Mr. Ian Davidson (Glasgow, Pollok): Does my right hon. Friend believe that joining the euro is an essential condition of Britain's being a leader in Europe, and that the question for the Government is when, not if? If he does not agree that that is the question facing the Government, why does he have it on his website?

Mr. Mandelson: That happens to be the view of the Government. I supported that policy when I was a member of the Government, and I still support it. In principle, the Government are committed to joining the single currency. That is a matter of when and not if. The timing will be determined by economic tests and considerations, not political ones.

[Mr. Mandelson]

On the subject of the economic considerations, I cannot resist commenting on what has been happening in the foreign exchange markets in recent weeks. The euro has strengthened somewhat against sterling, which is welcome to British manufacturers, but the financial press has contained much comment that the mighty dollar is set for a steady fall against the euro. If that trend continues, one of the most awkward economic obstacles to Britain joining the euro would be on course to be overcome. The significant point is that, if we were to choose finally to lock sterling into the euro, we would no longer be at risk of doing so at too high a rate. The danger is that, if the rate were too high, and if the euro were then to appreciate sharply against the dollar, that would render us uncompetitive in the US just at the time when we faced a tough task in holding our own in European markets.

Mr. Hopkins: Does my right hon. Friend not agree that the supposed strengthening of the euro is merely another facet of the weakening of the dollar? Are not both the American and eurozone economies in difficulties, with the result that the British economy looks rather strong?

Mr. Mandelson: I do not deny for a moment that the performance and underlying condition of the British economy are very strong. That could strengthen the argument that we should join the eurozone and not stay out of it. However, two things may be happening: the value of the dollar may be reflecting the underlying strength of the US economy, but the market's judgment about the underlying strength and performance of the eurozone economy may be catching up with its evaluation of the euro. Both factors are significant, but the Government's economic assessment must take account of a number of others, and I do not presume to anticipate the outcome of that assessment, or when it will happen.

The value of the single market—and a single currency, which is the sensible and logical extension of the single market—together with the consolidation of peace and individual freedom in a united Europe is the reason why I believe that we should remain on course to admit 10 additional members to the EU in 2004. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has said that negotiations should be finalised in Copenhagen in December, and I am encouraged to hear of his commitment to achieving that.

In the context of those negotiations, Britain is right to press now for a political commitment to reform the common agricultural policy at a future date. If the EU is to make a success of enlargement, deal with the many very serious strategic challenges that it faces and ensure that resources are used properly and for the real benefit of its citizens, reform of the CAP is long overdue. That tough decision must be faced sooner rather than later. However, I am not suggesting that reform can feasibly precede enlargement, nor be a binding condition of whether enlargement goes ahead.

The other week I was speaking in Poland, arguing for a strong commitment to a constructive social dimension in the European Union. It was clear in my discussions with Polish leaders and Government members that this is a decisive moment in Europe's history, not just for Poland but for all candidate countries. If we miss this chance to reunite Europe, it may not come again. I suspect that opposition to membership would be bound to grow in all the candidate countries that we would so badly let down were we to funk this challenge.

Much could be said about the many issues facing the European Union, but I should like to touch on just three—the work of the convention on the future of Europe and the need to strengthen the political legitimacy of the EU; the difficulties created by mass migration, how we deal with asylum and the need to police the EU's border; and Europe's attitude to the rest of the world, particularly its relationship with the United States, which I do not think is being handled in an entirely constructive and happy way.

First, I very much admire the way in which the convention is going about its job. Recently I have had the opportunity, on two occasions, of hearing lengthy presentations from members of the convention, including one of its vice-presidents, Giulliano Amato, the former Prime Minister of Italy. I believe that the convention is asking the right questions and seems to be establishing the right parameters in strengthening the role of national Parliaments and Governments in securing greater transparency and accountability in the EU's operation, without damaging the Commission's essential stewardship of the EU and its ability to work in the interests of all. The Commission has an indispensable rôle to play and I do not need to rehearse the arguments for that. Strengthening the hand of national Governments and Parliaments should not and need not be done at the expense of the indispensable role that the Commission plays.

There are two key points of which the convention should not lose sight in developing its plans. First, we will not achieve the popular consent that is required for Europe to contemplate further integration if we do not devise new mechanisms against unnecessary centralisation in the European Union. Many people talk a great game when it comes to subsidiarity and make a huge rhetorical commitment to it without demonstrating equal commitment to the machinery that is needed to make it a reality. Subsidiarity, and a new political mechanism to enforce it, is not a technical issue. It goes to the heart of Europe's political problems. I am not arguing against centralisation in certain respects where it is appropriate and properly agreed. Indeed, healthier and stronger subsidiarity would do a great deal to legitimise that centralisation which everyone has agreed should go ahead.

Secondly, I strongly agree with my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary that we must find ways to ensure that decision making in Brussels is not only more visible but more political. That is the essence of the case for abolishing the obscurity of the six-month rotating presidency and for having an elected president of the European Council for a significant period. It is not to find a resting home for some, no doubt distinguished, elder statesman—[HON. MEMBERS: "Name him!"]—who may or may not be emerging from first-rate public service in his own country, from whatever part of the continent and at whatever time in the future.

The case is that there should be politicians on the Council who are clearly identifiable and who can take responsibility. People could hear directly from those politicians and would know what they were dealing with, and there would thus be a measure of the politics that are going on in Brussels, instead of the foggy, hazy miasma of bureaucracy that people sometimes have the impression substitutes for effective political working in and around the Commission. That is also the argument for more open voting in the Council of Ministers, even with all the limitations that the Foreign Secretary described, and for rationalising the present bureaucratic paradise of councils, committees and working groups that is as opaque as it is slow moving in bringing the European Union to proper and expeditious decisions and agreements on many and pressing matters.

Behind the reforms is the idea that directly accountable politicians should be in charge of Europe's direction and that they should be seen to be in charge, working in tandem with the motor of the European Commission. As I said, I do not want the Commission to be weakened. It could be strengthened—it could certainly be legitimised—if it were seen to be working in a clearer political framework in the EU.

On migration—the second issue that I want to discuss—the Government are right to insist on the EU facing up to its responsibilities. We cannot solve the problems of asylum, migration and human trafficking simply by relying on our own national border controls. The problems are common for the European Union as a whole and strengthening the EU's common border is an urgent priority. The need will be even more acute when relatively poor countries, such as Poland and others, become EU members in 2004.

Simply lecturing our partners on how they should live up to their responsibilities—as some people on the continent and indeed in this country do—will not work. It is not realistic to say to the Greeks, for example, "You deal with all the boatloads of illegals landing on your islands and solve our problems for us". Our partners—Greece is not the only one—need practical help to tackle human trafficking across their borders. We should be ready to establish the proper working of joint action teams and to use the EU budget to guarantee the security of the EU's common border. The states of the EU, acting together, can be a more effective force in stemming the flow through transit countries, tackling the causes of migration at source and securing an increased number of returns where illegal migrants are shown to have no case for asylum.

This must not become an exercise in feeding people's xenophobia in those countries, and I feel that quite passionately. I believe that addressing those issues—tackling them head on and having a proper debate about them—and formulating balanced and sensible policies is the only way to head off creeping xenophobia in Europe. I do not believe that formulating policies of that kind needs to or should conflict with the liberal and humanitarian values that we rightly uphold, not least because Europe needs some economic migrants to offset an ageing population and, indeed, to supply workers for our public services, for example.

We should be proud, too, as Britons and Europeans, of our tradition of offering a safe refuge from persecution for those genuinely in need of asylum, but I stress that that is an argument for managing our common borders with more efficiency, not for continuing with the present, unacceptable chaos, which is inevitably and rightly causing growing public concern and is a very real political threat not to the left or the right but to our democratic and proper ways of working in Europe, and we have to face up to that.

The third issue that I want to touch on concerns the rest of the world outside Europe. Just to state the obvious, Europe faces considerable threats and considerable opportunities in the rest of the world. The organising principle that governed the international system for many decades following the second world war was, of course, that of the cold war—east versus west, freedom versus communism—and every international problem was seen through that model, through the prism of that conflict. Everyone lined up on either side and the international system was designed to mediate between those two competing blocs and ideologies to find some resolution of international problems and issues—which, more often than not, it did—but the cold war has ended with the collapse of the iron curtain and the Berlin wall, and we need to find a new organising principle around which the international system can revolve.

The organising principle that we now want to create in the post-cold-war era is one of order versus disorder. We will not bring order to any part of the world or to any regional conflict, dealing with any rogue state or integrating any pre-modern or failing state into the international system, nor will we succeed in spreading economic opportunity to the world—redressing and correcting the dark side of globalisation, which is manifested in so many ways and among so many people in different parts of the world—without America and Europe working very closely together.

America and Europe have worked very closely and successfully in sorting out the problems in Europe—we are still doing so in south-eastern Europe, in the Balkans—but Europe and America now have to work just as closely and effectively in helping to sort out problems beyond the European continent.

Mr. Hopkins: I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way again. I agree entirely about the need for a new order and stability in the world. Would he not agree that the post-war world created at Bretton Woods was much more sensible, orderly and stable than the world of global financial markets, which seem inherently unstable and much more difficult to control?

Mr. Mandelson: The world of Bretton Woods was one that we were able to create, operate and manage very well, from which we derived considerable benefits. The world of globalisation is not man-made in that sense, but it will not go away. It is the way in which the world economy is operating, and its rules, what governs it, its demands and the speed at which it brings economic change to all parts of the world—the way in which problems and tremors in financial markets or in certain regions of the world are felt throughout other financial markets and other regions throughout the world—that constitute the world in which we live.

We need to design an international system to manage, cope with and respond to the world in which we live. To state the obvious, we have not succeeded in the post-cold-war world, at least so far, in creating an international system that is capable of standing up to and managing the ferocious challenges that globalisation is creating. I am talking not just about the social and political effects of economic globalisation but about disease, illegal drugs, transnational crime and environmental degradation. Whatever international issue one cares to identify, none will be solved by either

[Mr. Mandelson]

America or Europe acting independently of the other. That is the common feature of the challenges with which we are now faced internationally. International terrorism and weapons of mass destruction are the new and additional threats. My fear is that EU member states are simply not appraising those external threats to our security with the realism and urgency in all cases that those threats demand.

I sometimes think that if the events of 11 September had happened in Europe rather than America, we would still be weighing up the evidence about who or which group was responsible and debating the pros and cons of whether to respond. I suspect that, had those events happened on European soil, the anniversary of 11 September would come around this year without us having acted in response. That is due partly to a lack of will and decision-making capacity on these matters in Europe. Also, however, some European nations—the majority, in fact—are not facing up to the need to equip themselves adequately if Europe is to play the full partnership role with the United States that I would like us to undertake.

It is no part of my argument that we are under-prepared or ill-equipped and, therefore, we should leave the responsibility to America. My argument is that Europe has a very important role to play, and, at the moment, it is punching below its weight. It needs to increase its decision-making and technological capability to an extent to punch its true and full weight as a partner—not as an equal partner, of course, but, none the less, as a partner—with the United States. Clearly, there is a huge technology gap between Europe and the United States. I do not suggest for one moment that we can, would or will close that technology gap. That is unrealistic. At the moment, however, most European nations are barely able to move or even talk to each other in terms of their technological capability, let alone engage directly with an enemy whom we must confront.

We are not lap dogs of the United States. We will have our own perspective on certain issues. At the moment, we take a slightly different perspective on the middle east, where we see a more pressing need for diplomatic and political action in that conflict. We do not seek to rival the United States in its power or world role—that is not realistic—but we share fundamental values and interests with it in winning the war against terrorism, in bringing democracy and human rights to nations and regions where people are denied both and in integrating Russia and China into the international community of nations.

My hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins) touched on the issue of international financial institutions, and we share with the United States the aim of modernising them. We need successor, modernised, relevant international financial institutions to rise to the challenge of the new global problems and the poverty that still blights many parts of the globe. We have successfully to complete the Doha round. Those and other challenges have one thing in common: they are global issues that Europe must address beyond its continent. It must co-operate with the United States in doing that.

I know that the Government are acutely aware of all those international challenges and I strongly commend the approach that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and his team have taken to them. When it comes to dealing with external threats, we must seek to engage the French and the Germans with particular seriousness. The year 2004 will mark the centenary of the entente cordiale—yet another anniversary—so let us plan to make it a major milestone in British-French defence co-operation while, crucially, encouraging Germany to assume its proper share of the ever-growing burden of Europe's world role. We need to do that if Europe is to punch its full weight.

I agree with my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary's remarks that Britain's relations with Europe have been literally transformed over the past five years. We have a position of respect and influence that would have been unimaginable under the previous Government. What do we do with that influence? How do we build it and use it to shape the future direction of the European Union?

In a further response to the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson), I have no doubt that, in the long term, we will need to be inside the single currency—I hope that that will not shock him too much—if we are to maximise the benefits of our position in Europe and strengthen Europe's effectiveness. However, that must be determined by Britain's national economic interest and not by political prejudice—whether the Government's or that of powerful foreign nationals however mighty they may be or appear to be.

Mr. Davidson: Name them.

Mr. Mandelson: No, a thunderbolt would strike the back of my neck and I might end up making a premature—definitely premature for some—return to the Front Bench.

In the meantime, I want to encourage the Government to continue on their present course, maintaining a strong influence for our country in Europe and pressing the case for reform, especially economic reform. The right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) was right to highlight Lisbon. We overlook and shuffle Lisbon, and Cardiff for that matter, to one side at this continent's economic peril. Economic reform needs to take place alongside reform of the EU's working methods and institutions. We also need to forge that necessary and strong transatlantic relationship with America. The interests of America and Europe do coincide, and I strongly believe that that should govern our approach to our membership of the EU.

5.35 pm

Mr. Michael Moore (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): First, may I associate the Liberal Democrats with the Foreign Secretary's comments about the tragic events in the middle east? It is yet another dark day for that part of the world. I welcome the fact that the Foreign Secretary and his colleagues will use this weekend in Seville to focus their minds on that problem yet again. May I also apologise on behalf of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell), who is unable to be here this afternoon? He sent a note to the Foreign Secretary and the shadow Foreign Secretary in anticipation of his absence and hopes to attend to hear the concluding speeches.

This important debate has been good humoured and good natured and many of the big issues have been brought into the open. The right hon. Member for

Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) said that this is a decisive moment for the enlargement process. I agree. I would also characterise it as a time when there is an uneasy atmosphere in Europe. Electorates have been uncertain in key parts of the Union in the past few weeks and some of the big decisions have to be taken when there is not a great deal of room for manoeuvre before enlargement in 2004. The different factors are coming together to create quite a bit of pressure on those who will meet in Seville later this week.

The issues before the representatives are fairly obvious. We are two years from enlargement and massive changes are in prospect as a consequence. Reform of the EU and its institutions was already necessary, and enlargement makes that more critical. Specific policies have been mentioned. Immigration and asylum policies are at the forefront of the minds of many Governments. We would not dispute that the issue is of legitimate concern. However, we are worried that an element of realpolitik has promoted the issue so far up the agenda. It certainly grabs headlines, but it may also be used to obscure other equally pressing matters.

Although that issue may dominate the agenda in Seville, others will probably dare not show their face—the single currency, Gibraltar and Irish ratification of the Nice treaty, for example. The challenge for the summit is to emerge from all the detail in which it will undoubtedly be caught up. It cannot fall into a reactionary trap and ape the right of Europe. It must show leadership.

In recent days and weeks the United Kingdom's position on immigration and asylum has been set out by senior Ministers. The Prime Minister wrote to the Spanish presidency on 16 May urging it to put asylum and immigration at the top of the agenda. The Home Secretary said:

> "If democratic politicians fail to tackle the difficult issues posed by immigration and asylum people will increasingly embrace extremist solutions".

The rhetoric is one thing, but the worry must be that in an attempt to outflank some of the less attractive parts of European politics, we might be seen to adopt their policies too.

These issues are undoubtedly very delicate, and we must be careful. Language like "swamping" and fears about the loss of cultural identity do not tackle the core issues. Just as important, surely, is the inability of Governments to co-operate on cross-border matters when they arise. The form of politics based on the lowest common denominator is depressing and rarely effective, but to have national Governments going their own way cannot possibly be the answer. The failure of the authorities in the United Kingdom and France to resolve the issues of Sangatte should be a warning to us all.

Of course, this policy area is ideally suited to joint working, and the Foreign Secretary set out the history of that from the Tampere summit in 1999. We believe that member states should be prepared to co-operate effectively on immigration and asylum in response to mutual and international concerns. Following the Amsterdam treaty, many of those policies have been developed, but we are still rather stuck where we are dealing with common minimum standards rather than eyeing up the common policy, which could still be a good distance away, although this afternoon the Foreign Secretary expressed confidence that more progress will be made.

Two specific policy proposals have been floated recently. I was glad that the Foreign Secretary chose not to dwell on them. One is for European border guards. Surely there is a huge difference between co-operation and support for existing members or applicant states in securing external borders and the concept of having capped Euro-guards at the frontiers. Perhaps that idea is the product of over-imaginative spinning, but even if it could ever be attractive, it is well ahead of its time.

More important, however, is the other proposal doing the rounds, which is that aid to particular countries may be linked to their acceptance of the return of failed asylum applicants. It was not clear to me from what the Foreign Secretary said whether this is his favoured approach. Do those who propose it intend it to apply to all Governments, including those of the failed states, or only those countries involved in trafficking, where the police force may turn a blind eye? The Government need to remember the reality of the countries from which many of those people come.

We must not allow the rhetoric of the right throughout Europe to influence that decision. As the Foreign Secretary said, the evidence is that asylum applications are levelling off, and their number is half what it was 10 years ago—although from the state of the political debate one would not necessarily appreciate that. Most refugees and people in difficulty come nowhere near Europe. Many millions suffer much more hardship and poverty thousands of miles from the European Union. Cutting off aid to some of those countries as a punishment for their refusal to comply with European standards on asylum seeking and migration would certainly be rough justice, and we seek clarification from the Minister who will wind up the debate about precisely what position the Government will be taking on the issue in Seville and elsewhere.

Asylum and immigration are closely linked to enlargement, another big theme that will, of course, be extensively discussed at the Seville summit. All European mainstream parties support enlargement, but there are undercurrents of concern about the movement of people from central Europe into other countries. Because the political climate in Europe has changed in recent months, we need to be careful that excuses are not found to raise the barrier to entry as the negotiations approach their conclusion. Similar fears were expressed when Spain and Portugal joined the European Union, but the migration did not materialise, although that may not stop some arguing the case.

Enlargement debates will rightly focus attention on many other issues. Enlargement has been a long-held goal of UK foreign policy under both Conservative and Labour Governments and has enjoyed cross-party support. Significant progress has been made in recent months, as we approach the deadline of completing the negotiations by the Copenhagen summit—nine years after the last gathering in that city, which set out the criteria by which applicant countries would be judged. The Spanish presidency has made significant progress, and reports suggest that 80 per cent. of the acquis is now resolved. That is no mean achievement, but we still cannot take the outcome for granted. Questions have been raised in existing member states and, possibly more worryingly, in applicant countries as well.

[Mr. Michael Moore]

Perhaps we are in danger of taking for granted some of the fundamental reasons why we all believe in the European Union. The benefits of strengthening security, entrenching democracy and underpinning prosperity have been the key principles for nearly 50 years. When we worry about the minutiae of agriculture, we may be in danger of forgetting those key principles, even though agriculture as an issue runs the biggest risk of being the block to the successful completion of the negotiations.

Although 80 per cent. of the negotiations may have been completed, we in Europe have developed a tendency to postpone a difficult decision. The finances of the common agricultural policy and how they will apply after enlargement will not be tackled until after the German elections. Likewise, the proposed mid-term review of the CAP as a whole is not to be undertaken until later in the year. That may be understandable and pragmatic, but given that the CAP is the biggest financial issue facing the conclusion of the negotiations, leaving just weeks before the self-imposed deadline makes it tight, to say the least. None the less, it is extremely important that CAP reform is developed and success achieved. When the Minister winds up, it would be helpful if he would say why he is confident that the reform of the CAP and of CAP finances will be resolved.

I mentioned the need for Irish ratification. Since we last debated these matters in the Chamber, there has been an Irish election and Mr. Ahern has been comfortably returned to government—more comfortably than was his position beforehand. We must not lose sight of the fact that when the referendum on the Nice treaty was conducted in Ireland last time round, all the political parties, whether in government or in opposition, supported the proposition, so a stronger Prime Minister may not necessarily strengthen the case.

The worry now must be whether there is a plan B or some stunt that will be pulled out of the hat if the worst comes to the worst and the Irish reject ratification a second time. All the rhetoric suggests that that will not happen. Perhaps that is a way of impressing on the Irish electorate the obligation to ratify the treaty on this second occasion. However, when European electorates have been told recently what they should be thinking or doing, they have had a nasty habit of doing something quite different. The Government must face up to that. If we can get some insight into what will happen if the treaty is not ratified, that will help us all to understand the process much more clearly.

The future of Europe is the tag line for the convention that has been set up to contemplate many of the structural changes that are necessary to take account of the changing face of Europe not only because of enlargement, but largely as a consequence of the difference between a European Union of 15 states and one of 25 states in about two years' time. The Laeken summit set up the convention. Assuming that they catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker, I look forward to hearing from the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart) and the right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory), who have been representing this place at the convention alongside Lord Maclennan and Lord Tomlinson from another place.

Europe needs reform. With enlargement coming along, there is no prospect of sustainable development of the EU unless we have that reform. Some different ideas have been bandied about this afternoon. The Liberal Democrats would welcome an enhanced role for the national and European Parliaments in the reformed Europe, not least in terms of greater scrutiny. I listened carefully to what was said about the Foreign Secretary's bold initiative on televising voting at summits of the Council of Ministers. If the only aspect of this place that could be seen on television was the voting—not that many people watch this place on television anyway—our chances of enlivening democracy and people's interest would be rather limited. Surely, that cannot be a serious answer to the underlying problem.

As a constituency Member of Parliament, I know how difficult it is to seek to influence any debate in the Council of Ministers. This place struggles to have any scrutiny role with regard to Ministers from particular delegations, unless it is through the tabling of parliamentary questions asking the Government to set out their version of events and of what was discussed and agreed. That is a partial process, however, and it is not particularly helpful.

Ms Stuart: I accept the hon. Gentleman's comment that televising the Council of Ministers is only one step. Does he accept that the fact that national Parliaments will know how their Ministers vote, so that, if they do not vote in the anticipated way, they can hold them to account, is a significant step forward?

Mr. Moore: I accept that. In being slightly scornful of the proposal, I do not wish to rubbish it completely. However, the fact that it is being heralded as a great move forward highlights the rather pathetic state of the development of accountability and transparency in the EU.

We are also hearing ideas about team presidencies, on which we are rather short of detail. The Minister has a burgeoning in-tray, but I am sure that he will be hoping to flesh out that proposal as well. Currently, it conjures up only inelegant images of three-legged baton racers, none of whom is quite sure who is in charge at any given moment.

The review of European policy is clearly important for us all at this time. The debate at the convention will be important and I know that many in this House and in another place are trying to follow its proceedings as closely as possible. As a party, the Liberal Democrats are in the process of reviewing our policies in this area, and the Conservatives have even launched a website about the future of Europe. What, then, of the Government? We have seen no White Paper about this major development in Europe; indeed, not even a Green Paper is in prospect. After Laeken, the Government were supposedly committed to launching a great debate about the future of Europe. I suppose we must ask ourselves whether this is it, because there has been very little other evidence of it in the wider country.

Many Euro-barometer polls are used to track attitudes to Europe and many of the related issues. Such a poll has recently exposed the United Kingdom as the least knowledgeable country about the EU and its institutions. Almost a third of United Kingdom respondents said that they knew nothing or almost nothing about EU policies and institutions, and 73 per cent. said that they had received no information about the single currency.

In a message on the Commission website that has been set up specifically to inform the people of Europe about the debate on the future of the EU, the Prime Minister writes:

"we need to ensure that European Citizens feel real ownership of the EU's activities".

He goes on to state:

"the people who really matter in this great debate are not the politicians or the institutions or the academics, but the people of Europe themselves."

Hear, hear to that, but how can people participate in the debate if the Government are not prepared to discuss the issues throughout the country?

Before this debate, I took the opportunity to review the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website to see what it was doing to promote discussion about Europe more widely in the country. One very helpful section states:

"The government has set out its approach to the Future of Europe debate in various keynote speeches".

Particular reference is made to a speech made by the Foreign Secretary on 21 February in The Hague, but a quick examination reveals this opening comment:

"My aim today is not to provide a blueprint for the future of Europe, but rather to ask some fundamental questions".

By any standard, that is not a great start. The Minister for Europe has characterised himself as being in listening mode, and we welcome that, as such an attitude is positive in any Government, but surely calling for the debate is not the same as having it, and now is the chance for the Government to take the lead.

The Laeken declaration set out 54 questions under four headings. It mentioned better division of competences between the institutions, Governments and Parliaments of Europe, simplification of instruments, better democracy and transparency and even the evolution of a European constitution. All those aims are worth while, from simplifying the treaties to opening up the Council of Ministers to some form of public scrutiny. The Government were party to the process that set the questions at Laeken, and in any walk of life, helping to set the questions is usually quite handy when one comes to provide the answers. When can we expect the Government's detailed response? Right now, it is not entirely clear where they think they are taking this country. Surely, the onus is on them to lead that debate.

Mr. Walter: I have been listening very closely to the hon. Gentleman. He has been asking what the Government's policy is, but I was rather hoping that we might hear about the Liberal Democrats' policy on the future of Europe.

Mr. Moore: I am sorry, but I do not think that the hon. Gentleman has been paying quite as much attention as he claims. We are in favour of a great deal of the reform agenda that is currently being discussed, and we think that there is a useful and lively debate to be had about that, but we are also in the process of reviewing our policies. I look forward to having a full debate with the hon. Gentleman in due course. Indeed, I respect the fact that, although his party has developed an interesting quietness about this subject in recent months, it claims at least to be willing to enter into the debate.

Perhaps the issue of the single currency is the reason why there is no wider debate, as it appears that the Government are still rather scared of a full-scale debate on the euro—and that is not the case only because the hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson) will be on the opposite side of the argument. As the right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) restated earlier, the point is that, as Government policy is to enter the single currency, it is all about timing. Yet, every attempt to find out who is doing what, what tests have been met, when we might get a debate and when we might consider enabling legislation leads us into the sand and a reference back to October 1997. That shows very impressive discipline, but it is not very helpful in winning the debate as a whole.

The single European currency has been launched since we last debated European matters on the Floor of the House. As most of us who support the concept predicted, the world has not ended and the sky has not fallen in. Perhaps that will give the Government confidence that they can now take a lead. Modesty in a politician is rare and modesty of ambition in a political party even more so. The former may be an attractive quality but the latter is certainly not. The Government have a real opportunity to take a lead on many aspects of the European debate, but Liberal Democrat Members would argue that so far they are failing to take it.

6 pm

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston): As we have heard, this weekend European Heads of Government will meet in Seville. When they met at Laeken last year, they agreed to the setting up of the convention on the future of Europe. That convention is composed of representatives of national Parliaments from the current 15 members of the EU as well as a further 13 applicant countries, including Turkey. Almost half the convention is therefore composed of people who do not have direct experience of the workings of the EU. Government representatives, Commissioners and members of the European Parliament serve on the convention.

I am privileged to serve on the convention as one of two representatives from the Houses of Parliament. May I reassure the shadow Foreign Secretary that we regard ourselves first and foremost as representatives of both Chambers of the Houses of Parliament? I am also a member of the procedural committee which guides the proceedings of the convention. Our terms of reference are broad, and recommendations are to be made to the intergovernmental conference in 2004. At the end of the second world war, my parents' generation could not have imagined the peaceful progress that has since taken place and the general lack of enmity between the nations and people of this continent. Football matches between Germany and England are serious, but not that serious.

We have lost our way a bit, however. Europe has to take a new direction and needs a new mandate. In considering what it is for, and who does what and why, we could learn from the formation and success of the European Coal and Steel Community. National Governments agreed on the clear objective of bringing together European coal and steel industries. An institution with supranational higher authority was set up with clear responsibilities and accountability for meeting that objective. The institutions of today's EU can be traced back to the ECSC, but too often the supranational institutions of the EU have accrued functions and taken initiatives with no authority but their own inclination to expand. That helped to drain much of the enthusiasm for the EU.

[Ms Gisela Stuart]

That must be put right. Identifying what we are trying to do is a key priority. We must decide what the appropriate institutions are, whether supranational or national, to achieve that priority, and give them the power to carry out that function but no more, then hold them accountable in an appropriate way. We do not have to start afresh, but must clarify areas where individually and collectively the countries of Europe truly benefit from co-operation and collective agreement. Those objectives are genuine, but they are not all-embracing. In too many areas, Europe has encroached on activities which should be left to the control of individual countries.

The convention is necessary because the world has changed fundamentally from the days when the most important objective appeared to be preventing Germany and France from fighting one another. The cold war, which gave western Europe a clear identity and purpose, is over. Germany is united. So what is the EU for? For many, the answer is no longer about ensuring peace but about providing a European answer to globalisation.

The EU is growing. Having started as six member states, it has grown to 15 and will soon have as many as 25, if not 27 or even 28 states. Changes need to be made simply because some decision-making processes will not work with such a large number of participants. Other changes are necessary because the dynamics of relationships have changed. It is salutary to realise that, after the next wave of planned enlargement, member states will include six large countries and one medium-sized one, accounting for 85 per cent. of the population of the EU and almost 90 per cent. of its gross national product.

What do the institutions do and why? In recent years, some EU institutions have lost their determination to act in the interest and on behalf of the union, and have taken sectoral and national interests into account in a manner which has not been constructive. Confidence has been lost in the Commission, the guardian of the treaties. Rather than focusing on their areas of responsibility and enforcing them, the institutions have sought wider powers. Even now, only 60 per cent. of internal market requirements have been implemented. The European Parliament has started to vote in overtly national blocs. The Council of Ministers has not used qualified majority voting to increase its decision-making powers, but QMV has often been used to build blocking minorities.

Do European citizens know how to make decision makers accountable? A number of them have lost faith in many of the institutions and the way in which they relate to one another. When those citizens go to the ballot box in European elections, they do not feel that they are electing a body that they can hold to account, as they do in national elections. Yet the European Parliament has become immensely important in decision making.

Given that assessment of the challenges that we face, what should the convention achieve, and how? We expect to report in spring or summer next year. For many, the real question is where the government of Europe lies. Some believe that we should aim for a Commission elected by the European Parliament. Others argue strongly that political control must reside with the Council of Ministers. We need to address practical questions, such as whether the six-monthly rotating presidency is sustainable. Some countries have argued that the Council of Ministers must become much more strategic, making decisions based on a longer-term view than the six-monthly rotation, and that there are far too many sectoral councils.

Those questions are extremely valid and important, but there is a danger that we may make a big mistake in focusing on institutions rather than their functions. Before we even begin to look at who should do what, we must ask what should be done. The convention has set up several working groups to look at some issues in greater detail. I chair a group which was asked to look at the way in which the role of national Parliaments is exercised in the current EU architecture; which national arrangements function best; and whether there is a need to consider new mechanisms or procedures at national or European level. The group will meet for the first time next week, and we hope to report in October or early November. I do not want to pre-empt its conclusions, but I shall draw the attention of the House to one area that we will consider in detail—the scrutiny of European legislation.

The House of Commons, compared with the Parliaments of many other European countries, has a proud record of scrutinising EU legislation and proposals. I recommend that Members read the 20th report by the Select Committee on European Scrutiny for the Session 2001–02; it addresses many of the issues to be tackled by the convention working group. I assure Members that we shall take its observations into account.

Angus Robertson: As the only member of the European Scrutiny Committee in the Chamber, may I ask whether the hon. Lady agrees with me and other Committee members that the House's position would be greatly enhanced if the scrutiny reserve was not breached by the UK Government so often? The UK Government should not enter into so-called provisional or political agreements, thus circumventing the scrutiny role that the Committee is supposed to have.

Ms Stuart: I am not a member of the European Scrutiny Committee; I am a member of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs. I do not necessarily agree with the hon. Gentleman's basic assertion. However, time scales for decisions are sometimes so short that the European Scrutiny Committee does not have enough time, which again raises the need for the Council of Ministers to work in a far more strategic way. At the moment, six-monthly breaks mean that there is a sudden hurry at the end and things are rushed through, which is not helpful. I would not blame any single institution, but the co-ordination between them must be improved tremendously to allow proper scrutiny at various levels. However, I shall deal later with more far-reaching problems to do with scrutiny.

Mr. Walter: I note what the hon. Lady says about comparing our scrutiny procedures with those of other national Parliaments. Earlier in the debate, we talked about transparency. Does she think that the European Scrutiny Committee would be a more transparent body if it conducted its affairs in public rather than in private?

Ms Stuart: The European Scrutiny Committee conducts many of its proceedings in public and issues reports. It is almost a reflection of the number of Members in the House that although we have all these Committees, there is insufficient engagement properly to scrutinise. A small number of Members do tremendous and significant work, and the House of Lords does good work too, but the system is not broad enough to allow many to take part in it.

My real argument concerns not so much procedure as the fact that scrutiny often occurs after the event. To put it at its bluntest, national Parliaments rank pretty low in the food chain of political decision making. One official recently told me that the system is an excellent burglar alarm—it tells one that one has been robbed, but there is nothing one can do about it. National Parliaments should be involved at a much earlier stage. One of the problems that we face is that on the European level we are fairly unusual in recognising Parliament as an institution in its own right which needs to be defended as such. In some ways that is our strength, but our weakness is that the House, unlike the political parties and the Government, has no way of arriving at an opinion. The European Parliament has methods of doing that, but we do not.

Mr. Hopkins: I am most interested in my hon. Friend's thoughtful speech. Will she comment on the Commission's recent suggestion that it would wish to see national Parliaments' Budgets to vet them before they are seen by the Parliaments themselves?

Ms Stuart: I promise my hon. Friend that I shall deal with that when I come to my point about the Commission.

When the working group on national Parliaments was first set up, several voices in the convention said that it was a pretty pointless exercise—why should we discuss the role of national Parliaments in the EU architecture, as national Parliaments are represented by their Governments? That demonstrated a fundamental misunderstanding. Although the two things are sometimes the same, Parliaments have a voice to be heard. Laeken made a tremendous break with tradition, in that the convention represents the first time national parliamentarians have been drawn into a process of drawing up proposals for treaty changes. There has been consensus, and the working group made a significant contribution to that.

Some people expressed concern that establishing a working group on national Parliaments would set us up in competition with the European Parliament. I do not want this to be a competition—it should be a constructive relationship that allows national Parliaments to fill some of the gaps in the powers of the European Parliament. One of my Italian colleagues in the convention put it succinctly when he said:

> "MEPs have power without a face, and National Parliaments have a face without power."

He was acknowledging that many people relate more to national parliamentarians, who do not have a voice in European-level decision making. I want the European Parliament and national Parliaments to learn to work together, not against each other.

In this House, changes will be required if we are to reach a point where we can arrive at a view. The House authorities have made changes, and I thank my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House for amending Standing Orders so as to allow for convention representatives to be questioned in public hearings by Members of both Houses. That is a tremendous innovation that will assist the debate. It also goes some way to addressing the concerns raised by the hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore), who asked where the debate is going on. In this House, the debate is already quite extensive. Convention representatives have given evidence to Select Committees, and we are going to Northern Ireland on Thursday to talk to Assembly Members. There is debate, but it does not always the hit the newspaper headlines.

Mr. Moore: I take the hon. Lady's point. It reinforces her earlier comments about the difficulty of achieving consensus in this place. My point was that the debate in the country as a whole needs to be kick-started, and that is where the Government have a key responsibility.

Ms Stuart: It is always easy to say, "What are the Government going to do about it?" When I went to a church service in Aachen for the Charlemagne prize, which took place on one of the Catholic high feast days, I was struck by the fact that the main speech was devoted to wishing the members of the convention on the future of Europe well. That showed the extraordinary difference between public perception and the debate that goes on in mainland Europe and the extent to which the media, for example, are interested in the convention's work. I regularly get phone calls asking me what I think about Giscard d'Estaing's hotel bills, but no one wants to know anything about the details of our work. That is one example of an area in which the Government can try to do something, and not be able to do it.

I want to turn to two specific proposals that I hope the working groups will consider. First, rather than focusing solely on legislation that has already been decided on, national parliamentarians should be involved at a much earlier stage. I see no reason why it should not be possible for the Commission to come to national Parliaments to outline its proposals. That would give an early indication of the kind of legislation that is being planned and allow national Parliaments to respond at the formative stages. I want to stress that the Commission should come to us: we should not have to go to Brussels.

Angus Robertson: The hon. Lady will be aware that about 80 per cent. of the remit of the European Union involves shared competencies with devolved institutions, notably that of Scotland, which has legislative rights. Is she in favour of the Commission undertaking pre-legislative consultation with parliamentarians in Edinburgh, as well as those in the UK parliament?

Ms Stuart: That is one of the interesting questions that will be addressed not only by the working group on national Parliaments, but by the working group on subsidiarity. We must be clear about how we deal with bodies that have legislative power. I look forward to Members of the devolved Administrations contributing to that process. However, the main point is that the Commission should come to Parliaments to close the circle, because at the moment it is a line that goes straight down. I am delighted that the European Scrutiny Committee intends to make scrutiny of the Commission's annual work programme an important part of its own programme.

[Ms Stuart]

My second point comes back to the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins) about the Commission's scrutiny of budgets. The process should be two-way, not one-way, traffic. I would find it difficult to be persuaded of the merits of my hon. Friend's case, but I am prepared to listen.

If we accept that the problem is one of a lack of clear delineation of responsibilities within the EU architecture, the question of who should police subsidiarity becomes increasingly important. Subsidiarity should be determined neither by the courts alone nor by politicians alone. There will always be issues where reference to the courts is right and proper, but in respect of many, if not most, subsidiarity is a political question, and national Parliaments should play a much more significant role in making decisions. I do not propose for one moment that we should give individual Parliaments the power of veto. However, if several Parliaments conclude that a certain EU-level proposal breaches subsidiarity, it should be taken to the Council of Ministers for a clear and open decision on whether it should be determined at national or European level.

Those are just two aspects of the working group's deliberations. All background papers for the groups are available on the convention website, and any Member who would like details can obtain them from the regular reports to the House that are issued by the two representatives of the House and are available in the Vote Office. I should be grateful for any comments from colleagues, which I will feed into the groups.

We face the paradox that all institutions in the EU architecture need to be strengthened. They need to be clear about their functions and to focus on implementing their mandate. Strengthening one institution is not enough. It would be possible to reorganise the functions of the Council of Ministers, yet continue to do too much at EU level. We can learn from history. We should consider the reason for the success of the Coal and Steel Community: it had a clear mandate, which it pursued.

The convention will be successful if our proposals allow citizens to obtain an answer to the following questions. Who does what in the EU? To whom are those who make the decisions democratically accountable? I would also argue that we must sometimes ask how we can get rid of those who made the decisions.

Roger Casale: I am sorry that I missed the earlier part of my hon. Friend's speech, but I am delighted that she is speaking in the debate, that she is the chair of the working group on national Parliaments and that she is championing their cause in the convention. I welcome her remarks about national Parliaments and I am pleased that she has received a paper from me about their role. I look forward to her comments on it.

Before my hon. Friend moves on, let me take her back to her point about the scrutiny of European legislation here. The European Scrutiny Committee has published its report, to which she may have referred. Does she agree that we need an additional mechanism apart from the Select Committee system and Standing Committees for EU scrutiny? The European Scrutiny Committee's report proposes a European Grand Committee, which would perhaps meet in Westminster Hall and debate matters such as the Commission's work programme and the EU budget. Another important—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must realise by now the difference between an intervention and a speech. That was far too long. He is taking time that he may need later.

Ms Stuart: Thank you for that protection, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I read my hon. Friend's paper on the role of national Parliaments with great interest. We agree on many ideas. However, I should be reluctant to propose the establishment of yet another institution. We need to consider existing institutions much more closely and I am tempted to suggest that we should have fewer, more strategic and co-ordinated bodies. The key to achieving that is making the Council of Ministers move away from changing its priorities every six months towards taking a longer-term, more strategic view. That will have consequences for its organisation, but I believe that it may be crucial.

The first 50 years of the European Union have been a tremendous success, which we have consequently forgotten to express. We simply focus on its failures. The convention must try to ensure that we leave our children a structure that allows the success to continue. The current honest debates highlight various shortcomings. That should not be interpreted as showing that the EU is not a success. However, the shortcomings exist and we have a huge responsibility to make the EU continue for our children and serve them as well as it has served us.

6.23 pm

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart), my co-member on the convention on the future of Europe. We have eaten several lunches for our country as we jointly tour the embassies and working groups here and abroad, trying to generate interest in the convention and pick up ideas so that we can better discharge our function. The difference between us is probably one of emphasis, because I agree with many of the hon. Lady's comments about the enormous task that faces the convention. My diagnosis is perhaps more radical. I believe that the European Union faces a democratic crisis—and I shall try to justify that phrase.

The European Union is essentially technocratic. It was built up over more than 40 years on a French model, which is statist and centralised. When challenged, it justifies itself by reference to the past, especially the second world war. However, that ended nearly 60 years ago, and the European Union is now curiously old-fashioned in many ways. It retains a bloc mentality and is not fitted for the reality of modern markets, or, more importantly, the principle of self-government. It operates on a top-down principle.

The Commission retains a monopoly on initiation. That is slightly paradoxical, because it opposes other people's monopolies and tries to prevent others' monopolistic activity, but jealously guards its monopoly on initiating legislation. Three weeks ago, it published a paper for the convention in which it advanced the case for radically new policy powers on foreign affairs, security—including defence—and the economy, including budgets and taxation. Today's press states that the Commission wants to reform itself—apparently without treaty sanction—into an internal cabinet. It therefore views itself as a Government in waiting, not as a secretariat or administrative body that carries out the instructions of member states or national Parliaments.

Further down the chain, the legislation is decided in Europe by an opaque and often secretive bargaining process between the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament. National Parliaments have no genuine input into that process. We have scrutiny rights, and Committees struggle heroically with the torrent of legislation, directives and regulations from the European Union. By and large, we simply have to accept what Brussels produces and implement it in law.

I agree with the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston that we are at the end of the EU food chain. We are the plankton of the European system. That is unsatisfactory, and I hope that the forthcoming report from the European Scrutiny Committee deals with that and tries to put Parliament back in the driving seat earlier in the process. Nobody, including Ministers, currently has any idea about what is happening.

Let us consider the example of the fridges directive, which attempts to deal with harmful gases from old fridges. The Minister for the Environment got into a dispute with the Commission and said that it had let him down badly, and did not keep him informed. Consequently, we have a fridge mountain. I wrote to the right hon. Gentleman on 28 March to sort the matter out, or at least obtain some clarity about the position. I still await his reply. The Minister for the Environment has hundreds of civil servants to advise him, but if he does not know what is happening, what are the public to make of it all? What do the small traders, the officials in local government and the people whom we represent make of the blizzard of obscure and technical regulations?

We should have debated such matters here so that we could examine the costs, the necessary trade-offs, the feasibility and the obligations for the public, business and local authorities. We should have done that before the European process started.

The Foreign Secretary, in opening this debate, said that the problem could be solved at least in part by more transparency, and by having television cameras in the meetings of the Council of Ministers. That is essentially a gimmick. In fact, the alert and informed viewer might want to know what the Council was doing, right at the start of its proceedings, when it passed all the A-points without debate or comment. Those are the points that have been decided not by the Council but by COREPER, the Committee of Permanent Representatives, without any input from Ministers or from this House.

If we went further down into the belly of the whale, the viewer might also want to know about the working committees of the European system. These are the advisory committees, implementing committees and managing committees that take many decisions; by some estimates, they take the majority of decisions. At risk of spraining my wrist, I have examined the latest volume—volume 45—of the budget this year, which lists these working committees. There are 496 of them, they produce no agenda or minutes, and they sit in secret. This is the reality of Europe, and the problem will not be solved by having some President at the top who is elected for a certain number of years.

Angus Robertson: In a similar vein to the comments of Labour Members about engagement with the democratically elected Parliament and Government of Scotland, which deals with the overwhelming majority of issues relating to shared sovereignty with the European Union that affect Scotland, I would like to point out that only 2 per cent. of working groups have been attended by Scottish Executive officials, although the vast majority of issues are devolved. Does the right hon. Gentleman think that that is too much, too little or about right?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I have offered, as has the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston, to visit Edinburgh and Cardiff to hear more about how we can repatriate some of this decision making back to the United Kingdom—and, possibly, under a form of devolution, back to the other parts of our kingdom. Indeed, we are going to Northern Ireland later this week, and I hope that we shall be able to give the hon. Gentleman a further and fuller answer after we have done that.

I am glad that the Minister for Europe has picked up on the point about the comitology process—a phrase that does not mean much to our constituents—involved in implementing decisions. He has said that he finds the process opaque and cumbersome, and that it needs review and reform. I have to say that it needs much more radical surgery than is apparently being contemplated by the Government.

I agree with the hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore) that the Government have not yet produced any real proposals either for the convention or for the subsequent intergovernmental conference, to inform and stimulate a national debate. The Prime Minister relies far too heavily on his new-found friends Mr. Berlusconi, Mr. Aznar and Mr. Chirac, possibly to be joined by Mr. Stoiber. This emerging conservative alliance in Europe may be important, but it cannot be a substitute for a real attempt by the British Government to address the democratic deficit.

I am sure that at the end of this process, we shall be offered a simplification of the treaty provisions. We shall also be offered a constitutional text and, probably, some sort of pruning of the legal instruments, which number more than 20. That will not do the trick, however, because slimming down and simplifying an organisation does not, of itself, make that organisation democratic. Nor does it deal with the burden of the past. Here I must mention the acquis communautaire, which comprises the accumulated laws and regulations of the European Union that have built up over the past decades. A modest estimate is that it now runs to 85,000 pages.

The Opposition leader in Malta told me recently that his country had been sent 1.5 million pages of laws, regulations and explanatory texts, which it must introduce into its domestic legislation to qualify for membership. I have suggested that there should be a working party on the acquis communautaire to try to slim it down, but that is an heretical thought. It is seen as advocating a retreat for Europe, but frankly, we have to find a reverse gear as well as a forward one. Otherwise, we shall be not only

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keeping on the statute book a volume of legislation that is incomprehensible to the public, but placing a most unfair burden on the applicant states.

Mr. John Baron (Billericay): Is my right hon. Friend aware that whereas the Lord's prayer runs to something like 60 words, and the American declaration of independence to about 350, the EU directive on the import of caramel and caramelised products runs to something like 25,000?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My hon. Friend is quite right. I saw a letter in *The Daily Telegraph* recently which said that the regulations on the export of duck eggs run to more than 26,000 words.

What are we doing to these small countries? Let us take Estonia as an example. It is now free of Soviet domination, and negotiating to join the European Union. We are imposing on it a common agricultural policy. At the moment it has a free market in agriculture, but while we are trying to reform the CAP at home, we are making Estonia comply with an agricultural policy that we are imposing on it as part of the accession negotiations. More than that, Estonia is having to raise its external tariff as part of those negotiations. Imagine what that will do to the poorer countries to the east of Estonia, such as Belarus and Ukraine, all of which will now have to surmount a higher hurdle to continue to export their produce to Estonia, if and when Estonia becomes a member. Estonia also has to take on the full burden of the acquis communautaire.

Many of those countries in eastern Europe have weak administrative and legal systems, and I doubt whether, in practice, they will be able to comply with this volume of obligation. This has, of course, triggered a reaction. Reference has been made in this debate to Poland, which is already suffering as a result of European Union export subsidies. That has done enormous damage to Polish agriculture, but Poland is now being told that it will be a second-class member of the European Union, and will not even qualify for the agricultural support enjoyed in western Europe. It would not, therefore, surprise me if Poland eventually decided, for that reason and others, not to join. That would be a tragedy, because we must reunite Europe.

The essential mistake is to suppose that reunification of Europe requires a single organisation with an enormous volume of regulations and laws. It would be far better to reform the European Union into a Europe of democracies, and to welcome all the applicant countries into a looser common European structure, without their having to surmount all those enormous obstacles to qualify for membership.

I have asked for a working group on the economic future of Europe, too, because all our political and social dreams for our continent depend on a successful economy. However, we are losing ground in the world economy. We are over-regulated and our competitiveness in those wider markets is under attack, so I have suggested to the convention that we take evidence from outside the European Union. The EU is seen by many, particularly those in developing countries, as a rich man's club. It has higher peak tariffs than the United States or Japan, and launches more anti-dumping measures against developing countries than any other trade block. Our claim to be the friend of the world's poor and disadvantaged therefore rings fairly hollow.

I am afraid that the very strong integrationist momentum in the convention means that the supposed solution to any of these problems is always more Europe. The hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz), who is in his place, repeated the bold claim that the fundamental charter of rights will remain a political document, and will not become a legally binding one. However, that proposition is under attack in the convention; it is almost certain that the charter will be incorporated as legally binding. If, having left office, the hon. Gentleman is still so confident of that claim, it would be interesting to hear from the Minister whether the Government intend to hold out in all cases against incorporation of the charter.

Mr. Vaz: I have every confidence that the right hon. Gentleman will use his position in the convention to ensure that the charter remains something that is not legally binding.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I shall be the last man standing in that particular contest—but I need allies, particularly the Minister, from among the other delegation members.

Angus Robertson: On the question of allies, I am keen to learn a little more about the convention's workings, and about which colleagues the right hon. Gentleman is working closely with. For example, is he in alliance with Jens Peter Bende, who holds regular meetings with the convention? Which political parties from other countries attend those meetings? Do they include the party of Slovakia's Mr. Meciar, or that of Austria's Mr. Haider?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I am a member of several different groups and alliances, some temporary and others shifting. Obviously, I am a member of the national parliamentary meeting, and I regard myself as having a particular duty to protect and advance the interests of this House. I am also a member of the United Kingdom delegation, which holds meetings, and of the European People's party. I do attend meetings organised by Jens Peter Bende, who heads an informal forum, as he describes it, consisting of a rainbow alliance between left and right—an alliance that is to its advantage. I do not know whether a formal membership list exists, but I can confirm that the Austrian Freedom party does not attend those meetings. The great advantage of the forum is that, like me, it puts democracy first. To do otherwise would be to build on insecure foundations.

It is no good advancing the proposition that Europe should do more, get bigger, spend more and have more missions and objectives, unless we secure at its foundations democratic consent from the people whom we represent. At the moment, that consent is lacking. I believe that electorates are trying to send us a message. The sad fact is that people do not vote at all, or they vote unexpectedly, and often for rather nasty people.

If people feel that they are not being offered genuine choices in elections, they express that feeling—as they did in the first round of the French parliamentary elections—by voting for extremist parties. Turnout in European

Parliament elections has fallen. Despite the fact that the European Parliament has been granted more powers in the last two treaty changes, turnout in this country was less than a quarter, and less than 50 per cent. throughout the European Union. Although the European Parliament has more to do and takes more decisions, fewer and fewer people feel properly represented by it.

Through referendums, people deliver snubs to the European elite. Switzerland voted no to joining the European Union, Denmark voted no to the euro, and Ireland voted no to the Nice treaty. That is not a very good record for the integrationists, but it seems not to have slowed down or altered their ambition. I again appeal to the Government, and the Minister in particular, not to continue to try to persuade the Irish to change their minds. It creates great cynicism in Europe when an electorate vote no only for the European Union to come back for another opinion.

The impression is gaining ground in Ireland that the EU will continue to shake the Irish electorate until it gets the right answer. Such action is completely unnecessary. The Nice treaty is not necessarily about enlargement. The provisions necessary for adjusting the institutional balance, and the voting in the Parliament and the Council, could be removed from the treaty and put into the accession treaties. That is what happened last time—and I know because I was there: I was the Minister who negotiated the accession of Austria, Finland and Sweden.

If those provisions were removed from the Nice treaty, the rest of it could be quietly forgotten, or swept up in the deliberations of the convention and the 2004 intergovernmental conference. A perfectly good solution exists, therefore, but instead the European Union seems obsessed with bullying the Irish electorate until they change their minds. That should act as a warning to us in any referendum on the euro. If we make the mistake of saying yes to the euro, the matter will indeed be all over; but if we say no, will that be the final decision? We need to know the answer from the Government before we proceed much further.

I am extremely worried about the lack of democracy in Europe. It is expressed in several ways, and electorates are trying to send us a message. However, I do not want to end on a negative or unduly pessimistic note. A solution does exist: we simply need to apply a little political science. Where do people feel democratically represented? At the level of their nation state, surely. It is at state level that public opinion, a single electorate and a demos exist. It is at state level that people elect, reject, dismiss, make changes and choices, and see the results of their decisions. We have a working democracy, which is replicated throughout the EU at member state level. However, such factors are absent in the European Union. There is no European Union demos, and it cannot be created artificially by waving an EU flag, or passing EU laws. It may evolve over decades—perhaps even centuries—but it does not exist at the minute.

Of course, the European Union, and in particular the Commission, are trying to develop a European people and a European mode of thought on an accelerated time scale. Today, the Bruges group has published an interesting document on the taxpayers' money that is spent on funding the European movement, policy centres, endowing university chairs, training journalists, and providing schools and schoolchildren with information on the EU that has a strong integrationist slant. We are paying for that. According to the document, the education material, at least, breaches the Education Act 1996, which tries to prevent the circulation of such partisan material.

Such efforts will fail. I object to them because they are wrong, they are an abuse and they are corrupt—but they will not create the conditions for a supranational democracy in Europe, either. The only solution is to return powers to member states so that issues can be argued and decided at the level of democracy in which most people engage. For issues that must be decided internationally or on a Europe-wide basis—such as cross-border and trade issues—the procedure must be spelled out clearly in a treaty text and must provide for the full involvement of the parliaments of member states. That is the prime task of the convention. If we fail, the EU will fail. If we succeed, we may have a second chance.

6.51 pm

Mr. Ian Davidson (Glasgow, Pollok): I note that this is not one of our best attended debates—and not just because I have risen to speak. This subject has not commanded the interest of the vast majority of our colleagues because it has not commanded the interest of the vast majority of our constituents. In such circumstances, it is clear that little enthusiasm is felt for a decision to abandon control over our economic affairs or to lose our currency without compensating gains. If the Government have a referendum without having built enthusiastic support, they will lose. In that referendum, many people will take the opportunity to kick the Government. As a friend of the Government, albeit a critical one on occasions when they deserve it, I hope that they will recognise that a referendum cannot be won before the next general election and should not be held. They should make an announcement accordingly.

Trust in politics has been damaged over the past few weeks and days by recent events and the spin and counter-spin. Because of the excesses of spin and the reduction of trust in politics and politicians, we are now less likely to have a referendum. How ironic it is that a key part of the new Labour project has been derailed by the excesses of new Labour practices. Various phrases about reaping and sowing spring to mind.

Three issues divide the House and the British electorate. The first is whether people are for or against the Labour Government, the second is whether they favour British membership of the EU and the third is whether they favour Britain joining the euro in the short term. Only a few hon. Members have been prepared to raise their heads above the parapet and make clear their views on those issues. It is also clear that Labour Against The Euro is the only group that is in line with the majority of the British population on those three issues, being generally supportive of the Government, generally supportive of membership of the EU and generally opposed to joining the euro in present circumstances.

I hope that my colleagues will see the error of their ways and recognise that a referendum would be inappropriate at present. As for those on the Opposition Benches who do not presently support the Government, we have some vacancies remaining on our Benches. For

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some, we are full up, but if Opposition Members care to apply to me personally I will give them my view on whether we will accept them.

Mr. Vaz *rose*—

Mr. Davidson: My hon. Friend can stay. I am even prepared to let him intervene.

Mr. Vaz: I was not applying for membership of my hon. Friend's club. The Government's position is not that we should have a referendum now but that we should have an assessment of the five economic tests at an appropriate time and then have a referendum.

Mr. Davidson: Some people believe that, and I shall say more later.

One of the more attractive elements of new Labour's appeal at the general election and before—to me and to others—was its claim to be leaving dogma behind in favour of what worked. I welcomed that as a change from our enthusiasm for privatisation and the involvement of the private sector in public services. However, we now see an ideologically driven commitment from many in new Labour to the EU and the euro, irrespective of the reality of the position.

Many hon. Members, and those who have left Parliament, have been ideologically committed to the EU irrespective of the objective realities. However, that position was not ignoble for those who grew up and had their formative experiences in the period immediately before and during the second world war. To be in favour of a united Europe that would banish war in those circumstances is a respectable and honourable position. However, we sometimes fail to recognise that the war started more than 60 years ago. Those of my colleagues who are still trapped in that mindset should reflect that the world has moved on.

I regret that some people whom I respect have failed to move on and recognise that the world is now, paradoxically, a bigger and a smaller place. We should have links that go wider than only with our neighbouring countries in Europe. Those of us who take the same view on the euro have been described scathingly as little Englanders. I am prepared to accept that I am vertically challenged, but I find the accusation of being an Englander unfortunate. Indeed, I welcome applications for founding membership of the Scotland-Brazil friendship society for the next few days.

We should not reject little Englandism in favour of little Europeanism. I have been very involved with the Japanese Parliament and found great similarities between our two countries, including our relationships with the United States and with our immediate neighbours. We need to try to build positive links to improve many areas of the world. To look inwards only towards Europe is a mistake. We have had insufficient discussion about the impact of the EU on the third world and I am glad that some hon. Members have mentioned it today. The EU, as presently driven, is too inward looking.

We should have much less dogma in our discussions in Europe, and I turn now to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz). Paradoxically, I support the Government's position more than they do. I believe that the concept of economic tests is correct and not just a fig leaf. We should consider joining the euro if it is clearly and demonstrably in our economic interest, because not to do so would be to do a disservice to our people. I also believe that the converse is true. I believe that joining simply because of dogma, irrespective of the economics, would be absurd and dishonest and would do our people a disservice.

I feel increasingly that the arguments advanced in favour of the referendum and the tests were no more than stalling mechanisms to get us through a difficult period electorally. It seems to me that there is a sixth test—that the Government intend to hold a referendum whenever they think that they can win it. That does not strike me as the most honourable stance. I would welcome a clear and unequivocal statement from the Government that they will maintain their previously stated position—that the economic tests must themselves be met clearly and unequivocally. Let us have no ifs and buts, and no "on the one hand and on the other hand." I am sure that if the Government adhered to that standard of proof there would be no referendum before the next general election.

It is interesting to note that those who are keen to join irrespective of the economics argued for a long time that if only the Prime Minister gave a lead, the polls would resolve themselves and there would be a swing in their direction. They said that there would be such a large majority in favour of joining that the Government could do it. I do not think anyone could reasonably suggest that the Prime Minister has not come off the fence: it is clear that he favours joining the euro.

There was some discussion earlier about whether the launch of the euro had been a success. It is worth looking at how the polls have moved since the turn of the year. MORI reckons that there has been a 6 per cent. increase in the no vote since then. ICM refers to an increase of 8 per cent., NOP to one of 11 per cent. and GFK to one of 14 per cent. That is despite the fact that the Prime Minister has given as much of a lead as I think he reasonably could have in the circumstances.

I was, in a way, heartened by the speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson), ever the optimist in these matters. He said that the introduction of the euro had not been a disaster, suggesting that in a sense that in itself was enough for a celebration. According to today's edition of *The Daily Telegraph*, however, Belgian euros are being refused in France and French euros are being refused in Spain. That is hardly a sign of a raging success.

None of that, of course, touches on the undoubted price inflation that we have seen. My right hon. Friend, regrettably, omitted to mention that the latest opinion polls demonstrate—as I understand it—that more than 55 per cent. of Germans want to abolish the euro and return to the deutschmark. If that is success, by all means let us have more of it, so that we can knock this project on the head in the short term.

It is sad that such an enthusiastic supporter of the euro should be encouraged by temporary fluctuations in exchange rates. Three rollercoasters—the euro, the dollar and the pound—are moving at different speeds and on different levels. The suggestion that the fact that they have moved nearer to each other recently, as they occasionally have previously, indicates that everything is coming right strikes me as an attempt to clutch at straws and to draw comfort from instability. In the circumstances, that hardly seems appropriate.

I recall when the Tories took us into the exchange rate mechanism, a move supported by the then Labour Opposition and enthusiastically endorsed by the Liberals. I think we all remember what a raging success that was. It demonstrates that if all the high heid yins are agreed on something, there must invariably be cause for concern. When the elites agree, the answer almost invariably lies somewhere else.

I mentioned the sixth test, whose existence seems increasingly clear to me as time goes on. Let me now ask whether it is necessary for us to be in the euro to have influence in Europe. Much has been made of how we can achieve such influence by magical means. I was pleased to note from the website of my right hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool that he acknowledged the position: there we find the statement

> "But joining the euro is an essential condition of Britain leading in Europe and it is accepted by the government that the question is 'when' not 'if'."

I must confess that in the event of a clash between the my right hon. Friend and the Prime Minister, I tend to side with the Prime Minister. In an interview with *La Repubblica*, which I will not quote in the original Italian—I would if I could—the Prime Minister said specifically that Britain did not need to be in the euro to be a leader in Europe. As I said earlier, we should make it clear that we will not allow a referendum on the euro before the next general election. Once that issue is out of the way, we shall be in a much better and clearer position from which to move forward—to negotiate, and to discuss how we want to play a part in Europe. As long as the issue is hanging there—as long as the "Will they, won't they?" question remains—all sorts of other issues are clouded.

I do not doubt that it is in our interests to remain engaged in Europe, and in debates on Europe. It is one of the Government's great successes that we have engaged in Europe much more positively than the last Government did. My hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East and his predecessors and successors engaged on a number of issues. Although—as my hon. Friend will be glad to learn—I did not always agree with their conclusions, theirs was a positive rather than a negative frame of mind, and I think that great strides have been made.

We should, however, consider what being good Europeans really means. In a number of contexts, the impression is given that the only way we can be good Europeans is to make concessions. Gibraltar was discussed earlier today. In that context, it is being suggested that we can be good Europeans only by selling people out or conceding ground. We ought to be much more robust in dealing with our European colleagues. Can anyone imagine for a moment that the French, or the Spanish themselves, would behave as we have in equivalent circumstances? We have consistently sought to make concessions and to find a middle way—and trying to find a middle way always encourages the other side to come up with something even more unreasonable in order to leave us seeking triangulation.

If we were more robust, we would gain more respect than we have in the past. The record of the European Union on a number of important issues—issues that were important to us—has not been all that great. I look at the Liberal Democrats, and I think of fishing. What have the European Union and the common fisheries policy done for the areas that many Liberal Democrats represent? Not a great deal. If I am not mistaken, not so long ago the Liberal Democrats wanted us to withdraw from the common fisheries policy.

Mr. Moore: The hon. Gentleman is mistaken.

Mr. Davidson: I will certainly check, but I am sure that Labour candidates in the south-west will be glad to learn that the Liberal Democrats are enthusiastic about the common fisheries policy.

Angus Robertson: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman has forgotten the occasion last year when the votes of Liberal Democrat members of the coalition on the Scottish Executive reversed a policy that would have introduced a cod compensation scheme. Such a scheme would have been welcomed in the fishing constituencies represented by the Scottish National party in Banff and Buchan, Moray and Angus.

Mr. Davidson: I do not believe in tribal politics, so I am prepared to accept the hon. Gentleman's point, which seemed to be that the Liberal Democrats are a bad lot. Not many fishermen or fisherwomen live in Glasgow, Pollok, so I do not have a direct interest in the matter. However, I can see that the hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore) is bursting to enter the debate, and I shall allow him to impale himself.

Mr. Moore: The hon. Gentleman may have a false recollection of my party's position on the CAP, but I cannot allow him to characterise us as not wanting substantial reform. His father lives in my landlocked constituency, so he will accept that it is not an issue in which I have taken close personal interest over the years.

Mr. Davidson: I am sorry. I mistook the hon. Gentleman for a spokesman. I presumed that he would know about these matters. My father speaks highly of the hon. Gentleman, in that he says that he is better than his predecessor.

Many of the same criticisms apply to the CAP. It has been denounced in this Chamber since I arrived, 10 years ago. The changes have been infinitesimal: prices are still too high, subsidy goes to the wrong places, and the policy remains hostile to the interests of people in the third world and the developing world. Has there been reform? There has not been much. Will there be reform before the enlargement countries join? Someone said earlier that we must tackle the question of the CAP once we get enlargement, but that seems to be the wrong way round.

New members must be full members, not second-class members. A policy that will not be tenable if new countries are brought in ought to be changed before they join. We must get rid of a policy that means that we pay farmers to grow things that we do not need so that we can dump products in a way that ruins world markets, to the cost of the developing world and the third world.

I will believe that the EU can be reformed when the National Farmers Union complains bitterly about falling food prices—although the NFU always complains bitterly

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that its members do not get enough money. I need clear evidence that food prices are falling and that we are achieving gains from European agriculture before I will believe that the situation is being improved.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): My hon. Friend has made a strong point about why the CAP has not been reformed. The only arguments that the Americans have been able to advance for the way in which they have increased subsidies is that they still do not subsidise nearly as much as the Europeans do through the CAP. Does not a fair system of agriculture mean that we should get away from this obsession with the euro and look at how we can reform the CAP? In that way we might take the Americans along with us.

Mr. Davidson: That is a helpful contribution. Until we see evidence that the CAP has been reformed, many hon. Members will be cynical about the proposition that EU reform is just around the corner.

I turn now to the Irish referendum, which was mentioned earlier. I hope that the Government will say whether they go along with the idea that the Irish, having got the referendum result wrong, must go through the process again. Do they consider that the principle—that when a country implements its right to hold a referendum but reaches a decision that the centre considers to be wrong it must keep on going until it gets the matter right—should be adhered to whenever there is a referendum in the EU?

Is it the Government's intention to intervene in the Irish referendum? Will British diplomats, civil servants, members of the machinery of Government, or British political leaders intervene in any way to influence the referendum result? I ask out of curiosity, but many people will want to hear the answer, as it has implications as to whether other EU countries are allowed to intervene in this country's euro referendum. Clearly, if we claim the right to intervene elsewhere, others will determine that they have the right to intervene here. It is important that we spell out the ground rules at an early stage.

Finally, I turn to the level of debate and discussion. It has been a cause of regret to me that much of the debate on the euro has been trivial and tribal. A number of Labour Members believe that we should not join the euro, and we have had a fair amount of vitriol directed at us by some parliamentary colleagues. That demeans politics in general.

On several occasions we have been accused of being dupes. A recent piece compared us with the 1930s pacifists who were "dupes of Hitler", and with

> "liberal members of Communist front organisations who were dupes of Moscow."

I find that offensive, as do my constituents. Members of the Government may disagree with our position, but to reduce politics on important issues to name calling brings us all into disrepute.

Mr. Hopkins: Does not my hon. Friend consider that that is a simple case of people who have lost an argument stooping to abuse?

Mr. Davidson: It is a classic tactic for people who are losing a game to start playing the man or woman, not the ball. That is to be regretted, as it diminishes us all.

Rather than be described as a dupe of the Tories, I fully intend to give up some other commitments to demonstrate my independence of mind on other matters. I hope that that will prove constructive for the Government. I have never before knowingly co-operated with the Conservative party, but I am willing to do what is necessary to prove that I am not hand in glove with it.

Some colleagues seem to believe that the height of political sophistication and argument is to wave euro notes before us, as if they were pieces of garlic being waved before vampires. They seem to think that that will make us disappear. A better level of exchange would be appropriate.

I do not often open my wallet, but I want to show my party's Front Benchers that it contains euros, dollars and yen. That demonstrates my internationalism, but it does not really prove anything. I should prefer it if hon. Members supporting the Government's position did not feel that waving euro notes proved anything with respect to their argument. We need a higher level of debate and discussion.

I accept that the argument can be difficult. I listened to our two representatives on the convention, and some of the issues are so intricate that one finds oneself losing the will to live. However, the essence of many of the relevant matters is relatively simple and straightforward and can be explained in ways that most people can understand. We do not need to have 256 pages on caramelisation read out to us to appreciate that there are major issues at stake.

The Government should concentrate on the issues of principle, rather than the trivial, abusive or tribal. If that happens, we can conduct the debate in a way that restores respect for politics and politicians, rather than diminishing it.

7.19 pm

Mr. Robert Walter (North Dorset): This has been an excellent debate. The speech of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson) was an old Labour tour de force against the euro, which I was pleased to hear. Then there was his revelation that he is not only a regular reader of *The Daily Telegraph* but believes what he reads in it and gets his inspiration from it.

We have had particularly interesting contributions from the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) on the deliberations of the convention on the future of Europe. It is a matter for some regret that the House spends so little time discussing the important matters that are discussed and decided in the European Union by the Council of Ministers, the European Commission and other bodies. Reference has been made to the Scrutiny Committee, on which I served for nine months in the last Parliament. As I indicated in an intervention on the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston, it is a matter of regret that that Committee, which is our principal means of scrutinising European legislation, whether in the form of directives or draft directives, conducts its affairs in private. I believe that there should be open and transparent scrutiny of European legislation.

I served on the Committee with a number of colleagues, including my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr. Cash). We tried to persuade the Committee on several occasions that the budget of the European Union should not be discussed in a Standing Committee but on the Floor of the House. It is a most important matter that is relevant to farmers in this country because agricultural spending is such an important component of the budget. The European Union's aid programme is a major item of expenditure in the Department for International Development. Alas, debate on these important areas is hidden away—something that I fear is symptomatic of what has been going on in the European Union ever since we joined.

On 1 January next year it will be 30 years since we joined the European Community, as it then was, and not long after we had a referendum relating to our membership. Since then, British support for our membership of the European Union has been tepid at best because so much of the development that has taken place has been conducted by the political elites not only in this country but right across Europe. We have failed to take the people with us; we have failed to involve our electorate in the developments that we are trying to promote in the British national interest. This secret agenda is often picked up on in the popular press and sometimes appears in the form of misguided headlines in our newspapers.

The fact that this is not only a British problem but exists right across the continent has been exemplified in recent years by the difficulties of some of our partners who have tried to get referendums through on what they thought were perfectly straightforward matters only to find that the electorate revolted because they were not involved in the process or engaged in the debate. I fear that we run the risk of encountering the same problem in this country in the run-up to a possible referendum on our membership of the single currency.

We have failed to take the people with us. Politicians throughout Europe have become detached from the real world. For example, we have talked today about structures, systems, committees and working groups. Yet ordinary people do not see Europe in that context. My own children, for instance, simply see it as a place they go to and come back from; they have no great hang-ups about it and feel part of it. In the next few years, we will require the consent of the British people, whether that consent is expressed in a referendum or simply implied in terms of the votes that we take in the House, on a number of major developments that will affect our future and that of the whole of Europe.

A number of right hon. and hon. Members have talked about enlargement. If we accept all the applicants, it will mean bringing 13 new members into this family of nations. The reform of the common agricultural policy has also been mentioned. I share the frustration of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok about how often we have talked about that. I guess that it has been in every major political party's election manifesto since the day we joined the European Community. However, every reform process ends up costing the taxpayers of Europe yet more money, becomes more complex and gets into more areas of agriculture. Even the most recent reform, which was supposed to be the prelude to enlargement of the EU, ended up costing more than was the case under the previous regime.

We have to reform the CAP before we can accept those 13 applicants as full members of the Union. If not, the costs for Europe's taxpayers will be astronomical. To accept those 13 member states and enjoy the current subsidy regime under the CAP would require so much from the taxpayers in the rest of Europe—it will not come from the taxpayers of the new, less prosperous nations—that there could be a revolt.

Many EU members have enjoyed a very generous structural funds regime, the most obvious examples being Spain and Ireland. Structural funds are also available in this country, France and a number of other countries in the existing European Union. However, those funds will shift, quite dramatically, to the new members of the European Union, which will have more justification for having them than those in the west.

We have lots of bright ideas about a common foreign and security policy, which goes back to the Maastricht treaty. However, that concept is at present totally inadequate. I have no problem with the common foreign and security policy as long as our fellow member states are prepared to make a commitment to it. I believe that the United States sees Europe having a greater presence in NATO—whether separate from the US but still part of the NATO structure, or additional to NATO. So far, however, there has been no new commitment from some of our EU partners to making available troops and materiel to make that structure work.

There could be some operational problems with the common foreign and security policy unless it is applied only to a small operation that could be handled by a national command and control structure. Any larger operation, especially one involving the 60,000 troops anticipated for the rapid reaction force, would still require the full commitment of the NATO command and control structure and SHAPE—Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe—at Mons.

We shall also have to face the challenges posed by free trade and by the World Trade Organisation. If Europe is to look outwards, it should be creating a North Atlantic free trade area which brings together the North American Free Trade Area and the European Union. We must break down the existing trade barriers that have worsened on the other side of the Atlantic. Beyond that lie the challenges of the developing world and, within the United Kingdom, the possible referendum on the single currency.

I am delighted that we have heard contributions from two of our members of the convention on the future of Europe and I look forward to hearing from the third as part of the winding-up. For the first time since we moved to a directly elected European Parliament in 1979, Members of national Parliaments are formally part of the [illegible] process. I welcome that development; we are beginning to get some joined-up government in the EU.

We must move on from that, however. Not only in the UK but throughout Europe, national Parliaments and national political debates have become detached from the reality of what takes place in our name at the European level. Also detached from those debates is the reality that every year millions of Britons travel in Europe on holiday and on business. They work and live on the continent, but we conduct our debates as though those people did not travel. Our debates are often conducted in the language of 1942 rather than that of 2002. We must try to set up a more adult and grown-up debate about the future of our continent.

I mentioned the goal of enlargement and the 13 new member states, but we must also consider the consequences of that enlargement. There will be

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consequences for the reform of the common agricultural policy, which will also be affected—as my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) pointed out—by the new US farm Bill. That will result in a tit-for-tat operation by upping the ante on subsidies. We must come to terms with that if we are to make any sense of the last WTO declaration at Doha, which refers to getting rid of our subsidy-dependent culture in the industrialised world, not only in Europe but in north America and Japan.

We must stop contemplating our navel and start to look outwards. A Europe that looks outwards across the Atlantic to north America and to the wider world to genuine free trade and recognises that globalisation can be harnessed for the benefit of the whole world is a Europe that will survive.

There is, however, an issue on which Europe must start looking inwards—the whole question of accountability. I was a little disappointed by the Foreign Secretary's response to my intervention when he told us that the Council of Ministers was to be televised but that we would not actually see any of the discussions, as that might be slightly embarrassing, but only the votes. That will probably be a waste of television time, as the voting process is not terribly interesting. A piece of paper would tell us how our Ministers had voted. What we really want to know is what our Ministers are saying in the Council. Are they representing our national interest in the Council of Ministers? What is the French Minister saying? What is the German Minister saying? Why are we agreeing or disagreeing with them? Why have we arrived at the compromise that the Council—as it often does—votes for unanimously? We deserve to see the Council in action as a legislative body, rather than being treated to the sight of 15 people putting their hands up, which would make for rather boring television and would receive even less coverage than our debates in this place.

I am also concerned about the scrutiny process in our national Parliaments. As a first step we must crank up that process in this place. So much comes from Brussels. At meetings of the Scrutiny Committee, umpteen documents are listed by number. The Chairman of the Committee reads through the list—as the Committee meets in private, I hope that I am allowed to say this—and if one is really smart, one can propose that the Committee discuss a particular point. If one feels that it is especially important, one might at least get the Committee to consider referring it to one of the European Standing Committees.

The meetings of those Standing Committees are rarely covered in the press. I sit on European Standing Committee B which yesterday held a most important debate on asylum seekers and their common treatment throughout the European Union. There have been acres of newspaper coverage of that subject but I do not recall seeing any reference in this morning's press to the only debate in this place on the scrutiny of proposals that will be brought into legislative effect throughout the EU. I am also somewhat sceptical—as was the Scrutiny Committee brief—about the Government's optimism as to the effect of the proposals.

We must involve our national Parliaments much more closely in what goes on in the European Union. Our electorates look to us when they criticise what comes from Brussels. Those directives that Christopher Booker and other journalists write about have been approved by Ministers who sit on the Treasury Bench. Those Ministers vote on them. Ministers who sit on the Treasury Bench approve those so-called Brussels directives—those things that Brussels sends us, which we have to implement and which are supposedly imposed on us. They are not imposed on us; we have a agreed to them, and Ministers of the Crown should be accountable for those decisions. We have to make that point over and over again. That is why national Parliaments should be much more at the heart of the scrutiny process than they are today.

I have a great deal of respect for many good friends who sit in the European Parliament, who spend hours discussing the detail of such documents, but our electorates look to us, and not to our friends in the European Parliament, for such scrutiny. That is why we must have a much more transparent debate on what occurs in the European Union.

I want to refer briefly to the euro. This is neither the time nor the place to discuss the merits or otherwise of whether we should join the European single currency, but I am somewhat saddened that one of our newspaper proprietors has seen fit to instruct his editors—or so it is reported in the *Financial Times*—to give only one side of the argument in their papers. If the British people are to be asked to take that decision—as I believe they should be asked in a referendum—the facts need to be put before them and both sides of the argument should be expressed to them dispassionately.

The decision should not become some sort of xenophobic or tribal decision about whether or not people are British or whether joining represents the end of sovereignty and democracy as we know it. We should actually look at the facts. That involves treating the British people as though they are adults, and considering not only the infamous economic tests but the political questions that my constituents certainly want asked about whether the decision is in Britain's national political interest.

If the Government and those who believe that we should join the European single currency can convince the British people that this is not about the creation of a European superstate—that they believe that Europe is a union of sovereign nation states and that that sovereignty will ultimately rest with the nations states—the British people will be far more amenable to considering the economic tests that the Chancellor has laid down. So the challenge for the Government and those who believe that Britain's future lies with Europe and membership of the single currency is that they have to convince the people that Britain is strengthened, not weakened, by an enhanced role in the EU.

7.43 pm

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): These debates are important because they provide the House with an opportunity not just to discuss the forthcoming European Council meeting in Seville, but to express our views on a wide range of issues.

I am very disappointed that, uncharacteristically in such debates, we have not been graced by the presence of the hon. Members for Stone (Mr. Cash), for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) and for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth), who always make interesting contributions. Of course they have now been promoted to the Front Bench. That is perhaps one reason why we have not heard from them this evening, but this has been a good debate because it has allowed us for the first time not just to discuss what will happen at the European Council meeting, but to assess what has been going on in the EU during the past six months.

I was fascinated by the accounts of the convention given by the right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) and my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart). The convention has been fashioned in a unique way. Members of national Parliaments will be allowed the opportunity not only to take part in a very important decision-making process, but to return to the House to give us the opportunity to question them and to hear what they have to say. That is extremely necessary.

Frankly, someone who met the right hon. Member for Wells and my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston separately would not think that they had much in common, but I am very pleased that they are working together, perhaps from different perspectives. They will go to Edinburgh, Cardiff and, this week, Belfast to discuss with the law makers in different parts of the United Kingdom how we can improve the way in which the EU operates.

My plea to the Minister for Europe is to continue the work that he and the Foreign Secretary have been doing on the reform agenda. They have both worked extremely hard to ensure that, although the EU's agenda is necessarily busy, the reform agenda remains very much a British initiative. We need to recognise the work that Neil Kinnock, one of the two European Commissioners from Britain, is doing on reforming the operation of the Commission's personnel, but we should applaud and commend what Britain is doing—what the Foreign Secretary, the Prime Minister and the Minister for Europe are doing—in constantly pushing forward the reform agenda.

The hon. Member for North Dorset (Mr. Walter) says that he wants television cameras to be present because he wants to check on what Ministers are doing and whether they are defending Britain's interests. Well, I can assure him that this Government, like the previous Government, defend Britain's interests to the hilt. The right hon. Member for Wells was a Minister in the last Conservative Government. He did not attend those meetings to allow the French, the Germans or anyone else to try to pursue their agenda without offering any resistance. Ministers are able to attend and fight Britain's corner, and they do so very effectively because they have tremendous support from our civil servants.

I pay tribute to Sir Nigel Sheinwald and his team in Brussels for the way in which they help British Ministers to press what we believe to be in the best interests of Britain and, indeed, the EU.

The hon. Member for North Dorset should have no fears about what happens. He and other hon. Members should not criticise the work that is being done throughout the country in trying to reconnect the British people to the EU. Clearly, that work has to be done. There was criticism that money was spent on publishing pamphlets and other activities because it was felt that that was not necessary, but I believe that it was vital. It is the best way to communicate with our people about the effectiveness of what we can achieve in the EU. If we say nothing and leave such things to a very Eurosceptic media, we will simply not get our message across.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: No one objects to information, but as the pamphlet clearly shows, the spending is biased in favour of those giving an integrationist, pro-European slant, and it is done with taxpayers' money. That is contrary to any guidelines that apply to the British Government over their expenditure. Why should we tolerate that from the EU; it is all taxpayers' money?

Mr. Vaz: I will study the pamphlet. I have not received a copy myself—perhaps those involved know that I am convinced of the argument, so they have not sent me one—but I will study it. However, I am trying to make the point that it is important that Ministers and others should go out to the country to talk to people about the benefits of being in the EU, and we should continue that process. If we were to fail to do that, we would simply not give the British people value for money. I hope that people will be told about those benefits.

I also want to ensure that the reform agenda is implemented now. We simply do not have to wait for treaty changes to do many of the things that we would like. In my intervention on the Foreign Secretary, I referred to the letter that the Prime Minister and Chancellor Schröder wrote to José Mariá Aznar, the Spanish Prime Minister. That letter contained 20 or so principles and suggestions to improve the way in which the EU manages its business, from how the presidency operates right down to how the agendas are formed. Is it necessary for Heads of Government—busy people—to sit around the European summit table and to have to read out their positions in turn? That may be possible now, but when the new applicants enter in 2004, it will simply not be possible to finish meetings; they will go on for ever.

That was one of the problems at Nice—a crucial conference, designed to ensure that we prepared the EU for enlargement, where we were negotiating about how many votes each country would receive in the Council of Ministers. It went on for days and, quite rightly, not just our Prime Minister, but leaders of other European countries were very concerned about the length of time that it took.

We must reform the agenda. We must make sure that the decisions are communicated effectively to people. The right hon. Member for Wells picked up something that looked like a very large telephone directory and referred to it as volume 45. If it is volume 45, I do not know what volumes 1 to 45 would look like, or whether there are more than 45 volumes. Clearly, it is necessary, in the interests of the environment at least, to cut down on the amount of paper that flows from Brussels. We can only do that if we reform the way in which the Commission operates, and if we try to make sure that people are alerted at a very early stage to what is happening in terms of the decision-making process. We can achieve that without the need for treaties.

The letter of 25 February 2002 went to the Spanish Prime Minister, as Spain has the presidency until after the Seville European summit. Javier Solana, the Secretary General, then produced his own paper preparing the Council for enlargement. That was presented at Barcelona, and several sensible proposals were put

[Mr. Vaz]

forward that, again, did not require a treaty change. I hope that the Minister for Europe will make sure that we press on with the reform agenda. We must find out what happened to the Prime Minister's letter, how many of the points sensibly raised by the Prime Minister and Chancellor Schröder have been dealt with, how many of those points remain, and how we can make sure that we focus the minds of the European Commission and Mr. Solana, who works with us on these issues, to ensure that these other points are completed. Those are my comments on reform.

The debate began with a discussion of immigration and asylum policy. Every time I come into the Chamber, there seems to be a debate on immigration and asylum. For two days last week, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary was talking about immigration and asylum. Today, obviously, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary began by talking about immigration and asylum, and goodness knows when it will be raised next—perhaps in a debate on economic policy. We need to make the point clearly that it is right that we should discuss these issues. We should also use the opportunity of Seville, however, to make sure that the other European countries put their good words into action. That means ensuring that common agreed policies are implemented and that problems are tackled at source.

I am not sure that I am entirely convinced that the way to deal with the issue is to sanction or penalise third-world countries into behaving differently. I do not think that that can be done. I understand why the Government have made the suggestion, and it merits discussion and attention, but I am not surprised that countries such as Sweden and others have said that it is not practical, as I do not think that it is. We need to consider an alternative method.

I shall give the House two examples of people who have come to my surgery in the last few weeks. One was a Dutch Somalian woman who had the right of residence in Holland and who has decided to come to live in Leicester in the United Kingdom. I am very happy that she has chosen to come to Leicester, which is a multicultural city. We welcome people from all parts of the world if they wish to be part of the Leicester experience. I asked her, not as an inquisition but for information, why she chose to come to live in Leicester. To use *Daily Mail* speak, I asked her whether she came because the benefits were higher in Leicester, or whether it was because we provided council housing more quickly—*[Interruption.]* It is kind of my right hon. Friend the Minister for Europe to suggest that she chose Leicester because of me, but I do not think that that was the reason. I asked her whether she was better off here. She said that she was not. She said that she received higher benefits in Holland and was provided with accommodation immediately there. She wanted to come to Britain, England and Leicester in particular because she felt safer in Leicester than in Holland. There are mosques for her to attend there and a fairly large Somalian community, as there is in Birmingham.

Last week, a woman who had come from Ethiopia via Stockholm with her three children visited my surgery to complain about the accommodation that she had been given. She had been given damp accommodation, and I wrote to the council on her behalf. I asked her, "Why did you choose to come from Stockholm to here? Was it because the housing was not particularly good?" She said that she had a wonderful flat overlooking the wonderful city of Stockholm but she preferred to come to the wonderful city of Leicester. I asked her again why she came to Leicester. She said that she felt safer in Leicester than in Sweden and that her family were settled here.

In our discussions and debates with our European allies, we must remind them of the need to value ethic minority communities, which have made such an important contribution to the life of our nation. The message coming from people who have rights of residence—they are not asylum seekers or illegally here but people who choose to come here with rights of residence from EU countries—is that they choose to come to Britain because they feel that they are valued and treated better here. We must tell our allies that they should do more to ensure that their ethnic minority communities feel as valued and as safe as they do when they come here.

My third point is in relation to the justice and home affairs agenda. Tampere was extremely important. Like my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, I was present at the Tampere summit, and it was good to see co-operation between countries on this important area. I want us to do more, however, on the issue of child abduction in the European Union. I have written to the Prime Minister about this, and I hope that the Minister for Europe will remind him that a letter was sent last week concerning the case of Catherine Meyer, a British citizen whose two sons were abducted by her German husband, and who has been treated appallingly by the German courts. I am very pleased that the issue has all-party support—I do not agree with the hon. Member for Stone on many European issues, but we agree on this. It is vital that we consider the case in the context of the appalling behaviour of the German courts. When an EU nation is a close ally of the United Kingdom, we should make sure that its courts dispense justice and that they do not merely act in the national interest. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will raise the case with Chancellor Schröder in the same way as it was raised by President Clinton and by President Chirac. I hope that we will achieve results in that regard.

I have two final points. One is on the issue of enlargement, which has been mentioned by all Members who have contributed. The shadow Foreign Secretary, the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram), who has returned to the Chamber from his other meetings in the House is rewriting history. He tells us that the Conservative party is in favour of enlargement. I know that it is not his fault—he did not fashion the policy as he was not the shadow Foreign Secretary at the time; it was the right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude), who was the co-signatory to the Maastricht treaty. He came to the Chamber on many occasions and said that he and his party would oppose Nice, and that the effect of opposing Nice would be that the enlargement process would be blocked. Of course, in practice, that would have been exactly the consequence of what he proposed to do. I am glad that the right hon. Member for Devizes has been converted and that he has changed the policy of the Conservative party.

We must have enlargement. We must welcome applicant countries into the European Union. Not only will that create the largest single market anywhere in the world, with 500 million consumers, and benefit our economy by about £1.75 billion a year, but it is important, politically and historically, that we unite Europe. If we look at the road map for enlargement, the 30 chapters have been opened in respect of all 12 countries with candidate status except Turkey. I have been surprised by the progress made under the Swedish and Spanish presidencies to the extent that the lead country, Cyprus, has closed 28 chapters, and even the applicant country that is right down the list, Malta, has closed 22. I was astonished that Bulgaria, which we thought would not join in the near future, had already closed 20 chapters, and by Commissioner Verheugen's statement in Brussels that 80 per cent. of the chapters would be closed by the end of June. That is astonishing progress and a credit to Commissioner Verheugen and the United Kingdom, as we have been the champion of enlargement. That process was begun by a speech in Warsaw by the Prime Minister and pursued by the Leader of the House—when he was Foreign Secretary—and by the current Foreign Secretary and the Minister for Europe.

Enlargement is crucial for the success of the European experience, so will my right hon. Friend the Minister tell us whether he is convinced that all 10 applicant countries, other than Bulgaria and Romania, will join the EU by 2004? I know that Ministers are reluctant to put figures on that but, in the past, we talked about waves of entry. Will we have just one big bang in 2004 before the European elections?

The shadow Foreign Secretary was a Minister in the previous Conservative Government and he spoke about agricultural reform. For 18 years the Conservative party in government did nothing about reforming the common agricultural policy. It is all very well to come to the House now to say that he wants reforms, but we have been arguing for them. *[Interruption.]* The shadow Foreign Secretary knows how many vested interests are involved in the CAP, and even five years is not long enough to overcome the vested interests, especially those of the French, in the CAP.

We want to ensure that the CAP is reformed, and we cannot use reform of the CAP as a means of stopping the enlargement process. Reform must wait until after enlargement, but the Government are committed to it and we will do it, unlike the shadow Foreign Secretary and his colleagues who say that they want reform but will not bring it about.

My final point is about the euro. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins) will speak about this issue, but I am sorry that my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson) has gone. He made a very thoughtful speech. Government policy has remained the same for the past five years; it has not changed. There is no question of a referendum now. The Government have made it clear over five years that the economic tests will be assessed. Only after they are assessed and only when it is in the national interest will the Cabinet, Parliament and then the British people decide on whether we join the euro. It will be not this House or one person to decide as happened under the Conservative Administration—and as expressed in the Conservatives' election manifesto—when the Conservative party's former leader and the shadow Cabinet were left to decide. The people will decide, and that remains the right course of action.

I wish my right hon. Friend the Minister well in Seville. I know that he, the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister will bat very hard for Britain as they always do. I know that the policy of positive engagement that started five years ago will continue in Seville and that we will get an agenda that suits Britain and Europe.

8.2 pm

Mr. Mark Simmonds (Boston and Skegness): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz). Like all other Members who have spoken in the debate, he urged reform, particularly of the lack of democratic accountability in the European Union. He also urged the essential reform of the CAP. Much of the debate has been about the minutiae of the detailed changes that are required. However, much more fundamental reform of the EU is required if it is to be responsive to the demands and the needs of the populations that it purports to represent.

The world and Europe have altered significantly since 11 September. The old enmities and animosities have been brushed aside in an optimistic surge and spirit of co-operation. The United States and Russia are working together to combat terrorism and to reduce their respective nuclear capabilities. Pakistan, Syria and Iran have played their part and have certainly not stood in the way of the eradication of al-Qaeda.

Although Britain rightly continues to fulfil its role in assisting the United States, I have grave doubts that the Prime Minister could and would have been so courageous had we had in place a fully operational and fully fledged common European defence and foreign policy. As the right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) eloquently pointed out, I suspect that we would still be discussing the issues at European level without any action having been taken. However, as a nation state, we quite rightly rallied, as we always do, behind our excellent armed forces.

The fundamental lesson that we must learn from the ghastly events in the United States is that nation states can and will co-operate when it is in their mutual interests to do so. Nation states will not always agree on every issue. It is therefore a prerequisite to co-operate where necessary or where mutual advantage exists and not to have forced co-operation between states when no mutuality of advantage exists.

It is clear that all the interests of one country are not shared with the same countries. This point is exemplified and exacerbated by the current European Union structures where, irrespective of national interest or disinterest, a single policy approach is considered applicable. This forced and often false co-operation both degrades and erodes the necessary flexibility that should be allowed to flourish. It is vitally important that the United Kingdom, with its strong historic transatlantic ties and its historic Commonwealth connections, be allowed to maintain flexibility of social, economic and diplomatic arrangements, especially at a time of ever increasing and accelerating globalisation, as evidenced by China's recent rejoining of the World Trade Organisation.

Flexibility must be the bedrock of any future European integration, particularly as the EU expands eastward. The retention of power in national Parliaments and the principle of subsidiarity must not be maintained just at existing levels, but must be enhanced. The mendacity of fudge and compromise leaves dissatisfied and disaffected countries, Parliaments, national and regional politicians and, most importantly, a disengaged electorate who

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rightly believe that double dealing and duplicity are the order of the day. This democratic deficit is extraordinarily dangerous.

When the electorate feel left behind and ignored, and when the political elite move in one direction and the electorate wish to move in another, it is inevitable that, if only through despair, those who flaunt and propound abhorrent views and policies will attract support. We have recently seen that phenomenon in France, Holland and, thankfully to a lesser extent, in the United Kingdom. There is a direct correlation between the democratic deficit and support for extremists. There is also a direct correlation between this democratic deficit and the continuing downward spiral and low turnouts in the last general election in this country and in recent elections in Europe.

A simple issue requires addressing. Within the European Union, the bodies that have power and control are not in any way democratically accountable. I have a few suggestions as to how we could start to remedy that problem. First, the Commission should become an administrative body—a civil service—with no political authority. Secondly, the Council of Ministers, which has a semblance of democratic accountability, should be charged with greater political responsibility and initiation and enacting powers.

Thirdly and more crucially, as has been alluded to by my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Mr. Walter) and others, this Parliament and other national Parliaments across Europe should have a greater and earlier role in scrutinising, amending and ratifying the legislation, directives and draft directives that emanate from the EU. That would avoid the necessity for unanimous votes within the EU and give real power back to democratically elected and accountable Parliaments, which would have to answer to their electorates for the decisions and changes that they make. It would also allow individual nation states to forge alliances and to enact legislation when it was in their national interest to do so, and to block legislation and directives that may be detrimental or irrelevant to one country without stopping others who might wish to have that legislation or those directives. The other countries would not have to use their veto at the European level.

Greater co-operation between us and our European neighbours should be forthcoming in other ways, which hon. Members have already mentioned. Asylum is at the forefront of concerns and I am pleased that it is high up the agenda for the forthcoming Seville summit. We do not co-operate enough to combat the crime that crosses geopolitical boundaries. We also clearly need to co-operate more on the environment. It is obvious that many parts of the EU suffer from industrial pollution and emissions that damage the atmosphere and other parts of the EU, as the problem crosses political boundaries.

I remain worried that in a fast-moving global economy, with capital not only disrespectful but ignoring political boundaries, the EU seems to be inward looking and introspective rather than outward looking and flexible. We should consider ways to enhance our populations, especially by increasing the choice offered to consumers through encouraging free trade. We should not encourage protectionism, which in agriculture has the additional unpleasant and undesirable side effect of extenuating poverty in third world developing countries and perpetuating economic migration and asylum. It is not until we get to the root of the problem, which is resolving and amending the common agricultural policy, that we will start to have an impact on economic migration and asylum.

The arrival of global markets and electronic technology make political boundaries irrelevant in trade terms. The last set of structures required to deal with such a market is an overcentralised, over-regulated, protectionist, over-bureaucratic and undemocratic union of states. We should be promoting competition, not harmonisation, especially of fiscal and monetary policy, and we should be promoting diversity and flexibility, not fostering uniformity and unaccountability.

8.12 pm

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): There have been many interesting speeches and I am pleased to participate in the debate. Before I focus on my main concern, which is economic, I want to comment on scrutiny. For five years I have been a member of European Standing Committee B and I make the most of it. A Minister is present for two and a half hours. Often not many hon. Members speak, and it is possible to get to grips with the subject. It is probably inadequate—I have no illusions about the extent of our democratic power and my influence—but our scrutiny system is better than those employed in other member states where scrutiny is even less effective.

Mike Gapes: I do not know whether my hon. Friend has studied the Swedish or Danish parliamentary models, but he is wrong about the effectiveness of their Parliaments.

Mr. Hopkins: I am pleased to hear that. I am a great admirer of Denmark and Scandinavia in general, which has a social democratic tradition. The evidence on the effectiveness of the systems used in other member states came out in one of our debates in Committee. I am pleased to be corrected about our Scandinavian colleagues, but I understand that scrutiny is scant in other major nations.

I want to concentrate on the economies of the eurozone which are now in difficulty. There could be a serious crisis if changes are not made. However, I also want to mention Britain's attitude to the euro. A large majority of British voters are against UK membership of the euro. That opinion has not shifted much for a considerable time and it remains firm. There have been many polls on the subject and a recent one suggested that 57 per cent. would vote no and 21 per cent. would vote yes. So a substantial majority is against membership.

What interests me more is that a majority of Labour voters would vote against UK membership. It is right that their view should be represented in the House, and I am pleased that I am in tune with a majority of people who vote for my party.

I caution those euro enthusiasts who are keen on a referendum. Let us consider the opinion polls. Before Denmark's last referendum on euro membership, its whole political establishment—the political class, the political elite—unanimously favoured a yes vote, and the opinions polls showed a 9 per cent. majority in favour of it. However, the vote was lost by 12 per cent. Enthusiasts should bear it in mind that referendums do not always go the way they might like, especially when a change is proposed rather than settling for the status quo. A yes for the status quo is much easier than a yes for change.

Opinions can be mistaken, however. Although I do not think that I am wrong, we need to hear the arguments and the facts. Indeed, I spent time with a Conservative Member who said, "Let's look at the facts." So let us do that. I do not suppose that I have much in common with Sir John Egan, the new president of the Confederation of British Industry, when it comes to politics, but he said:

> "Strong arguments in favour of joining"

the euro

> "have yet to be made and my suspicion is that there aren't any".

I agree strongly with him on that.

Let us consider trade. We are constantly told that if we do not join the euro and get into the eurozone our trade, and, as a result, our standard of living, will suffer. In the two years since the euro has been in effect, British trade with the eurozone has increased more than any other member state's. UK exports to the eurozone have increased by 24 per cent.; German exports have increased by 23.1 per cent.; and French exports have risen by 21.2 per cent. I suggest that we are doing rather well in trade terms without being a member of the eurozone. I am confident that we can run our economy successfully outside it. I am also sure that it will remain strong while we continue to maintain good relations with our neighbours on the continent.

The real problems relate to the exchange rate. A recent estimate by Oxford Economic Forecasting suggests that if an exchange rate for entry was 10 per cent. above an equilibrium exchange rate, that would cost 4.2 per cent. in terms of output and would cost 300,000 jobs. It is difficult to estimate what an equilibrium exchange rate would be, but that would be the effect were we to be 10 per cent. above it. The only way to have an equilibrium exchange rate is to maintain one's own currency so we can adjust it over time to ensure that it is at an appropriate level in terms of value relative to other currencies. A single currency does not allow that to happen.

It has been said—a suggestion leaked by the Treasury, apparently—that before entry Britain would have to depreciate its currency, or devalue, by 30 per cent. That might be excessive. A more recent figure suggests 20 per cent. because the pound has come down slightly against the euro. Those figures are considerable. I suspect that the eurozone would not accept Britain into the euro with a pre-entry devaluation of that order, because it would give us a substantial competitive advantage and we are already doing quite well. However, it would be disastrous in the long term if we locked in at a high exchange rate.

We have to retain exchange rate flexibility. I am not a floater. I would like a stable exchange rate system, as we had after the war, with perhaps more frequent small changes in rates. That was called "crawling peg" in the 1960s and I am a fan of it. Such flexibility is an essential lever of macroeconomic policy. When we talk about little England, let us not forget that Britain is the fourth largest economy in the world. When one travels to smaller countries in Europe, one realises that we live in a populous and economically powerful country. We are not little England; we are actually quite big Britain.

Let us consider the rest of the eurozone, because that is where the problems lie. There are 4 million unemployed people in Germany. Last month, unemployment increased by 60,000. Growth there is optimistically forecast to be about 0.5 per cent. in the next year. So Germany has serious problems. By any standards Germany is going into, or is already in, recession.

In such circumstances a sensible Government would do one of three things or possibly two or even all three of them. They would try to depreciate their currency if they had a competitiveness problem; they would try to cut interest rates; they would relax fiscal policy. However, Germany cannot do any of those because it is in a single currency arrangement—it cannot depreciate, it cannot cut interest rates and it cannot relax fiscal policy because the stability and growth pact specifically forbids that.

Germany is now in deficit. The deficit is still below 3 per cent., but if Germany gets close to that figure it will be told by the Commission to cut its deficit. If a country is already in a recession and it is told to cut its deficit, it is being told to deflate its economy. If one deflates an economy during a recession, it goes further into that recession; it does not recover. That is what would happen to Germany, so I suspect that it is very worried about its difficulties. Given that its Government are facing an election this year, I imagine that they are trying to hold off any serious decision about the matter until afterwards, but at some point the reckoning will have to come, and I suspect that this will be a topic of discussion in the bars and restaurants of Seville in a few days' time.

One can understand that many Germans are worried about their position in the euro. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson) pointed out that 54 per cent. of Germans want the deutschmark back, and that is not because they are being xenophobic or hostile to the rest of the world, but because they realise that they went into the euro with their currency over-valued, and they cannot devalue. That means that there is now an inherent deflationary force in their economy which they cannot change.

France, quite sensibly, has suggested, as has my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, that the growth and stability pact should be made more flexible. However, a member of the Commission—I believe that it was a German—recently said that any attempt by a large country to break the pact would be a disaster, and reminded the French Government that

> "the only thing that matters is the promise made in Barcelona".

On the one hand, the Commission is saying that there will be no change and the pact must be rigidly enforced, but on the other hand France is saying, "Let's be a bit flexible." I suspect that this will be another topic of conversation in the bars and restaurants of Seville.

The reality is that it is essential that major economies have separate currencies if there is to be sensible economic management and if countries are to get on well with each other. We can have a mutually agreeable international arrangement for running our economies, as we did in the post-war era, but if we try to force countries together into a single currency when their separate currencies would naturally diverge over time, that will cause serious economic problems.

Britain is in a very advantageous position at the moment. Our economy is stronger than that in the eurozone and our inward investment is higher. There is

[Mr. Hopkins]

absolutely no argument for entering the eurozone or joining the euro. Indeed, it is possible, if not probable, that in a few years some countries inside the eurozone will be considering whether they ought to recreate their own currencies.

Mr. Wiggin: One of the difficulties, as I am sure the hon. Gentleman will agree, is that once a country has committed itself to the euro and its debt has been denominated in euros, it is impossible for it to withdraw. Countries may be tempted, or have a strong desire, to withdraw from the single currency, but does the hon. Gentleman have any ideas about whether they will be able to do so? I do not think that they can.

Mr. Hopkins: It would not be easy. It would have to be done by international agreement to dissolve the single currency, rather than by a single country withdrawing, and an arrangement would have to be made about the debt. There are examples of groups of nations with a single currency that has been dissolved, sometimes with a lot of economic pain. The Soviet Union is one such example, and the Czech Republic and Slovakia is another more recent one. Not long ago I went to a lecture by the former Prime Minister of Czechoslovakia, who handled that parting of the ways. The two countries successfully separated their currencies. Theirs are not strong economies like ours, but they are functioning. Of course if they both enter the eurozone, their currencies may be reunited.

My argument is that the sensible way forward for coherent and separate economies, with separate polities, is to have their own currency and, over time, to adjust its value relative to that of other countries. In that way, they can ensure that they keep the economy in balance and they do not suffer either from being over-valued and losing out on trade or from being under-valued and having too much inflation. There is a sensible value for most currencies at any particular point in time, but it changes, and the only way to deal with that is to retain one's own currency. I suggest that that is the way forward for Britain.

8.25 pm

Angus Robertson (Moray): I am pleased to be able to participate in this important debate on behalf of the largest opposition parties in Scotland and Wales—the Scottish National party and Plaid Cymru. I am also pleased to participate as a member of the European Scrutiny Committee, which is set to publish a report on the role of democracy and accountability, and of national Parliaments. Many of the issues that have been discussed today are covered in that report, which I commend to hon. Members.

I want to associate myself entirely with the Foreign Secretary's comments at the beginning of the debate about the tragic situation in Israel. On a less serious note, I dissociate myself entirely from the remarks of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson) and, in the finest civic and inclusive traditions of the SNP, in the run-up to the England-Brazil football game I condemn narrow-minded nationalism and wish England all the best in that match.

Of course, Europe and our relationship with the European Union are reserved matters. It is for Ministers, representing the UK Government and the UK Parliament to channel the wishes and aspirations of the democratically elected politicians of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland—despite the fact that the overwhelming proportion of European business relates to devolved matters, so this House rightly has no say in them.

That is the nub of a problem that has not yet been debated today. I find that interesting because we regularly hear, especially from the Labour party, that that is the optimal way to represent the interests of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland—yet there has been not a single mention of the views of MSPs, Members of the National Assembly for Wales or Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly, or of the devolved Executives of those nations. Not one mention was made of those views by the Minister, by Labour Members, by Conservative Members or by Liberal Democrats.

People in Scotland in particular will be astounded that only days after a Council of Ministers meeting on the vital issue of fishing, in which there was a controversial U-turn by Commissioner Franz Fischler on a quota system for the deep-water fisheries to the west of Scotland, the matter has not been mentioned in a debate in a House in which Government and Opposition Members from Unionist parties declare that the interests of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are taken seriously. They are not, and the absence of such matters from the debate is proof of that.

I want to touch on the main issues on the agenda for Seville: the EU convention, immigration, the reform of the European Council and enlargement.

First, on the convention, I start by expressing my appreciation of the work of the only two directly elected Scottish representatives on the convention—Professor Sir Neil McCormick MEP and councillor Keith Brown, both of whom represent my party. I also praise the work of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart), who has taken seriously her role of representing the interests of the House and all its Members. I look forward to continuing discussions with her. I have not yet been approached by the other representative of the House to share any thoughts. The Front Bench of the Conservative party described him as a party nominee—but I hope that is not the approach that he takes to his work.

I am interested in and excited by the role of the convention. It is supposed to listen and to draft new processes in an effort to democratise the decision-making structures of the European Union. I welcome that. We should follow the watchwords adopted by members of the convention, whose task has been laid down by the Governments of the EU: democracy, accountability, transparency and subsidiarity. The UK Government and the devolved Administrations should be leading by example, but the reality is very different.

Let us consider the reality of democracy. The devolved nations in the UK are not directly represented in the convention, unlike the German Länder, which are. The reality of the involvement of Ministers from the devolved Administrations at Council of Ministers meetings is that they attend only a fraction of those meetings, despite the fact that they are elected to represent—

The Minister for Europe (Peter Hain): I must intervene to correct the hon. Gentleman. The Länder are not represented in the convention. No regions are directly represented.

Angus Robertson: I am grateful for the Minister's intervention. I am certain that he understands that one of the representatives from the upper House of the German Parliament is a representative of a German Land, because the upper House of the German Parliament is made up of the representatives of the German Länder. Ergo the Länder are represented directly in the convention.

With regard to the involvement of Ministers from the various devolved Administrations in the Council of Ministers discussions, I referred earlier to the meeting of the Fisheries Council, which is vital to Scotland. I have the agenda and the attendance list, from which I see that the UK Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), was present this week, but the Scottish Minister with responsibility for agriculture—the Minister for Environment and Rural Development, Mr. Ross Finnie of the Liberal Democrats—was not.

Similarly, the statistics for recent ministerial meetings on justice and home affairs, which are vital to Scotland, with its own legal system, show that since devolution the leader of the Liberal Democrats in Scotland, who is responsible for the Justice portfolio, the Deputy First Minister, Jim Wallace, has attended only four out of 19 meetings.

The reality of democratic representation leaves a lot to be desired. If hon. Members do not take my word for it, they should listen to the recent comments of the Scottish Labour Member of the European Parliament, Mr. Bill Miller, who I understand has a pretty senior role in the party of European Socialists. He described the efforts of the Scottish Executive in the European Union as being "virtually zilch". On the democratic element of the agenda set by the convention, much is left to be desired.

On accountability, it is astounding that not one UK Minister from any Department has ever given pre-Council or post-Council evidence to the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament—or, to my knowledge, to the National Assembly for Wales or to the Northern Ireland Assembly.

It is also a fact that paperwork giving notice of Council of Ministers meetings is not forwarded regularly by the various UK Government Departments to the Scottish Executive. That was confirmed in the recent report to the European Scrutiny Committee. Hon. Members who have not picked up on the minutiae of that may find it rather amusing that the letter from DEFRA confirming that it has not been forwarding letters to the devolved Administrations states:

> "It would seem sensible to do so and I would therefore be grateful if you could supply a contact name for each of the following:
>
> the Scottish Executive
> the Scottish Parliament
> the Scottish Parliament's Library
> the National Assembly for Wales
> the Northern Ireland Executive
> the Northern Ireland Assembly".

The devolved Administrations have not even been receiving the relevant paperwork. That is in breach of the concordats, which state that information should be exchanged. It is also, incidentally, in direct contradiction to written answers that I have received from the relevant Government Departments, which claimed to me that all relevant information is passed on, whereas the reality is very different.

The reality of transparency—another of the key issues that the convention is following—also leaves a lot to be desired in the context of the devolved institutions in the UK. How is transparency served when, for example, Scottish Executive Ministers claim that they have been at meetings when they have not? Again, Mr. Finnie from the Liberal Democrats claimed to be at a key meeting, then the Scottish Executive was forced to "clarify the situation". There had been an administrative error and he had not been at the meeting as claimed.

How transparent is it that the Scottish Executive falsely tried to hike its attendance statistics in a parliamentary answer to the Scottish Parliament? It had to do a U-turn on that as well, and admit its appalling track record by confirming a lesser figure. All that can be read in the *Official Report* of the Scottish Parliament. It might interest Conservative Members that the attendance record of Scottish Executive Ministers from the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats is now even worse than it was under the Conservative party pre-devolution.

It is interesting that the issue of representation at Council of Ministers meetings was raised at First Minister's questions in Aberdeen recently. First Minister Jack McConnell claimed to MSPs that Scottish Ministers have led Fisheries Council meetings, although they never have. He was forced to make a U-turn to explain that Scottish Ministers have never led any Council of Ministers meeting when the Scottish interest is overwhelming within the UK.

In relation to transparency, it is also interesting that European policy making in the UK is governed by concordats that seek to maintain confidentiality—known to most people as secrecy—at a time when Ministers are advocating that we should open up the proceedings of the Council of Ministers, which I fully endorse. However, when information is sought about how policy is formed between the various Governments in the United Kingdom, they say that that is unnecessary.

Mr. Wiggin: I recognise how meticulous the hon. Gentleman is in his research. With all the claims about people being at meetings at which they were not present, especially with regard to the parties that he mentioned, does he know whether any expenses claims have been submitted? Perhaps he has researched that matter as well.

Angus Robertson: Unfortunately I must disappoint the hon. Gentleman, as I have not pursued that issue, although he might wish to do so. I do not want to cast aspersions on Scottish Executive Ministers about the expenses involved in Brussels trips, as I am more concerned about the political claims that they make about turning up and standing up for Scotland when they do not even bother to be present. Incidentally, they skive off 90 per cent. of meetings of the Council of Ministers, too.

On transparency, it was interesting to hear the Foreign Secretary say that he welcomed the conclusion of the recent European Scrutiny Committee report. He may want to reread the report; if he does so, he will note that the Committee is in favour of changing the rules on confidentiality with regard to interaction between the various levels of government in the UK.

[Angus Robertson]

The four key issues that are to be pursued at the convention also include subsidiarity. As I said, the reality in the UK is that 90 per cent. of Council of Ministers meetings are not attended by the democratically elected Ministers of Scotland. The statistics are even worse for Wales and Northern Ireland. Similarly, it is beyond me to understand what sort of ambition the First Minister, Mr. Jack McConnell—no doubt he is supported vigorously by the UK Government—has with regard to the acceptance of the idea that any eventual subsidiarity watchdog might have fewer representatives than there are member states of the European Union. Of course, that would preclude direct representation of interests from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

I do not know whether there are any Members in the Chamber from Wales—*[Interruption.]* I must clarify for the Minister the fact that I meant Back Benchers. Perhaps he can explain the very strange decision to close the Welsh representation office in Brussels without any consultation. While every other part of Europe is opening offices willy-nilly to pursue and fight the good fight for the interests of Scotland, Catalonia or wherever else, Wales is suddenly not to have any such representation. I do not know why the Labour-Lib Dem Administration in Wales has decided in favour of that proposal.

Mike Gapes: As the hon. Gentleman is so interested in Wales, can he tell us where his friends from Plaid Cymru are?

Angus Robertson: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising that issue. First, he must understand that I am speaking on behalf of the Scottish National party and Plaid Cymru. My colleague who speaks for Plaid Cymru on these issues is currently in a meeting dealing with objective 1 status for Wales. There is, of course, a question about whether the UK Government are going to include in the next comprehensive spending review a budget line to cover the match funding for objective 1 in Wales. Perhaps the Minister, with his Welsh interests, will be able to confirm to the hon. Gentleman that a specific budget line for match funding for objective 1 will be included.

Peter Hain: As the hon. Gentleman has taken an interest in Wales, let me reassure him that every nationalist attack on this Government in respect of objective 1 funding has been shown to be untrue. The nationalists said that we would not get the funding, and we did; they said that we would not get requisite funding and resources from the Treasury, and we did; and they said that we would not get match funding, and we did. All their allegations have proved to be unfounded, as his is now.

Angus Robertson: In that case, I await the announcement on the budget line in the comprehensive spending review, as will all the people in Wales. We do not have long to wait. Following the Minister's intervention, and as he is a member of the convention's working group on subsidiarity, I look forward to hearing for the first time from the Government about how the interests of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland will be pursued in the convention. I would also be interested to hear whether the UK Government will support the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament, which has a Labour majority, in favouring the idea of devolved Administrations and Parliaments with a legislative status having partnership status with the Commission. I am interested in whether the Minister and the UK Government will battle for the interests of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Call me cynical, but I do not think they will.

I know that many other hon. Members wish to contribute, but I should like very briefly to mention a number of other important points. Clearly, immigration has been creeping up the agenda at home and on the continent, despite the fact—it is not repeated enough—that the total number of asylum seekers now is only half what it was in 1992. I agree wholeheartedly with the right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) that we need an effective common European policy. I take the subject seriously because of personal experience—my mother came to this island as a refugee after the war. Scotland, of course, is a country of immigration and has benefited for centuries from immigrants, particularly from Ireland, England, the Asian sub-continent, eastern Europe and elsewhere.

I am concerned about the rise of the far right of Pim Fortuyn and Jörg Haider. In Germany there are serious worries about the so-called "Haiderung" of the Liberal Democrats' sister party, the Free Democrats, and, indeed, Edmund Stoiber's CSU, which campaigned under the slogan "Kinder statt Inder"—children instead of Indians. That should be of concern to hon. Members, especially as German opinion polls put the CDU/CSU in pole position ahead of the SPD.

We are anxious about the role played by certain parts of the media in relation to immigration. A recent MORI poll showed that respondents believed that the UK hosts 23 per cent. of the world's asylum seekers and refugees, which proves that perceptions have been massively skewed. We must appreciate that a number of newspapers have been grossly irresponsible in their coverage of the subject.

I was pleased that when the Scottish National party recently commissioned a poll by Systems 3, the main polling organisation in Scotland, to establish the key perceptions of people in Scotland about immigration and asylum seeking, it found that a massive majority of Scots reject racist attitudes and believe that all people in Scotland should have equal rights and fair treatment, regardless of their colour, creed or country of origin. Similarly, Scots believe that incomers make a positive contribution to Scottish society. By an even greater margin—nearly three to one—Scots oppose the deportation of incomers living in Scotland.

We have a declining population because successive Labour and Conservative Governments managed to put our economy into relative decline, so it is essential that we welcome people from elsewhere who bring with them skills, energy and immense commitment. Before I entered the House, I reported for the BBC from Austria and saw at first hand the dangers of populism and media hysteria about immigration. We should take every opportunity to tackle extremism head on, and find sensible and humane solutions to the challenges and opportunities of immigration.

I shall conclude now, because other Members wish to speak. I wish the Government well in seeking an appropriate conclusion to the Seville summit. I firmly support measures to reform the EU, make it more effective, help it to remain confederal, and ensure that it is closer to the people. We need a Europe of nations and nation states. Unlike some Members of Parliament, I believe that Scotland is a nation. To secure democracy, accountability, transparency and subsidiarity, the best answer for Scotland is independence in Europe.

8.48 pm

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): Our debate is taking place at an interesting time. I want to go back to the debates that were going on just before the countries that joined the single currency did so. As a member of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs in the Parliament before last, I went to Portugal and had discussions about whether the Portuguese economy would be sufficiently robust for it to join the euro. There was a general view in the British media and among Conservative Members that that would be impossible for Portugal. Yet the Portuguese joined the euro and the Portuguese economy is a success within it. We saw stories saying that the launch of the single currency would be a failure, but on 1 January this year, in notes and coins, it was a success. The process went very smoothly. After a long period in which the euro fell against the dollar, five months later it is going the other way, and the budget deficit in the American economy may lead to serious long-term problems.

Of course, the Eurosceptic press—the Murdoch and Conrad Black newspapers—will want to run stories about the euro saying that all is doom and gloom and that it will fail. Unfortunately, some hon. Members also push a doom-laden scenario. Most of them sit on the Conservative Benches, but I regret to say that some are Labour Members—they are not here at the moment, so unfortunately they cannot hear me. I welcome my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins) to the Chamber. I am referring to him, among others, so it is important that he hears what I have to say. They believe that the economy will collapse, the euro will disintegrate, and all its member countries will leave it. That is nonsense. The single currency will generate economic growth and expand trade and company relationships: eventually that economy will be the dynamic for 400 million people in our continent.

An enlargement process is taking place. If several new members join the European Union in four or five years' time, they will all join the euro, and the single currency will extend from the Baltic down to the Mediterranean. In a decade or 15 years' time, it may reach all the way across to the borders of Russia and Ukraine. We in this country are living in cloud cuckoo land if we think that we will not be affected by that process. Unfortunately, there is an element of wishful thinking on the part of my hon. Friend and others.

Mr. Hopkins: I think that the wishful thinking is all on my hon. Friend's side. He has a passionate belief in something that he wants to happen. My argument is that the arrangement is inherently deflationary and is causing problems and stresses between members of the eurozone, which are doing less well than those outside it.

Mike Gapes: My hon. Friend missed my earlier remarks. I shall not repeat them, but I suggest that he read tomorrow's *Hansard*.

We live in a global economy with three large currency blocs, and countries that are left outside face a real danger of speculation against their currencies. Owing to the excellent economic management of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, we are not experiencing that problem, but throughout the past 60 years the British economy has faced all kinds of difficulties, including runs on our currency and having to borrow from other central banks. I do not wish our economy to get into that state again.

This debate is about wider questions. Reference has been made to immigration and asylum. I made two speeches on that subject last week, and I shall not repeat them today, but I want to draw attention to the fact that we in the European Union countries must recognise that there may be a downside to enlargement if we start to build robust external borders against potential applicant countries. The changes mean that we need to be especially sensitive to Bulgaria and Romania. British Customs officials are already helping Bulgarian efforts to stop smuggling. People from the Home Office and our police force are helping other countries in central and eastern Europe. Other EU countries, especially Germany, are also providing assistance. That is the way forward.

Three weeks ago, I was in Bulgaria with the NATO Parliamentary Assembly and we discussed NATO enlargement. At the end of our proceedings, we adopted a resolution that recognised the importance of sending positive signals to countries that wish to be part of the NATO defence alliance. There will be a major summit in Prague in November when six or seven new members could join. In 1999, three new members—Hungary, the Czech Republic and Poland—joined. The 19 could therefore become 26 or even more members. However, I am worried that the process is not being thought through sufficiently sensitively.

There is a danger that the United States, in its enthusiasm to push for the widest possible enlargement of NATO for political reasons, will weaken its effectiveness. That raises a fundamental issue for Europeans. We should not get into a position whereby NATO is less effective and the US can pick and choose about defence matters. We have not yet built the strong European security and defence policy that will enable us as Europeans to act without the US, if necessary.

We need a strong EU for our European interests. We have witnessed American attitudes to Kyoto, steel and the US farm Bill. We know that the compassionate conservatives across the pond tend to global unilateralism. I believe that we in Europe have to defend our global interests. That means a strong EU with this country at its political and economic heart.

8.58 pm

Mr. John Baron (Billericay): I am pleased to be called to speak in such a good humoured and wide ranging debate. One could focus on several issues, but I want to confine my remarks to one of the EU's most serious deficiencies: the tendency of its overseas budget to be increasingly dominated by political considerations at the expense of its stated objective of relieving global poverty. An increasing amount of aid is being directed towards middle-income countries for political purposes and the poor of the world are consequently suffering.

The crime is compounded by the fact that the low-income countries need our help more than ever. Recent research shows that world inequality is increasing.

[Mr. John Baron]

According to the economist Branko Milanovic, the richest 1 per cent. of people earn more than the 60 per cent. of households at the bottom of the income distribution.

Previous research has been able to compare only the average income of countries. A more recent study shows that the gap between rich and poor countries is much greater than was previously understood. Meanwhile, the World Bank has warned, in a new study, that many developing countries are at risk of not achieving the poverty goals established by the United Nations.

In addition, we all see regular evidence on our television screens that much more needs to be done. For example, last week, the United Nations World Food Programme warned that southern Africa is facing its worst food crisis for more than a decade, with about 13 million people facing starvation. Yet, despite all this evidence that much needs to be done, the EU is increasingly turning its back on those most in need. The latest figures show that the proportion of the overseas aid package spent in low-income countries was 39 per cent. in 2000, compared with 76 per cent. in 1990 and 85 per cent. in 1980. The most recent figure represents a new low.

There is little doubt that the EU is increasingly playing petty politics with the poor of the world to foster stability in the countries surrounding its borders, rather than eliminating poverty. Why else do Asia and Latin America combined receive only 12 per cent. of the EU overseas aid package, when one third of the people living in absolute poverty live in India alone? Why else does Poland receive twice as much aid as Asia and Latin America combined? Why are the top 10 recipients all countries bordering the EU?

Despite those facts, this country allows nearly 30 per cent. of its overseas aid budget, which amounts to nearly £800 million a year, to be directed through the EU. I believe that that is very wrong. No single country can end world poverty. Only a team effort by the richer nations and the multilateral institutions can effectively tackle the problem. However, it is wrong that we are providing UK funds to bodies that do not share that objective. As a country, we should be ashamed of ourselves. Rather than trying to reform the system, however, the Government are set to increase the amount that we commit to the EU overseas aid package by more than £1 billion by 2003–04. Clearly, this must be wrong, because all we are doing is committing more money to those middle-income countries bordering the EU at the expense of the low-income countries that are increasingly desperate for aid.

Surely the time has come, if only as a matter of principle, to say to the Commission, "Enough is enough. Either change your objectives and help the poor of the world or we shall ourselves increasingly commit resources to achieving that objective, using moneys gained by reducing our contribution to the overseas aid package." Britain has built up an enviable record on international aid over the years, and our aid agencies enjoy a similar reputation, yet the Government appear to be attempting to sacrifice our good name on the altar of the EU overseas aid package.

Meanwhile, despite the EU being the worst aid agency in the world—in my opinion—the only target that the Government have published in their recent White Paper on measuring the effectiveness of EU aid is set for 2006. Must we wait another four years before we can determine whether things are getting better, when it is increasingly evident that the percentage of aid given to low-income countries continues to fall? That will be another four years during which money will continue to be wasted, mismanagement persist and hundreds of thousands of lives will be needlessly lost, all because the Government refuse to take a principled stand and challenge the EU's increasing tendency to play petty politics.

One of the main priorities of politics must be the relief of poverty, wherever it exists. I am sure that Members on both sides of the House agree with that objective; it is just that we differ as to the means of achieving that goal. Yet, when dealing with one of the most powerful of tools to alleviate poverty—international aid—the Government have clearly turned their back on the poor of the world by allowing the EU to discriminate in favour of the middle-income countries.

I urge the Government to act now, before too many more lives are needlessly lost, because actions speak louder than words. I look forward to hearing the Minister's views on how the Government plan to put the situation right.

9.5 pm

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): I shall be brief, to ensure that the hon. Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Duncan), who is representing the Scottish Conservative party, can speak.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) rightly said in a pamphlet that if the EU did not exist, we would have to invent it. There are those who stick their heads in the sand and believe that globalisation will go away; similarly, others believe that globalisation can continue without our strengthening Europe. Both positions are clearly wrong. In the UK in the 1970s, the left took the view that we could isolate ourselves economically, but it is clear that that is no longer an option. From the moment at which it was possible to press a button and transfer funds across national frontiers, the world started to change. In that regard, I fundamentally disagree with my hon. Friends the Members for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins) and for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson), who are adopting a pre-1980s, rather than a post-1980s, position.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Miller: No, I cannot because of the time. The debate that is taking place within Europe concerns not a desire to destroy cultural heritage, but a desire to create a vehicle that benefits its nation states within an increasingly globalised economy.

The tenor of the remarks of those who are against the euro merely exacerbates the problems that we face. As has already been said, it seems inevitable that a eurozone will stretch across Europe. The fanciful belief exists that we could isolate ourselves from it, but such a mechanism would be impossible to sustain as major currency zones become stronger. It would be interesting to hear parliamentary debates in a couple of generations' time—although none of us will be able to hear them—on the next phases in the evolution of currency structures.

Debates such as this with be looked back on with a degree of amusement. Although the economic structures of nation states will increasingly converge, culture, history and language will be protected.

On the sad day of 11 September, I was in Tallinn, meeting colleagues from across Europe to discuss a parliamentary information technology project. We were stunned by the unfolding news, but there was a tremendous spirit of comradeship. We recognised that developments in Europe, at least, are taking us forward, strengthening the political basis on which we operate, and driving away some of the terrible history of Europe. That is an important dimension, but in expanding Europe and wholeheartedly welcoming new member countries as quickly as possible, we need not turn our backs on our transatlantic relationship, or our relationship with the rest of the Commonwealth. To do so would not be the way forward. We need to embrace, and indeed strengthen, all aspects of those older relationships as far as possible.

There will be vigorous competition, as our current relationship with the United States demonstrates. In respect of matters such as steel, America is perhaps adopting an unreasonable position. It is clear that we can envisage a better working relationship with our European partners that seeks to avoid such problems.

In the longer term, as the globalisation of the economy continues, structures will need to change. The current expansion programme in Europe, which is supported by Labour and the Liberal Democrats—I am never too sure about the Conservatives' position—will present us with some significant problems. It would be foolish to disregard the significance of the CAP, which must be resolved. However, that must not be used to block expansion. It is clear from my discussions with aspirant member countries that they understand that the CAP must be reformed. Similarly, discussion has taken place about immigration and crime.

It was fascinating to hear one contribution from a Conservative Member that supported the notion of cross-border co-operation to fight crime. As I remember, the Conservatives voted against measures intended to bring that co-operation about.

The complexity of the issues is no excuse for preventing expansion or ducking the issue of the currency. That complexity, however, underlines the need for change in some of Europe's institutions. That is why I am strongly in favour of the reform agenda promoted by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. It is important that we carry people with us by improving transparency and accountability, while at the same time taking the logical approach—which reflects the nature of Europe—of protecting the national Parliaments as the sovereign bodies within a Europe of nation states.

I am keen to see that happen, and that is the principled position on which the British electorate want us to go forward. It is not inward looking. It would protect the great institutions we have at the same time as embracing all the benefits of expansion and taking account of the increasing globalisation of the economy. I know that the argument will continue, but—as other hon. Members have said—we must present it in a mature way to the British people in the months to come. We have to debate some incredibly important issues, not least of which is the recognition that the nirvana that my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North seeks is impossible, given the nature of the present economic structures of the planet.

9.13 pm

Mr. Peter Duncan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): I thank those hon. Members who have truncated their remarks to allow me to contribute to the debate. The right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) suggested that this was a decisive moment in European affairs, and it is appropriate that we are having this debate today.

The future of Europe is not only being discussed at an international level. Contrary to other remarks made tonight, I find that it is regularly the subject of strong views in my postbag, and at surgeries and markets, pubs and meetings across Galloway. It is taken as read by both sides in the debate that the EU needs to be perceived as relevant to our daily lives. The turnout at the last European election suggests that that is a real problem, with the average man in the street not motivated to vote in European polls.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) mentioned the democratic crisis, but that crisis is all the more surprising given the pace of change in European affairs. Europe is changing. It has become much more significant in terms of the way in which it affects our daily lives. But the United Kingdom is changing—has changed—too. I do not believe that the manner in which we interact with Europe has changed to reflect the devolution settlements with Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The fact that it has not changed has only served to increase lack of interest in a European institution that continues to be viewed as disconnected from the domestic political scene.

A specific aspect of that distancing concerns me today. In 1999, devolution created a Scottish Parliament with executive powers over a substantial list of policy areas. The settled will of the Scots gave responsibility for education policy—along with health, law and order and many other policies—to a Scottish ministerial team in the Scottish Parliament. Although my party and I were the sole dissenting voices, we accept the decision, and I now believe that the Government must be persuaded to proceed on the basis of its implications—and those implications include our dealings with Europe.

Currently, United Kingdom delegations to EU decision-making bodies and working groups are formed in Whitehall, irrespective of the policy being made in Scotland. I understand that Ministers and officials from the Scottish Executive are often invited to join such delegations, but in this instance "often" is surely not good enough. I feel that when Europe is discussing devolved matters the devolved Administrations should be involved in the UK team as of right.

To date, the Government's record has been patchy to say the least. It has not been lost on the Scottish public that the party which delivered devolution for Scotland seems once more reluctant to recognise its implications fully. The Government will insist that they have consulted the Administrations regularly—*[Interruption.]* I urge Ministers to wait for my conclusions.

The current arrangement whereby a party shares power in Holyrood while holding it in Westminster cannot be expected to last for ever. Indeed, a change at both ends is long overdue. The only practical solution is for the Scottish Executive to be involved, as of right, in the UK group contributing to European policy debate on devolved issues.

[Mr. Peter Duncan]

While advocating a stronger voice for Scotland within the parameters of the United Kingdom, I abhor the notion of "a Europe of the regions". That soundbite is the objective of many, simply because it subsumes the very nation states to which we belong. I have little doubt that the regional government agenda of the present Administration is intended to further the plan within the UK in preparation for a greater future role for the regions in Europe.

That is the Government's agenda. It is not mine or that of the official Opposition. In the Europe of the future, the nation state can and must remain supreme. Only through the continuance of the nation state as the building block of Europe can we recognise the imbalances that may have developed, and seek redress in years to come. Anything else will lead to a lack of clarity and create national resentment.

In Scotland, for example, we have continued to suffer significant losses in our most vulnerable communities through the malfunctioning of the common fisheries policy. As Members will know, that is causing resentment. The CFP highlights the great divergence that is often experienced between good intentions and the reality of EU political interference. Scotland accounts for more than 70 per cent. of the UK fishing fleet, and has experienced a similar proportion of the devastation following falling fish stocks. The CFP's ambition is

> "ensuring rational and sustainable exploitation of fish stocks through conservation and management policies designed to protect resources and reflect the needs of the fishing industry".

In fact, we have seen the opposite.

As a result of the politics of failure in Brussels, more than 50 per cent. of CFP support has gone to one nation—Spain—while 1.1 billion euro of financial support per annum has failed to preserve stocks. That is the kind of politically driven madness that gives the European Union such a poor reputation for delivering for its members through such programmes.

I recently returned from a visit to Denmark, another country that has suffered greatly from structural changes in fishing. During my visit, I was made very much aware of the Danes' eagerness to progress reform in the crucial areas where the EU at present is failing. I wish the country well when it accedes to the presidency in July, and urge it to deal with the real issues that stand in the way of Europe delivering for its member states.

That task is to become even more onerous with the onset of enlargement, which the Danes are desperate to have moved to the top of the agenda. I am happy for it to be there, as enlargement will nail once and for all the mirage of a one-speed Europe. Before and after expansion, flexibility should be our watchword, allowing each nation to reap the benefits of free trade without being bound up by the political agenda.

In short, the EU has the power to add massively to our economic well-being. It has done so in the past, and will do so again. If flexibility remains at the forefront of our debate on the future of Europe, I for one will be its strongest advocate, as I will for Scotland's place at the UK's table in Brussels.

9.21 pm

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): On the brink of enlargement, all being well, the EU is faced with great opportunities, and with its greatest dangers for a generation. It can aim to make itself, in the words of Romano Prodi, an "advanced supranational democracy", or it can strive to be a Europe of nation states in a single market working together to promote peace and prosperity in Europe. It is clear from recent elections what the people of Europe want, and we ignore our people at our peril.

The EU will never become a real force for improvement in all our societies until the democratic deficit is dealt with, as many hon. Members have noted today. This Government have failed to deal with the matter in any substantive way. Their policy so far has been marked by a rudderless drift towards a more centralised Europe. Their concrete ideas have been few and far between. One such has been the Prime Minister's absurd idea of a second chamber for the European Parliament. It has been roundly dismissed by every commentator and most politicians on the continent of Europe.

The next big thing, which the Minister for Europe has been touting for the Prime Minister, is this idea of a president of the European Council. That person is supposed to give Europe a single voice, especially on foreign policy. The president would have to be a remarkable man—or woman—because we have seen how hard it has been for Europe to find a single voice on foreign policy in any formalised sense, whether on the war against terrorism in Afghanistan, or on the middle east. Of course it is important, from time to time, to coalesce with a joint viewpoint and approach, but that is quite different.

Above all, this British Government do little to deal with the lack of democracy and accountability in the European Union's institutions. In too many elections on the continent, we have seen extremist parties coming forward in response to that. Those parties have different causes and reasons in different countries, but they are united by a sense that people's voices are not being listened to, and that the governors are becoming more distant from the governed.

The solution cannot be to create what Romano Prodi called an "advanced supranational democracy". The desire to build such an entity is a sad sign that some in the European Union do not want to listen to the loud popular voices that are calling for societies where power comes from the bottom up, where the rulers must respond to popular concerns. The Commission is clearly still stuck in a time warp of idealistic thinking, frozen in the 1950s. This has little to do with the problems and needs of Europe today.

We are all familiar with the Government's wish to make Europe a superpower, as the Prime Minister has said, but we have yet to hear anything from the Government on how such a plan is realisable. It is natural that different nations will have different views about what their interests might be and about the values that they consider to be most important to promote abroad. It is only when we have calls for "more Europe" in foreign and security policy that it becomes a problem. The unavoidable logic leads either to the imposition of some member states' foreign policy on others or a subjection to the lowest common denominator. Of course it is to our advantage for the nations of Europe to combine their foreign policies from time to time when they wish, but that is not something to be forced. These grand dreams do nothing to promote a Europe that responds to today's needs.

The European Union should, above all, be an engine for its people's prosperity. That has to be the priority, and it was its original purpose. The Government have talked a lot about this; we have heard a great deal about getting Europe to embrace the enterprise agenda, making it the most dynamic economic region in the world. The Lisbon agenda has been in action for more than two years and yet it has let down Europe's businesses and workers.

We heard how, at Stockholm last year, the Prime Minister was delivering economic reform in Europe and jobs in Britain. Yet three months ago he was forced to admit to the House that at Stockholm, progress stalled. That was quite a climbdown from the talk about that Council's "good news".

Sadly, the Government have not lived up to their promises where it matters most and are failing to deliver. Let us look at some of the targets set at Lisbon to see what has become of them. In his statement to the House after the Lisbon council, the Prime Minister told us that all government was to be done fully online by 2003. I tried to find out what progress had been made in reaching the target but was told in a written answer that the information was not held centrally. So the Government are clearly up to date on that one.

We heard about the need to increase the amount of electronic commerce conducted in Europe and Britain, but in answer to a written question I was told that the Government have no means of measuring that amount. There was a target to halve youth unemployment in Europe by 2010. Since then, youth unemployment has fallen by 1 per cent—progress, I grant the Minister, but very modest. There was a target to allow electronic access to all the main public services by 2003. We learn that slightly more than half of those services are e-enabled. Some progress has been made, but I will be interested to hear whether the Minister can guarantee that the target will be met on time. It is crucial that the spirit of Lisbon becomes a reality. So far, the Government have not persuaded our partners to deliver.

In reality, the Government's achievements have fallen far behind their claims and ambitions. The people of Britain want less hot air about Europe being a superpower but real delivery to make the European Union a catalyst in the creation of jobs and wealth for its people.

The second great challenge and purpose that Europe faces is to make enlargement a success. We cannot afford to jeopardise this great task, upon which the future prosperity of eastern Europe and important opportunities for British business rest. One obstacle, of course, has been the Nice treaty. We told the Government repeatedly before the treaty was signed that it would likely be more about integration than preparing Europe for enlargement. We have been proved right, because the Irish people recognised that the treaty, inter alia, would take more from their sovereignty than they were prepared to give. They rejected it and may, despite the pressure put on them, reject it again. If so, we would need a new accession treaty ready for the candidate countries. It should contain those parts of the Nice treaty that are needed for enlargement, which we have happily acknowledged and accepted. A short, simple treaty is needed and the Government must actively work towards putting together a plan B if a second Irish referendum rejects the Nice treaty. Anything less is ostrich-like behaviour and absolutely wrong. It would be a tragedy if enlargement were imperilled because of the unnecessary baggage attached to the Nice treaty.

The Government continue to have an out-of-date geopolitical agenda. Once upon a time, the Labour party refused to face up to the challenges of the communist era. Absurdly, it abandoned its policy of unilateral disarmament only as the cold war ended. Labour is behind the times again today. It appears to subscribe to a new type of Europe that is increasingly out of favour. People do not want monoliths imposed upon them any more—they want institutions that work from the bottom up, not ones that dictate to them.

The right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) mentioned several issues that are wholly pertinent to the future of Europe; for example, reform of the common agricultural policy—a point taken up by the hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore). The right hon. Gentleman referred to the economic tests for the euro, although I suggest that only one test is relevant to the Government—whether they can win a referendum.

The right hon. Gentleman gave an accurate warning against any form of anti-Americanism, and pointed out the importance of co-operation between Europe and the United States. Many of us will disagree with some parts of the right hon. Gentleman's speech, but it is well worth reading for its view of Europe and our relationship with the rest of the world.

The hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale correctly said that over the past few months—and indeed the past few years—the Government have posed questions about the future of Europe but provided no answers.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart) on her role as a representative of the House of Commons and wish her well. She said that the convention had broad terms of reference. We thought it rather odd, however, that the chairman of the convention—who should be disinterested as he has an important role—was advocating the establishment of an EU diplomatic service and EU embassies. That seems a curious dichotomy. I hope that the hon. Lady agrees that there seems to be some clash in that regard. None the less, we support her in the view that the EU must be made to be successful. I hope that the convention will play an important part.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) talked of opacity in the European Union and about the old-fashioned, statist character of the EU. He is wholly correct. Lack of transparency has helped to cause so much of the alienation of the peoples of Europe from EU institutions. My right hon. Friend referred to the hideous weight of the acquis communautaire. All those things must be dealt with for people to reconnect and for the convention to be successful.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson) gave his views on the euro. It is significant that there are differences of view throughout the party political spectrum, although the only one that he suggested is that he has been subjected to abuse for holding his views.

[Mr. Richard Spring]

My hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Mr. Walter) said that political elites should no longer have the power that they currently hold in the EU. He also spoke of the effects of the CAP on enlargement.

The hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) referred to the reform agenda. He, too, spoke about enlargement. It was a great pleasure to hear from him again. I remind him of our warnings during the preparation for Nice about everything that could go wrong—the impact of enlargement, putting baggage on the treaty that should not have been there. That is exactly what happened in practice and the consequences are there for everybody to see.

We heard an excellent speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Boston and Skegness (Mr. Simmonds). He talked about the global overview and spoke of the lessons of 11 September—the need for flexibility in a military response.

The hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins) talked about the importance of retaining our currency. He also referred to statistics showing that Britain was doing well despite not being a member of the eurozone.

A point made in the contribution of the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) was taken up by my hon. Friend the Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Duncan): how we relate the devolved constitutional architecture of the United Kingdom to the institutions and practices of the European Union. We need to address that.

We heard a contribution from the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mike Gapes). I point out to him that the euro will do well only if the underlying economies of Europe do well. That depends on low taxation, deregulation and a proper competitive environment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mr. Baron) was right to talk about the imperfections in EU aid policy, which have been widely discussed throughout the European Union.

Since the second world war we have seen the world move on—to echo the words of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston. It was a perfectly legitimate and admirable desire among Europe's leaders to create a community that would prevent war from ever happening again. In that respect, there is no doubt that the Community has been particularly successful, but we have now moved on to a point where those old-fashioned blocs, which were relevant before, are no longer relevant in the 21st century.

There is a lively debate about the future of the architecture of the EU. My right hon. Friend the shadow Foreign Secretary and I have had numerous meetings to discuss that point with politicians, diplomats and other opinion formers from all over the EU and the accession countries. Happily, more and more of our sister parties are taking over as the governing parties in Europe. They, too, reject in many instances the corporatist, statist, high taxation and interventionist culture that has so damaged the EU's economic performance.

To enjoy public acceptance, the EU will need to find radical ways to decentralise authority and to reinforce our national Parliaments. It is absolutely crucial to have a finality of competencies at the centre of our EU structures, to assure people that the remorseless process of integration and harmonisation will be arrested and that what is done at the remote centre, which is so unaccountable, will be minimised. That is hugely important for the convention to consider and for the IGC in 2004 to address; otherwise people will simply not feel comfortable with the relationship with the EU.

The Conservative party has already produced many constructive proposals to deal with the democratic deficit and the need for economic liberalisation and reform, but there is clearly much more to do. However, we are at a crossroads. Everything points to a new European architecture that is flexible, open and more transparent. Nothing that we have heard today from the Government thus far in any way goes to the heart of those matters. Just as the Government while in opposition failed to face up to the great geopolitical challenge of the cold war, today they are frozen in a mindset of Europe utterly unsuited to the challenges of the 21st century.

9.37 pm

The Minister for Europe (Peter Hain): I always enjoy following the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring). I attribute his great fluency and charm to the fact that he was educated at the university of Cape Town. I agree with at least on one thing that he said. He wanted a flexible, open and transparent Europe, and I totally agree with him about that. However, I deprecate the fact that, when he refers to the Irish referendum result, he always seems to gloat and to be delighted that the result could wreck the whole enlargement process. As I have reminded Conservative Members before, the candidate countries know who is on their side. They know that the Labour Government back them and that the Tories try to sabotage them.

On the recent election results in Europe, the voters of Britain will remember when the next general election comes that those right-wing Governments elected in France, Denmark, Portugal and Italy have all found that their national footballs teams have been knocked out of the World cup. I am sure that that will be a key factor in the next general election campaign here in Britain.

It has been a particular pleasure to hear Conservative Members' interventions, given their uncharacteristic silence on matters European in recent months—so much so that *The Independent* reported on 5 June that the Leader of the Opposition was planning to take a back seat in the no campaign because of fears that his party's unpopularity would damage it.

Dominic Cummings, the Leader of the Opposition's director of strategy, memorably said:

> "the biggest potential threat to the survival of the pound is the Conservative party. If the Conservative party were to define the anti-euro campaign and articulate its message as it has in the past, then Blair has a real opportunity to win a referendum".

As Clint Eastwood said:

> "a man's got to know his limitations".

What the Tory director of strategy is saying is that Tory support is the kiss of death. Perhaps we should ask the Tories to pledge their wholehearted support to the Brazilian football team ahead of Friday's match.

The director of strategy at Conservative headquarters also commented that

> "it is difficult for some Tories to accept—but nevertheless true—that for many people, just about the only thing less popular than the euro is the Tory party".

The difference, of course, is that the euro is increasing in value and credibility, while voters have been selling shares in the Tories for a decade. Many Tories want their party to run the no campaign. One Conservative was quoted as saying:

"We hope it will be run by Thatcher, Tebbit and Duncan Smith".

I presume that the fourth horseman of the apocalypse was unavailable.

I fear that we heard nothing new in Conservatives' contributions today. We heard the same old scratchy record of suspicion rather than engagement, and the same feverish defensiveness, rather than our confidence in driving forward the agenda in Europe. Several spurious points, to which I need to reply, were made by the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram). He asked about the Laeken declaration and implied that it was some kind of vehicle for a superstate. He should read it. It states:

"Citizens want results, they do not want a superstate".

I acknowledge that he said that he wanted enlargement to be on track by 2004. We want that, and we are determined to achieve it, which is why ratification of the Nice treaty by all countries of the European Union, including Ireland, is essential to keep it on track.

The right hon. Gentleman may want further elucidation on the common agricultural policy. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary attended yesterday's General Affairs Council meeting, and I attended its meeting last Monday when the CAP was discussed. Our agenda and the leadership given by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary secured a position whereby direct payments were not part of the policy on the agricultural chapter. That was left to be settled at the October meeting of the European Council. That would not prejudice the outcome of the mid-term review, whose initial proposals are due to be published in a few weeks' time. If some countries, including France, had ensured a reference to direct payments in the GAC conclusions, that might have prejudiced the Commission's draft proposals. That was a major achievement.

On Zimbabwe, we expect it to be on the agenda of the next GAC meeting. Indeed, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary will ask for that to happen.

On common foreign and security policy, I remind the right hon. Gentleman that it is an intergovernmental matter and will remain so. I also remind him that common foreign and security policy—which he seems to deprecate and about which he seems deeply unhappy—was established under the Maastricht treaty, which the Conservative Government of which he was a member in the early 1990s introduced. The treaty was taken through the House on a three-line Whip with timetable motions all the way through. I remember that because I was speaking against it. Maastricht established the single currency, the European Union, and the objectives of a common defence policy and a European Union citizenship. It was also a treaty to advance European integration—a Conservative agenda.

Mr. Ancram: The Minister for Europe asked me to read the Laeken declaration, which I have done. I want to quote one part of it. Paragraph 2 states:

"The construction of a political union has begun".

Will he explain what he understands by that?

Peter Hain: Yes. That is what was in the Maastricht treaty, which the right hon. Gentleman's Government introduced.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) made an eloquent, formidable and authoritative contribution describing enlargement as an historic opportunity that must not be missed. He argued wisely that the reform process that we are seeking to achieve in the convention on the future of Europe—on subsidiarity, the role of national Parliaments and the key issue of European Council reform—is absolutely critical to establishing intergovernmental control of the European agenda. That is what the reforms are about, and they include a proposal for an elected president of the European Council.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart) made key and important points about the role of national Parliaments. She informed the House that she is the chair of the working group on national Parliaments in the convention on the future of Europe, and that is an important recognition of the key role that she plays.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool made a key point about Europe's future global role and its potential as a force for progressive internationalism on the world stage. I agree with him that it is punching below its weight, and it needs to punch at its full weight. It needs to be in partnership with the US, but as a progressive force that stands its ground on issues such as Kyoto and opening up world trade to poor countries. That is Europe's mission as a force for good in the world, and that requires a strong common foreign policy. My right hon. Friend made that point very well.

The hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore) said that there was no Government debate on the future of Europe. I have done my best to stir up apathy in six visits to the nations and regions of Britain. I have tried to carry the debate to the grass roots and to generate discussion at a much more local level. That has been quite successful, but I would not make exaggerated claims about the visits. I intend to visit the rest of the regions of Britain. There is a website seeking to involve people and everyone can contribute to another one about the convention on the future of Europe. *[Interruption.]* If the right hon. Member for Devizes is inviting me to his constituency, I shall give the invitation the serious consideration that it deserves.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston is doing an excellent job on the convention on the future of Europe and is an excellent representative of this Parliament. She is extremely influential and that should reassure us about the outcome.

I sort of enjoy working in the convention with the right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory), some of the time. He asked the specific question whether it was the Government's policy that the charter of fundamental rights should become legally binding. The Government's policy remains that the charter should not create new legal rights. That is imperative. The horizontal provisions negotiated by Lord Goldsmith in the convention on the charter state, in article 51:

"This Charter does not establish any new power or task for the Community or the Union, or modify powers and tasks defined by the Treaties."

The right hon. Gentleman may have found, in talking to fellow members of the convention, that the people who say that it is a great idea to have a charter of rights do not seriously appreciate what the implications would be if it

[Peter Hain]

were incorporated wholesale in the treaty. I agree with him about that. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has made it absolutely clear that we shall not do that and that we shall ensure that the debate is approached in a rational fashion. For example, I pointed out to German representatives that their ban on strikes for essential workers could be overridden if the charter were imported wholesale in the treaty. They had not been aware of that point. There is a sense that people want a charter of motherhood and apple pie at one level, but are not willing to recognise what full incorporation would signify.

Mr. Spring: We warned at the time of the Nice treaty that it would have an application in terms of our law. That view was confirmed by the Commission at the time. I remind the Minister that I tabled a question about how the charter had been cited in the European Court of Justice and in the Advocate General's opinions or judge's decisions. The Minister replied:

> "Providing the full list would incur disproportionate cost."—[*Official Report*, 24 January 2002; Vol. 378, c. 1000W.]

However, he then cited a number of instances when the charter had been mentioned. The idea that it has no relevance to judicial processes now and in the future in this country is absurd.

Peter Hain: There is a good answer to that. The hon. Gentleman should be well aware of it. If he wants me to spell it out again in detail in writing, I will happily do so.

I agree with the right hon. Member for Wells that we need a reverse gear as well as a forward gear. Indeed, part of the debate is about how we build that in to any new settlement to come out of the convention. In respect of the Irish referendum, he well knows that the Government of Ireland have asked for assurances about Irish neutrality in the event of the Nice treaty coming into force. They anticipate that the Seville Council will give those assurances, and I hope that that will enable the people of Ireland to vote yes in a second referendum. As strong pro-Europeans who have done very well out of their membership of the EU, they will not, I am sure, want to deny the benefits that they have had to other countries who wish to join.

The hon. Members for North Dorset (Mr. Walter), for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Duncan) and for Boston and Skegness (Mr. Simmonds) spoke with their usual conviction on European matters. I like the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson), and he speaks with eloquence, but he gave his usual Scottish nationalist rant on Europe. He did not say anything about the substance of the issues; he just peddles the same old stuff. It was the usual whinge.

The hon. Gentleman was wrong on one thing. Well, he was wrong on virtually every point, but I only want to correct one thing that he said. Welsh representation in Brussels has not been closed down. The National Assembly for Wales has withdrawn from a private body with a few officers. It now wants to establish a proper office and representation, as the Scottish Executive have done. That is what has happened.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) spoke authoritatively on the subject. I am always slightly nervous when one of my predecessors speaks and I am expected to reply, because they probably know more than I do about Europe, especially my hon. Friend, as he was in office twice as long as I have been. I can assure him that we will continue the reform agenda.

I am supportive of his views on child abduction. I think that the Catherine Meyer case is a disgrace. Like my hon. Friend, I agree with the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash), who has an honourable campaigning record on that matter. On enlargement, we think that all 10 countries will come in on time. They are making enormous progress. Bulgaria's progress in signing off 20 chapters has surpassed expectations and is impressive.

The Prime Minister's joint letter with the German Chancellor sets out about 10 to 15 separate ideas, but I suppose that that depends on how they are defined; perhaps there are 20 if we look at them differently. They are all on the table for Seville. We will have to see how the discussion goes. All but two of the ideas are fairly certain. So that is another British agenda that we expect to get adopted in Seville.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South (Mike Gapes) made a convincing speech on the euro, reminding the House that it has been an incredible success. Portugal has benefited from it. My hon. Friend answered many of the points raised from a position of principle by my hon. Friends the Members for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins) and for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson), although I do not disagree with them for doing that. My hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) also successfully rebutted their arguments.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South made an important point when he reminded the House that, as part of the enlargement accession process, the 10 countries that are expected to join in 2004 will be on an automatic ticket into the euro. After the anticipated Swedish referendum early next year and the subsequent Danish referendum, we could be the only country outside the single currency if the policies of the Tories' dogmatic opposition are followed. They need to bear that position of isolation in mind.

The hon. Member for Billericay (Mr. Baron) made a series of points about European aid and development assistance. There are imperfections, as the Secretary of State for International Development has forcefully explained. However, I find a contradiction in the hon. Gentleman's position. This Government have increased overseas aid and development assistance by 40 per cent. in real terms.

Mr. MacShane: Forty-five per cent.

Peter Hain: My hon. Friend adds another 5 per cent. Those increases are occurring after years of cuts by the Tories, who ratted on their obligations to the poor of the world. The European Union has its imperfections, and the Government are the first to criticise them, but in the World Trade Organisation it is the EU that has led the drive for a new trade round that will provide favourable terms of trade for the poor countries of the world, especially in Africa. I do not understand how the hon. Member for Billericay can argue his position.

Mr. Baron: Will the Minister give way?

Peter Hain: I cannot, I am afraid. I am trying to reply to all hon. Members who have spoken.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston made a series of valid points. I pay tribute to his work as a country liaison Member with Hungary and to his work on enlargement, which is very valuable.

The issues that we are dealing with in Seville—including asylum and immigration and Council reform—throw into sharp relief the difference between the Government's approach to Europe and the Opposition's approach. It is the difference between practical engagement to deliver what the British people want and a dogmatic anti-Europeanism that would mean turning our backs on European action even when it is clearly in our interest.

Let us take asylum and immigration. People throughout Europe want a fair deal for genuine refugees and, I remind the hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale, an anti-racist policy. This Government are delivering that. People want managed economic migration to fill gaps in our labour markets, and a tough approach to illegal immigration and the criminality behind much of it. A great deal of that is for national Governments to tackle domestically, but European action can and does add value.

A common asylum policy will ensure common minimum standards for the treatment of asylum seekers and will head off a self-defeating race to the bottom by member states seeking to make themselves the least attractive to asylum seekers, even the genuine ones. It will prevent asylum shopping and make those member states that asylum seekers first enter, or pass through, take responsibility for them, rather than allowing them to shovel the problem on to others.

Working together to strengthen weak points on the EU's external border will help to prevent problems like Sangatte from occurring down the line. It is not enough to wait until people are just across the channel. To be effective, we have to deal with the illegal movement of people earlier in the chain. We must use Europe's collective weight in our relations with third countries to tackle the root causes of mass migration at source and to encourage them to accept the return of failed asylum seekers.

All those actions contribute to results that the British people want. They all add value to domestic action. They are all being driven by this Government in Europe, in partnership with others. The Tories are against European competence in this area, preferring dogma to a practical response to people's concerns. Our Government operate a policy that maintains our own frontier controls but also engages with our European partners in dealing with asylum and immigration. The previous Conservative Government wanted nothing to do with the latter and could not even achieve guarantees on the former.

The Opposition say that they want a Europe of nation states. How do they go about achieving that? By peddling the myth of a superstate even though that is yesterday's news, and by saying that they will renegotiate the treaty to restore the veto and extensively repatriate powers to Britain. That is not practical politics. It does not have the remotest chance of being agreed. In the unlikely event that the Opposition ever got into a position to negotiate on this, what would they do when they failed—meekly accept defeat or withdraw from the EU? The latter is the real agenda among many of their Back Benchers.

We also want a Europe of nation states, but a very different one. We want a Europe in which nation states act nationally when their goals can best be achieved in that way, but work together—sometimes by co-operating, sometimes by pooling sovereignty—when it is in their collective interest to do so. The other difference is that we are doing something about it. The Council reform process that will begin at Seville is designed to ensure that Heads of Governments are setting the agenda in Europe and that Ministers in those Governments are transparently and effectively delivering on that agenda. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool said, the agenda is being set not by bureaucrats but by politicians whom people elect to be in charge.

After Seville, we will be taking that and other aspects of the future of Europe agenda forward, in the convention and elsewhere. That will provide further opportunities to embed our vision of a Europe of nation states; first, by strengthening the arrangements for the presidency of the Council; secondly, by strengthening subsidiarity, the principle that Europe acts only where member states cannot adequately achieve a policy objective on their own; thirdly, by strengthening the role of national Parliaments in the European Union, perhaps by making them guardians of subsidiarity; and fourthly, by embedding more deeply the practice that when the EU needs to act, it does so as lightly as possible.

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Ordered,

That the Court of Protection (Enduring Powers of Attorney) (Amendment) Rules 2002 (S.I., 2002, No. 832) and Court of Protection (Amendment) Rules 2002 (S.I., 2002, No. 833) be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.—*[Mr. Jim Murphy.]*

Regional Foods Registration

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Jim Murphy.]*

10 pm

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): It will come as no surprise to the Minister that the debate has been prompted by the situation of the Arbroath smokie.

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): I assure the hon. Gentleman that we will be on level communication this evening. I am aware of his intention of raising the matter of the Arbroath smokie, and I sampled that delicacy this afternoon in order to be properly prepared for the debate.

Mr. Weir: I am delighted to hear that the Minister has sampled that delicacy. I brought down with me a pair of Arbroath smokies bought from E and O Fish in Arbroath on Sunday afternoon, so I could have presented them to him had he not done that. My Chief Whip tells me that that might constitute a bribe, but he says that he will come round and help me finish them off. We shall see.

As I am sure the Minister and all other hon. Members are aware, the Arbroath smokie is a smoked haddock, a delicacy that has been produced in my home town for centuries. Indeed, it is believed to have been invented by the monks at Arbroath abbey, even before the abbey hosted the signing of the first declaration of Scottish independence.

The Minister also knows that the fishing industry, and with it the fish processing industry, have been going through difficult times in recent years, owing to the scarcity of fish in general and haddock in particular. That has hit the Arbroath smokie industry particularly hard. For a time last year, the main producer of Arbroath smokies ceased production. It is now reported that there has been a substantial increase in the haddock catch with the new quotas, and the haddock catch landed at Arbroath has risen from 40 to 300 boxes a week. That is the first time that that has happened in many a long year, and it is a good sign.

Now is the perfect time for the industry to expand and seek new markets—but if it is to do so, the protection by registration of the name is essential. The Minister will know that most of the producers in the town are small-scale family businesses that rely for their business on the worldwide reputation of the smokie. That has been under threat in recent years, as fish processors in other parts of the UK have tried to use the name of the Arbroath smokie to sell their own much inferior products.

Such a situation can be disastrous for any product that relies on its name and reputation. If the market gets contaminated by inferior products, the name and reputation can be irreparably damaged. Because of that, my local authority, Angus council, is spearheading a campaign to guarantee and protect the good name of the Arbroath smokie, by joining forces with fish processors in the town to apply for the Arbroath Smokie name to be registered under the European protected geographical indications scheme.

That is rather a mouthful, but as the Minister knows, it is one of three designations that can be sought under European legislation, the others being the protection of designated origin, whereby the product must by produced, processed and prepared in a specified geographical area, and the certificate of specific character, where the name must be specific in itself or express the specific character of the foodstuff.

Under the protection of geographical indications scheme, the product must be produced, processed or prepared in the geographical area, which is obviously the case with a smoked fish delicacy such as the Arbroath smokie. Perhaps the most famous example of a food with such a designation is Parma ham. It is a scandal that such an inferior product has the designation, while the great Arbroath smokie has not yet achieved it. The producers of Parma ham jealously guard its name. The pig producers must adhere to strict protocols and standards, and the ham must be prepared and sliced in or around Parma. Indeed, the producers have taken large supermarket chains and others to court to try to ensure the quality and reputation of their ham.

However, the problem with the registration process is that it is long, cumbersome and expensive. A protection of geographical indications—PGI—designation involves a number of stages, as the Minister will no doubt be aware, and must include information about the method of production, including the origin, nature and characteristics of the raw material. In the case of a traditional delicacy such as the Arbroath smokie, making the application is an arduous task. Angus council engaged Bob Spink, local smokie expert and former director of Arbroath fish processing company R. R. Spink and Sons, to draft the application. Indeed, anyone who knows Arbroath will know that the name of Spink is synonymous with fishing.

After the application has been drafted, it must pass through three stages. It must go to the Environment and Rural Development Department of the Scottish Executive, the Minister's own Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and then the European Commission. That is a lengthy process; I understand that it can take up to 18 months. Once the application reaches the European Commission, I understand that it takes six months to consider it before issuing its decision. If the applicant is successful, as I am sure the Arbroath smokie application will be, details of the product are published in the *Official Journal* of the European Commission.

However, there is then a further period of six months to allow other members of the European Union and EU producers to express objections. If no objections are received, I understand that the product will then become registered and details will once again be published in the *Official Journal.* If objections are received, however, there can be a further three-month period to allow the EU states involved to have bilateral discussions to solve the problem. It would be an interesting seminar or summit at which European nations met to discuss the Arbroath smokie. I am sure that it will not come to that, but if it does, and the issue remains unresolved, the final decision will be taken by the European Union regulatory committee.

I have described the process in some detail to illustrate the fact that it can be expensive. The costs of drafting, submitting and pursuing an application and of the required expertise would be beyond the means of most small-scale producers. Indeed, I asked the Minister's Department a parliamentary question about the average cost to it of such an application. The answer referred to some £15,000 in staff costs alone. That is how much it will cost that

Department, let alone the applicants themselves. No small amount is involved, and therein lies the problem with the process: it is almost impossible for a small-scale producer to afford the cost of registering a product.

In the case of the Arbroath smokie, as I said, most producers are small scale and would be unable to meet the cost on their own. They can proceed only because of the support of Angus council. That should not be the case; we should be able to register our traditional products much more easily. Therefore, my first question to the Minister is this: will he investigate whether it would be possible to reduce the cost of making such applications, and whether the Government could consider helping to fund them to ensure that more go forward?

Given the complexity and costs of the process, it is perhaps hardly surprising that producers in Scotland—and, indeed, the whole of the UK—are far behind in registering products. Again, I raised the matter in a written question to the Minister's Department. I was told that to date, only five products from Scotland and 31 from the UK as a whole had been registered. As well as the Arbroath smokie, I understand that only two other Scottish products are currently going through the process: Aberdeen Angus beef, which again comes from my constituency and neighbouring ones—

Alun Michael: As anybody reading the record might be misled, I should say that I understand that seven applications have been approved from Scotland out of the 31 applications made from the UK as a whole. As a Welshman, I was rather disappointed to see that there were no Welsh applications, although I believe that Welsh beef and lamb—both excellent products—are on the cards.

Mr. Weir: I thank the Minister for that intervention. I had originally written that there were seven approved applications, as that was my understanding, but the parliamentary answer that I received said that there had been five.

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): As my hon. Friend is going to Wales, may I also take him across the constituency boundary to the part of Angus that I represent? As a son of Angus, he will no doubt be aware of the excellent Forfar bridie, which in my opinion is the finest meat-based product—I suppose the English would call it a pasty—in the whole United Kingdom. Beyond that, Strathmore, which has the most intensive berry production in the United Kingdom, produces the best strawberries and raspberries in the UK, in my opinion. Does my hon. Friend agree that registration of those regional foods could do a lot to encourage tourism to those areas? We could use the excellence, exclusivity and greatness of traditional foods to promote Angus, Strathmore and the rest of the Tayside area.

Mr. Weir: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point, which I was going to come to later. Many European areas have managed to get a good industry going with local foods, and to tie that into their tourism industry. We need to do that in Scotland to a much greater extent.

The only two products currently going through the registration process are Aberdeen Angus beef and Scottish farmed salmon. It is instructive to realise that the products registered to date include Scotch beef and lamb and Orkney and Shetland lamb, which are backed by strong producer organisations, although those industries have not been without their troubles in recent years. Comparing the number of registrations from Scotland and the UK—I am, as I said, sad to learn that there are none from Wales—with those from continental Europe, we see that in France 127 products have been registered, in Italy 117, and even 88 in Greece. Registered European products include wine from Italy and champagne from France—again, products far inferior to the great Arbroath smokie. It is obviously important for small producers to register a food, and the reasons for doing so are becoming more urgent in a difficult marketplace.

Registration protects a product from cheap imitations and provides an excellent marketing opportunity both for products aimed at new markets and for tourism, as I have mentioned. Would champagne be so successful if it was just another fizzy wine? Registration protects the quality of the product and thus its respectability and the market for it. In an age of mass production, people who seek to create quality products must more and more seek niche markets to sell their wares. Scotland has a worldwide reputation for quality and for its environment, and that reputation means a lot.

Furthermore, registration means that inferior products produced elsewhere cannot be passed off as local products, as has happened in the past to the smokie industry among others. Indeed, when Delia Smith recently discovered the Arbroath smokie, there was a rush, albeit short-lived, on the product—but many people who were buying "Arbroath smokies" were probably buying fish that had never smelled the fresh air of Arbroath harbour.

Many rural and remote areas are suffering badly from the downturn in traditional industries. Sadly, Arbroath's once great fishing industry is almost a distant memory—although as I said earlier, there is currently an upturn, but that may turn out to be an Indian summer. Proposals have been submitted to turn part of the Arbroath harbour area into a tourist attraction—again, smokies could form part of that. Perhaps there will be no Smokieworld, but we have hope for the future.

Welcome as those developments are, they do not compensate for the loss of fishing jobs in the past few decades. Fish processing continues in a fairly substantial way, although with small-scale producers in Arbroath, and has a future if fish stocks are maintained. There was a welcome increase in them this year as a result of the quotas negotiated by the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) in Brussels. However, storm clouds appear to be gathering on the horizon again. The fish-processing industry sometimes lives on the edge, as was recently demonstrated by the closures in north-east Scotland.

To survive, traditional industries must protect the things that make them unique; the Arbroath smokie is an example, as is the Forfar bridie, which my hon. Friend the Member for North Tayside (Pete Wishart) mentioned. To do so, however, they must seek the protection of their identity, which would allow them to develop a niche market and sell a reliable quality product. We are told that food producers must seek that quality niche market, and many are striving to do so.

[Mr. Weir]

However, to secure protection for the future they must receive European registration. It is imperative that the Government give all necessary assistance to such applications, especially to small-scale producers, who may be wiped out if they have been successful in establishing a market only for it to be swamped by mass producers cashing in.

The registration system has been taken up with gusto across continental Europe, as is shown by the figures. I ask the Minister to do the same here and to offer help in achieving registration to all small-scale producers in Scotland, Wales and the rest of the UK. Many fine and unique products are produced in Scotland, and even in other parts of the UK; I confess to being a great fan of blue Stilton cheese.

10.15 pm

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): It is a great pleasure to respond to the hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Weir), and I congratulate him on securing the debate, which gives us the opportunity to hear about the joys of Arbroath smokies. The first thing that I did when I realised that I would be responding to the debate was to test the availability of Arbroath smokies in London. As the test proved positive, I tasted the product for myself this afternoon. I can therefore join him in recommending it to the hon. Members who have flooded into the Chamber to hear this important debate.

I want to get one or two statistical matters straight. The hon. Gentleman referred to the number of successful registrations in Scotland. There are seven—Orkney beef, Orkney lamb, Scottish beef, Scottish lamb, Shetland lamb, Bonchester cheese and Teviotdale cheese. That list excludes those that are going through the process, such as the Arbroath smokie. On the comparison with other countries, although the hon. Gentleman is correct that the United Kingdom has some 31 successful registrations, France has 127 and Italy has 117, we are at the halfway point in the table, and many countries have not taken as much advantage of registration as has the UK.

Mr. Weir: My figures are taken from a parliamentary answer from his Department, which reads:

> "No regional foods have been registered as protected food names in Angus"—

as yet, obviously. It continues:

> "Five regional foods have been registered in Scotland, (and including these) 31 in the UK."—[*Official Report*, 10 June 2002; Vol. 386, c. 940W.]

Alun Michael: The point is that I can give the hon. Gentleman the accurate answer—there are the seven that I named. I do not know the reason for the disparity. Perhaps the figure that he was given is mistaken or has not kept pace with registrations.

What is interesting, apart from the fact that the United Kingdom is halfway up the table—and may move further if the information that I have been given today is correct—is the way in which registration is being used. Eleven products are from the south-west of England. That fits in well with the fact that the promotion of regional foods in the south-west, "Taste of the West", is particularly effective. It has succeeded in giving a profile to the region and to the local foods of the region. I have been telling those in other regions of England that they should look at what has been achieved in the south-west to build on that for the future. We can learn lessons from each other.

Although there is growing interest in regional and local food, there is little public knowledge about the EU scheme for protecting food names, and I welcome the opportunity to discuss it and to say a little about what we have been doing. The idea of registering a traditional regional food or drink remains something of an alien concept in the UK, and we need to ask why that is. Other member states—it is no accident that France and Italy are at the head of the list of registrations—have a long tradition of recognising the importance of regional food and drink in encouraging a vibrant rural economy. The French have a well-established system for registering protected food names, which is familiar to us from their cheeses and wines—appellation contrôlée. That explains why so many French products now benefit from the EU scheme that came into force in 1993, with the first products being registered in 1996.

Despite our position somewhere behind the starting line when the scheme was introduced, we are beginning to catch up. The first products registered under the scheme include Scottish beef, Scottish lamb and Orkney lamb and, moving south of the border, Newcastle brown and Stilton cheese. Both the latter have adherents in the House. They are all excellent products, which deserve protection. The 31 United Kingdom products that have been registered place us seventh in the EU league table.

In addition, there is the designation known as the "certificate of specific character". Such a product has to be produced on the basis of a traditional recipe. It has been little used so far, even in France. However, traditional farm-produced turkeys in the United Kingdom can make use of it. The market is growing because consumers appreciate the distinctive flavour that derives from the method of production and preparation. That is another commendable step forward.

Much more needs to be done. As we have heard, many other products are equally worth protecting. I hope that, in future, hon. Members from different regions of England as well as from Scotland and Wales will compete to tell the House, the country and the world about the excellence of their local products.

Why should we protect such products? What are we doing to encourage more registrations? It is not enough to register food names for the sake of it or for sentimental reasons. Consumers are showing an increasing interest in regional and traditional foods. As well as price, quality and accessibility, consumers look for authenticity and traceability. Products that fulfil those needs can therefore be marketed at a premium, thus benefiting farmers and secondary producers.

Time and again, we have said that it is important to find ways of getting the price that consumers are willing to pay back to primary producers and the communities from which the products originate. Once a protected food name is registered, consumers can be assured that it is authentic because registered products must be fully certified as conforming to a set specification by independent inspection bodies.

It is becoming easier for consumers to identify registered products thanks to the distinctive community logos that producers can use when labelling their products. Several UK products are using the logos and we are keen to encourage a greater take-up.

Let us consider ways in which to encourage more awareness of the scheme, which is voluntary and designed to promote new applications. In 1999, the then Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food launched a campaign to raise the profile of our regional food heritage. It was aimed at food producers, retailers and consumers and tried to raise awareness of the EU scheme and highlight UK products that had already been protected or might be eligible for protection.

The campaign involved a major exhibition at the royal show and a series of regional seminars in England and Wales. They prompted a great deal of interest from producers and resulted in several new applications, some of which are with European Commission for consideration.

There is more to do and I am pleased that Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs officials are working closely with colleagues in the devolved Administrations to attract more applications. As I said earlier, no Welsh applications have yet been approved but we are confident that that will happen. The Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly have been working, through officials' joint activity, to use the European scheme. That is another example of the co-operation necessary to make devolution a success.

Close co-operation is also vital once an application has been submitted to us. That was much in evidence when we dealt with the Arbroath smokie application, and ensured that we were able to forward it to the Commission in Brussels without delay.

I want to say a little about the timetable to which the hon. Gentleman referred. Criticisms have been made of the scheme, which has been portrayed as slow and bureaucratic. However, let us consider our goal. The delay is partly due to the built-in timetable in EU legislation. The timetable is designed to protect the scheme's integrity and the long-term value of designation to consumers and producers. It is not simply a quick marketing ploy, but something that will add value in the long term to the product that he wants promoted on behalf of firms in his constituency.

The timetable also includes an opportunity for producers elsewhere in the EU to object to applications and enables our producers to object to a possible unfair designation from some country elsewhere in Europe. It is, therefore, right that the process should have a degree of time for thought and for objection to ensure that the integrity is protected, and that once a product is designated, it means something.

We try to make the process as painless as possible by guiding applicants through the process, advising them on completing their applications, and doing all that we can to ensure that there is no undue delay once an application is sent to the commission. The hon. Gentleman referred to costs, and was kind enough to inform us of the amount that it costs the Government to assist with the process. I should point out that no fee is charged to applicants. We are supporting this because it is good for business in the UK, and we are seeking to encourage small businesses as well as larger ones to take advantage of this facility.

The commission on the future of farming and food, led by Sir Donald Curry, recently recognised that one of the greatest opportunities for food producers to add value and retain a bigger slice of the retail price was to build on the public's increasing enthusiasm for local food or food with a clear regional provenance. The Curry report recommended that industry bodies, with the help of Food from Britain and the regional food groups, should do more to ensure that English producers take part in the protected food name scheme—the same would apply to Scottish and Welsh producers. We accept this recommendation, and DEFRA officials have been making information about the scheme available to the regional food groups and will work closely with them in the same way that they work closely with their colleagues in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Finally, it is worth noting that the scheme may not be suitable for all our regional food and drink products, either because those products do not meet the criteria for eligibility or because the producers themselves do not wish to register the products.

I shall close by saying something about our efforts to encourage regional food production more generally and to help producers find outlets for their products. One of the pleasures of this job is spending time in the regions of England, and eating regional and locally grown products with people whom I meet and entertain has brought home to me how the quality and presentation of food in the United Kingdom has improved in recent years.

We have made provision under the England rural development programme for grants-related activities such as the establishment of farmers' markets, the development of regional or local branding of foodstuffs, the marketing of organic products, and the formation of collaborative groups to market quality products. All of these are important. The Countryside Agency's "Eat the View" campaign seeks to achieve more favourable market conditions for local products that support sustainable land management. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that there is a link between food and attracting tourists to an area. That is a good connection that we should make the most of.

Food from Britain, another of the bodies to which we grant aid, has been encouraging supermarkets to stock local produce, with some success. It also supports a network of regional food groups which provide trade development services to regional and speciality food producers.

At a more strategic level, it is one of the benefits of the new Department that it brings more closely together the staff dealing with a wide range of food, environmental and sustainability issues. This is very much in our minds as we draw up our response to the Curry report's recommendations relating to regional and local food, with the aim of developing a strategic approach to the promotion of regional foods and greater co-ordination between bodies with an interest in this work.

At the end of the day, there are models that work, and there is an opportunity for registration in this community scheme. It is by bringing those together and ensuring that people understand what is being done that we can help the British food industry not only to succeed for itself but to help the work of the British tourist industry and other industries at national, regional and local level. The encouragement by the Prince of Wales to supermarkets to consider regional and local products is also beneficial.

[Alun Michael]

There is also encouragement for us to look across boundaries so that we appreciate products from elsewhere. Those of us from Wales, for example, might appreciate the products of Scotland and the regions of England, and so on. We have a great deal to gain from each other if we value each other's products and encourage them to become better known not only throughout the country, but throughout Europe and the world. I hope that, like the hon. Gentleman, many Members will take the opportunity to publicise products from their area, and to encourage producers in their constituencies to make use of this facility.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at half-past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 19 June 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

MERSEY TUNNELS BILL (*BY ORDER*)

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second Time on Wednesday 26 June.

Oral Answers to Questions

WALES

The Secretary of State was asked—

Residential Care

1. **Mr. Mark Prisk** (Hertford and Stortford): What discussions he has had with the First Secretary on the funding of residential care in Wales. [59906]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Paul Murphy): I discuss the national health service and other health issues on a regular basis with the First Minister, and I spoke on this issue earlier today with the Minister for Health and Social Services of the Welsh Assembly.

Mr. Prisk: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for his reply. Last night, however, BBC Wales revealed that up to 10 residential care homes in Wales are now closing every week. Can the Secretary of State confirm that figure? Given the obvious distress that that causes to vulnerable pensioners, who does he think is to blame?

Mr. Murphy: I saw the BBC programme to which the hon. Gentleman refers, and it is a cause of great regret that beds are being lost in the care sector in Wales. First, however, some £17 million extra has gone into the care home sector in Wales. Secondly—he and his party should reflect on this point—hundreds of million of pounds will go into the national health service and other related areas in Wales as a result of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Budget. Thirdly, only weeks ago I issued and signed a regulatory order to ensure that local authorities can transfer more funds into the care home sector. The hon. Gentleman will, of course, be aware that the Minister in the Welsh Assembly has set up a care home strategy that brings together all the relevant partners in Wales in this area of activity. I hope—I am sure that the hon. Gentleman agrees with me—that that will mean that more and more people will be cared for in their own homes, as well as in care homes. I believe that that partnership in Wales is working.

Adam Price (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): The Secretary of State mentions £17 million, but he will know that Carmarthenshire county council alone faces a bill of £20 million to reach the new standards demanded by the Care Standards Act 2000. As a result of that shortfall, local authorities throughout Wales are having to privatise their homes. Can he not understand the distress that elderly residents and their families feel at the prospect of being placed at the mercy of a private sector that is in crisis?

Mr. Murphy: The hon. Gentleman, too, knows that not only has £17 million extra already gone into that sector in Wales but, through the Chancellor's Budget some weeks ago, an awful lot more money will go into the health and social services sector in Wales. He referred to regulations, and he will also be aware that as a result of the close working relationship and partnership in Wales between the care home sector, the local authorities and the National Assembly, there is a transitional system and arrangement to deal with those issues. I am not underestimating the problem—far from it—but the National Assembly, local authorities and the independent care sector in Wales are working together to achieve a solution to this problem, simply because more and more people are living longer—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The House is far too noisy.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): My right hon. Friend will know that the Nantgwyn respite care home in my constituency, which was to have been closed by the Plaid Cymru council, will, after protests from us, remain open. Not only will it remain open but a new facility will be built in my constituency for children with acute disabilities. I hope that my right hon. Friend will ensure that it has state-of-the-art equipment, and that we continue to welcome the opportunities that respite care homes give to children and their families.

Mr. Murphy: I understand that there are plans to repair and refurbish the building to which my hon. Friend refers. I also emphasise, however, that it is ultimately a matter for local authorities in Wales to decide how to deal with their social services. I take my hon. Friend's point about her local authority.

Mr. Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): The National Assembly has made clear its intention to provide free long-term personal care for the elderly. I know that the Secretary of State is firmly committed to devolution. Will he make use of his position in the Cabinet to make sure that parliamentary time is found for the legislation that will be necessary for the National Assembly for Wales to deliver that long-term care?

Mr. Murphy: The hon. Gentleman is aware that these matters were debated in the National Assembly some weeks ago. However, in addition to the point that he has just made, the Assembly is considering more than 100 recommendations on how to deal with the strategy for older people in Wales, and at least a dozen of the recommendations relate to matters that are reserved to the United Kingdom Government. I will, of course, look very carefully at the Minister's letter and will respond to it in due course. The hon. Gentleman is aware of the Government's position.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): The Secretary of State talks about millions of pounds, but many elderly people in Wales face misery. I recently visited Plas y Dre, a local authority care home in Llandudno that is now facing closure, and met many of the residents. They are in their 90s and are anxious about the prospect of their home being closed, being parted from their friends and being cast away to other places all over the town. Is the Secretary of State now saying that there is no local authority or private care home that has to close because of the want of money?

Mr. Murphy: I did not say that. The hon. Gentleman knows that this is not simply a question of money. It is an extremely important issue. I am sure that he will support the Government on measures such as the NHS Reform and Health Care Professions Bill, which will ensure that we can reform the health service, but he did not support the Budget this year, which put literally hundreds of millions of pounds back into the health service and social services in Wales. That is what ultimately matters, and I would like to hear a commitment from him that the Conservative party would give as much money to health and social services in Wales as the Government are giving.

Mr. Evans: What I will not do is to promise at a general election that things can only get better, only for them to get decidedly worse for people throughout Wales.

The Secretary of State is hopelessly complacent. We have already heard that the BBC programme "Week In Week Out" has stated that 10 care homes a week are closing in Wales. Headlines in the *Daily Post*, which is fighting a valiant campaign, refer to "A cruel slap in the face for our OAPs", and a headline in *The Western Mail* a couple of months ago said, "Care homes head for meltdown". A Cardiff GP, Andrew Dearden, who is chairman of the British Medical Association's committee on community care says:

> "Community services for the elderly are falling apart. They are abysmal and getting worse."

Care home operators are fed up with increased Government regulations and inadequate funding. Will the Secretary of State now stop the spin and meet local government officials and councillors as a matter of urgency, to ensure that the shabby treatment of the elderly is stopped and they get the first-class services that they need?

Mr. Murphy: It seems to me that the only one to have spun is the hon. Gentleman. He understands that in dealing with such hugely important issues, simply to talk as he does is of no help. At the end of the day, homes need more money—that is now happening—and they need proper regulations. Is he suggesting that he disagrees with proper regulations and standards for care homes in Wales? Of course we have to have them. Indeed, when the standards were agreed in Wales, they were agreed both with the Assembly and with the independent care home sector. Together they agreed on the standards, and those standards have to be in place. The hon. Gentleman knows full well that because more and more people are living longer and have to be accommodated, we have to look at the issue sensibly and carefully, which includes dealing with the elderly who wish to stay at home—and that is what the Assembly and the Government will do.

Mr. Evans: If the Secretary of State and his Government introduce new regulations, they should ensure that there is proper and adequate funding for them.

Another example is the Chancellor's announcement that national insurance contributions will go up next year by 1 per cent. I have received replies from local authorities throughout Wales, and the increase will add another £460,000 a year to costs in Blaenau Gwent; in Flintshire the figure will be £500,000, in Denbighshire it will be £500,000, and Carmarthenshire will have to find an extra £1 million because of the increase in national insurance contributions. Will the Secretary of State now have urgent talks with the Chancellor of the Exchequer to ensure that in the block grant next year, sufficient funding will come forward to ensure that local authorities do not need to close their homes?

Mr. Murphy: Of course I shall discuss those issues with my right hon. Friends the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. We are in that process at the moment. I repeat that the hon. Gentleman needs to tell the House whether he agrees with the amount that the Chancellor of the Exchequer gave to the National Assembly for Wales to increase by hundreds and hundreds of millions of pounds the funding for the health service and other services in Wales. What the hon. Gentleman does not understand is that in Wales, there is a partnership between the independent homes care sector, local authorities and the National Assembly to ensure that we treat our old people properly.

Non-departmental Public Bodies

2. **Llew Smith** (Blaenau Gwent): If he will make a statement on the number of NDPBs in Wales *(a)* in 1999 and *(b)* in 2002. [59907]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Paul Murphy): In 1999 there were 38 Assembly-sponsored public bodies. This followed the merger of the Development Board for Rural Wales and the Land Authority for Wales with the Welsh Development Agency, and the abolition of Tai Cymru. At the end of May 2002 there were 36 such bodies.

Llew Smith *rose—[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. There is still far too much noise in the House.

Llew Smith: Does the Minister remember the commitment given to the people of Wales that if they voted yes to a Welsh Assembly, the Assembly would make a bonfire of the quangos? Bearing in mind the figures that he just announced, does he accept that there has been no bonfire? Instead, it has been very much a damp squib. When he next meets the First Secretary of the Assembly, will he request that he apologise on its behalf for that publicity stunt, and for its failure to make a bonfire of the quangos? Will he suggest that the Assembly's time would be better spent making a bonfire of the quangos, instead of being involved in the publicity stunt of telling the Welsh Rugby Union how it should do its job?

Mr. Murphy: I have no intention of making any such comment on the Welsh Rugby Union. However, I reassure my hon. Friend that his robust views will be reported in full to the First Minister. What has happened is that those bodies are now much more locally accountable in Wales than they ever were, and appointments to them are much more open and transparent than they ever were under the previous Administration. I am sure my hon. Friend agrees with that.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): In the Minister's substantive answer a moment ago he appeared to mention the abolition of Plaid Cymru. Was that wishful thinking?

Mr. Murphy: I was referring to the abolition of Tai Cymru.

Manufacturing

3. **Paul Flynn** (Newport, West): What recent discussions he has had with ministerial colleagues about measures to assist manufacturing industry in Wales. [59908]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Paul Murphy): I have regular discussions with my ministerial colleagues on a range of issues, including manufacturing, which has of course experienced difficulties this year. However, I am pleased to note that the fall in unemployment in Wales is one of the fastest of any region or country in the United Kingdom, and Wales now has lower unemployment than Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Canada and the United States.

Paul Flynn: My right hon. Friend will agree that part of that success story has been the brilliant record of local entrepreneurs, particularly in the high-tech sector and especially in the city of Newport. Does he realise that one very successful high-tech company—although still in its embryo stage, it will certainly sell its unique product throughout the world—is in some difficulty because it is outside the objective 1 areas? Alcan had a similar problem in Newport, and is it not true that the present objective 1 map distorts priorities, to the detriment of places such as Newport?

Mr. Murphy: I understand what my hon. Friend says, but he knows that Newport now has an urban regeneration corporation, which is the work of the Welsh Development Agency and the local authority. There will be opportunities to help firms such as Alcan because of the money—some £20 million—that the corporation will be able to generate. I also think that the new city of Newport is a great place for companies to invest in, and I wish it well.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): After the right hon. Gentleman's Freudian slip in which he said that he had abolished Plaid Cymru, although we are unabolished at the present time, will he ensure that the £170 million public expenditure cover is allowed for in this year's comprehensive spending review, and that the £100 million that should come to Wales does come there, so that we can draw down as much as possible under objective 1—or will he be complacent, as he was last year?

Mr. Murphy: I did not make any Freudian slip about Plaid Cymru—but the hon. Gentleman should be careful over the next 11 months, because we might well see, if not the abolition, the demise of his party.

As for the hon. Gentleman's question, I have said that I am in discussion with my right hon. Friends the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Chief Secretary regarding the spending review, and he cannot expect me to comment on the detail of those discussions at the moment. The Government and the Assembly are not complacent about objective 1. We regard it as vital in regenerating two thirds of the land mass of Wales. We believe that it is working well, and that after seven years Wales will be a much better place because of it.

Julie Morgan (Cardiff, North): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the proposed closure of Federal Mogul in my constituency, which would lead to the loss of 75 jobs, mainly in manufacturing? Although the economy in Cardiff is buoyant, as my right hon. Friend said, it will be difficult to replace those jobs because of the loss of employment in manufacturing. Will he do all that he can to assist manufacturing in the area?

Mr. Murphy: Of course I will. I am well aware of the matter to which my hon. Friend refers. She knows that we have to manage a changing economy in Wales and that there are unfortunate cases of firms having to close down and move away. She will also be aware that there are now 3,000 more people in work in Wales than there were this time last year, so the overall picture is good. Of course that does not help her constituents, and she can rest assured that I will raise the matter with the Economic Development Minister in the Assembly and the First Minister—although she might get there first.

Huw Irranca-Davies (Ogmore): Does my right hon. Friend welcome the independent report in the *Financial Times* yesterday that shows increased productivity in manufacturing? Is not that recognition that the sector is moving forward?

Mr. Murphy: Of course I welcome that. We are now seeing an increase in manufacturing activity in Wales, including in my hon. Friend's constituency, where unemployment has come down by nearly 44 per cent. since 1997.

Bovine TB

4. **Mr. Bill Wiggin** (Leominster): What recent discussions he has had with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on badger movements across the Welsh border. [59909]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Don Touhig): The Secretary of State and I have regular and wide-ranging discussions with ministerial colleagues in DEFRA and the National Assembly for Wales. Our officials also maintain contact with officials in DEFRA and the National Assembly concerning the issue on which the hon. Gentleman has tabled his question.

Mr. Wiggin: Today Members of the European Parliament are investigating foot and mouth and its handling in Wales. Wales now faces a similar crisis with the bovine tuberculosis microbacterium. Does the Minister agree that it is a disgrace and a display of contempt for the rural community that the Labour Administration have appointed Mike German, a Liberal Democrat, to handle their rural affairs brief?

Mr. Touhig: The hon. Gentleman had trouble keeping a straight face when he was asking that question—whereas the Government take the problem of bovine TB in Wales very seriously. In partnership with our colleagues in the Assembly, we are making available extra resources and extra staff to tackle the problem. As for the appointment of Mr. Mike German to his position in the National Assembly, that is a matter for the First Minister, not for me.

Drug Abuse

5. **Mr. Jon Owen Jones** (Cardiff, Central): What recent discussions he has had with Assembly Secretaries concerning drug abuse in Wales. [59910]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Don Touhig): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I discuss a range of issues with Assembly Ministers, including drug abuse.

Mr. Jones: The Minister, along with other south Wales MPs, will recently have got a letter from South Wales police saying that heroin and crack cocaine in south Wales have never been as available or as cheap as they are at present, that there are 7,700 problematic heroin and crack cocaine users, and that a conservative estimate is that in 2000, more than 270 people died of drug abuse in south Wales alone. Is that evidence of a drug policy that is working, or one that is failing? Will the Minister note that in Holland, which has a population of 17 million, just 61 people died in the equivalent period? Does he agree that that is testimony not only to the evil of drug pushers but to the cowardice of British politicians from various parties, who prefer to have drugs policies that sound tough rather than ones that work?

Mr. Touhig: I recall that during a debate in Westminster Hall on 22 May, my hon. Friend made a similar point when he said that we should be treating heroin users as a drug problem, not a criminal problem. I can tell him that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has already said, in response to the Home Affairs Committee report on our national drugs strategy, that he wants an appropriate extension of the prescription of heroin, but there are no plans for injecting rooms. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will respond to that report before the summer.

I share my hon. Friend's concern about the explosion in the use of crack and heroin in the Welsh valleys. The crime reduction director for Wales, David A'Herne, recently met Welsh MPs and warned of the severe dangers and problems that that will cause. It is important that all the agencies of the Government here, and of the Assembly and agencies in Wales, work together with the police to tackle the problem. I do not believe, however, that letting up in any way on our drive to crack down on drug pushers and those who sell drugs sends the right message. We should not send young people the message that we condone their using drugs—that is quite the wrong line to take. The Government must stick to the policy that they have already enunciated.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): Does the Minister accept that it is becoming perfectly obvious that simply attacking the drug pushers does nothing to reduce drug usage in a demand-led industry? Many Liberal Democrats and members of other parties believe that it is now time we tried an alternative approach of prescription to recorded addicts, which would undermine the drug pushers and improve the prospects of treatment. Is the hon. Gentleman willing to speak to the Home Secretary about setting up some sort of experiment to test such a policy where it matters most—in the communities that are suffering the most?

Mr. Touhig: As I said in answering my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones), the Home Secretary has made it absolutely clear that where appropriate he would consider the extension of prescribing heroin, but that is a matter that will be considered when he responds to the Home Affairs Committee's report. We have to wait for that.

The hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) mentioned drug pushers; drug pushers are parasites on our society who exploit our young people and change them from the sort of children we knew into the sort of children we do not want to know, and it is important that we take a tough line against them. At the end of the day we need a co-ordinated approach, or we will end up with a society that most of us do not want to live in.

Sports Funding

6. **Simon Hughes** (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): What discussions he has had since June 2001 with the National Assembly and others about national lottery funding for sport in Wales. [59911]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Don Touhig): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I meet colleagues regularly to discuss a range of issues, including lottery funding for sports.

Simon Hughes: Do Ministers accept that there is a direct link between the amount of provision for sport and other constructive activity for young people in Wales, and the ability to distract them from crime and other destructive activity? Given that at this very moment the Welsh team is preparing for the Commonwealth games, and presumably the Welsh football team is preparing for the World cup finals in four years' time, can Ministers assure us that throughout the whole of Wales—we on the Liberal Democrat Benches all speak as the beneficiaries of sporting provision in Wales—young people can have access to sport in increased measure and at all ages from now on, and for the next four years?

Mr. Touhig: Yes, indeed. The Government are committed to using funds through the lottery to enhance the sporting abilities of our young people and to provide opportunities, especially in deprived areas of the United Kingdom, and in Wales in particular. The hon. Gentleman and the Government are on the same wavelength in that respect.

Unemployment

7. **Mr. Chris Bryant** (Rhondda): If he will make a statement about the recent effect in Wales of Government measures to create job opportunities for unemployed people. [59912]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Paul Murphy): The Government's long-term ambition is that by the end of the decade there will be a higher proportion of people in work than ever before. The Government have seen success both in reducing unemployment to nearly its lowest for 20 years, and in increasing employment, with 1.5 million more people in work than in spring 1997. I am pleased to tell the House that the latest figures for Wales, published last Friday, showed an increase of 3,000 in the total number of people in work in Wales compared to a year before.

Mr. Bryant: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. He will be especially delighted to know that since 1997 unemployment in the Rhondda has fallen by more than 50 per cent. However, there are still many problems facing local industry, which complains that it is difficult to understand the process whereby it can get assistance from the Welsh Development Agency, and is worried that young people do not emerge from school with the entrepreneurial skills that are needed. Will he talk to his colleagues in the Welsh Assembly to ensure that we improve our record on those matters?

Mr. Murphy: Yes, of course I will. My hon. Friend is right to stress that his constituency has benefited—perhaps more than any other in Wales—from the changes, and that he has a committed work force in the Rhondda. I look forward to being with him in the Pop factory in Porth on Friday, where we will celebrate the industrial heritage of the Rhondda and a great future for his valleys.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [59936] **Ms Claire Ward** (Watford): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 19 June.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall have further such meetings later today.

Ms Ward: Does my right hon. Friend agree that globalisation can bring real benefits to all of us, but that it must not be allowed to do so at the expense of the poorest in this world? Today there are thousands of people demanding that the Government use their influence to change the World Trade Organisation and the trade rules to ensure that developing countries benefit and are not exploited. Will my right hon. Friend listen to those representations today, and will he lead the debate for change when he attends the Heads of Government meeting?

The Prime Minister: I met representatives from my constituency and others today in Downing street over that very issue. The Trade Justice movement will get a great deal of support for its basic principles from the Government and, I hope, all Members of the House. It is important to point out that over the past few years we have increased the aid budget by 45 per cent. in real terms, and we have been leading the cause of writing off the debt of the poorest countries. We have also been making sure that we focus the aid that we do give on poverty reduction. The people of this country can be very proud of the commitment that they have given to some of the poorest people in the world. We need to make sure that as well as giving aid and writing off debt, we are giving access to our markets so that those countries can compete properly and fairly.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): May I take this opportunity to extend my condolences and those of my party to the families of the victims of the terrible suicide bomb in Jerusalem yesterday?

Two years ago the Prime Minister said that it was time to give police the powers

> "to impose curfews on children and time to use them".

Can he tell us how many curfew orders have been issued since then?

The Prime Minister: I cannot give the right hon. Gentleman the exact number of curfew orders, but I can say that curfews in respect of offenders have been used in thousands of cases.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Perhaps the Prime Minister ought to check his figures. The answer is that not one single child curfew order has been issued in the past three years, despite the Prime Minister's speech. He also introduced child safety orders for the under-10s, apparently to stop them drifting into crime. That was four years ago, and only 12 such orders have been issued since. He promised that there would be 5,000 antisocial behaviour orders every year, and there has been a total of only 500. Can the right hon. Gentleman tell us how many more crimes there are each day than there were a year ago?

The Prime Minister: We do not yet have the full recorded crime statistics, but they will show a rise in recorded crime in the past year. However, on the same day, we will also have the British crime survey. Perhaps we should wait for the results of both those surveys. In any event, crime will be down from where it was five years ago when we came to office.

I return to some of the points that the right hon. Gentleman made on curfew orders. There have been about 1,500 juvenile curfew orders, about 14,500 adult curfew orders, 6,500 drug treatment testing orders and 12,500 reparation orders, particularly for young people, so it simply is not the case that none of those orders is being used. The critical point is that we are taking measures, particularly to deal with street crime. Overall crime has fallen in the past five years. That stands in stark contrast to the Conservative Government who, when they were in office, doubled the rate of crime.

Mr. Duncan Smith: I know that the Prime Minister does not like to answer the question, but the question was about child curfew orders. Two years ago he said that he would issue them, but not one child curfew order has been issued. Crimes are up by 850 a day in the past 12 months. Overall crime is now rising for the first time in a decade, burglaries are up for the first time in eight years, and violent and street crime is rocketing. It is no good the Prime Minister sending his chairman and his Home Secretary out to attack the press merely because their spin is backfiring. Does he understand that what the people require is action, not words?

The Prime Minister: I agree. However, let us get the facts straight. Overall, police numbers are now at their highest level ever. They were falling in the last years of the past Government. Since we came to office, burglary is down by 35 per cent., and vehicle crime by 24 per cent. We have halved the time that it takes to get persistent juvenile offenders to court. We have increased dramatically the cuts in court delays, which have caused so much distress. A huge amount of work is being done in the White Paper on criminal justice and on juvenile crime.

Surely the comparison is this: in the past five years, crime overall has fallen under this Government. There is much more to be done, and we are doing it. Crime under the previous Conservative Government doubled. We have increased the numbers of police officers. It is only as a result of the additional investment that we are putting into the criminal justice system that we will get further results in future.

If it is the case that we need more police and we need more investment in our criminal justice system, we have committed ourselves to make that investment. Will the right hon. Gentleman reverse the Conservative party's position and support that investment?

Q2. [59937] **Mr. David Borrow** (South Ribble): Tesco will soon be opening a £20 million store in Leyland in my constituency, and it is using the new deal partnership to guarantee jobs for the long-term unemployed in the area. I have recently met some of the 80 trainees who have finished a 13-week course that was run by Runshaw college and Age Concern. Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating them on completing their course and wish them luck in their new jobs? Can he assure me that similar schemes will be available for those of our citizens who find it difficult to get back into work in future?

The Prime Minister: In my hon. Friend's constituency and elsewhere, the new deal has had a huge impact in cutting unemployment. In the long term, youth unemployment has declined by about 75 per cent. in the past few years. We have put about 650,000 people through the new deal. Literally hundreds of thousands of people who were without hope and any chance of a decent prospect in life finally have job prospects and a potential career to go to. I remind the House that when we introduced the new deal, it was opposed every inch of the way by the Conservative party. We will continue with the new deal because it is right for the country and right for the people who are benefiting from it.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): Given that the Prime Minister is meeting the President of France later today, will he be raising with him the continuing illegal ban on British beef importation? Has he yet been able to ascertain whether the incoming French Administration intend to end this illegal ban?

The Prime Minister: Yes, of course I will raise the issue with the President. We are also raising it at a government level. There is a new Government in place, and we very much hope that they will come into line with their legal obligations.

Mr. Kennedy: Will the Prime Minister confirm also that British beef is produced to the most stringent health, safety and quality standards, which match those of the rest of the world? Given that the illegal ban remains unacceptable, will he launch a fresh promotional campaign for British beef? Will he also seek compensation from the French authorities for the damage that has been done to our farmers in the interim?

The Prime Minister: First, we must ensure that if the French Government will not change their position, the European Commission will take the necessary infringement action, because the ban on British beef is wholly illegal.

The incidence of BSE in this country is falling, and has fallen dramatically. The incidence in France has been rising. There is no reason, in science, common sense or law, for the ban to remain. We will continue to do everything that we can. Through the red tractor campaign, we are doing our best to promote British beef—it is among the safest and the finest quality in the world—and British produce generally.

Ann McKechin (Glasgow, Maryhill): Given the huge response to the trade justice lobby today, will the Prime Minister assure the House that this Government will work for reform of the EU common agricultural policy to end the tariffs and subsidies that are throwing millions of people into continued poverty?

The Prime Minister: We will press for that reform. I hope that the European Union realises not merely that it is the right thing to do, but that reform of the common agricultural policy is inevitable, given that enlargement is going to happen. We must argue the case for free trade and access to markets not only in the European Union, but in the world trade round, the G8 and elsewhere, because it is the right thing to do. What many of the poorest countries need is not simply more aid, but access to our markets. If they were given the chance to sell into our markets, many of the people who are living in poverty today would not be living in that poverty.

Q3. [59938] **Mr. John Baron** (Billericay): Why did the Prime Minister endorse the takeover of Express Newspapers by the pornography king Richard Desmond and, indeed, accept a large donation from him? Was it because all other interested parties were committed to keeping the pound and he was simply lying back and thinking of Europe?

The Prime Minister: I suppose that that is what passes for forensic questioning by the Conservative party nowadays. The takeover bid was handled entirely in accordance with the proper rules, as the hon. Gentleman well knows.

Q4. [59939] **Mr. Huw Edwards** (Monmouth): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the World cup has helped to highlight UNICEF's call for a global movement for children to combat extreme poverty, provide universal primary education and combat the devastating effects of HIV and AIDS? Will he work with the leaders of the affluent countries to adopt those aims as part of a strategy to achieve global social justice?

The Prime Minister: We will certainly push for the global targets on poverty to be met. They will be met by a combination of action from the developed world and—this is what is particularly important—from the developing world itself. That is why the New Partnership for Africa's Development, which will be discussed at the G8 next week, is so important. It will set down clear benchmarks not only for aid on issues such as health and education, but for action on issues such as governance and the proper commercial and legal systems from African countries, so that the money that we put into such programmes is properly used for the benefit of the people.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): Last year, the Prime Minister told the House that the tax on pension funds that his Chancellor imposed was justified because

"of the buoyancy of the stock market".—[*Official Report*, 7 March 2001; Vol. 364, c. 285.]

Does he now regret that statement?

The Prime Minister: No, I do not.

Mr. Duncan Smith: I know that the Chancellor has his best interests at heart, so when he whispers in the Prime Minister's ear, it is only for his own personal good. The fact is that the stock market has fallen by £300 billion in the space of one year, so will the Prime Minister please tell the House how much longer—I would not listen to the Chancellor much longer; he will only get him into more trouble—a man of his age will now have to work to receive a decent pension?

The Prime Minister: What my right hon. Friend was saying was that the stock market rose £520 million before the recent fall, but the fall to which the right hon. Gentleman refers still leaves the stock market in a net balance up of £250 billion. If he disputes that, perhaps he will say so.

Mr. Duncan Smith: It really is difficult for the Prime Minister; he really should not listen to his neighbour, because he genuinely does not have his best interests at heart. I asked him a specific question: how much longer? This may come as a bit of a blow to the Chancellor, but a man of the Prime Minister's age will now have to work four years longer than planned. That is because the pensions industry is in crisis. Does he accept that, as a direct result of the imposition of his pensions tax, millions of people's retirement plans are now in ruins?

The Prime Minister: I may be working for four years, but I think that the right hon. Gentleman will have to work for about 40 years before he has any chance of crossing the Floor. As for pension funds, it is absurd to say that the Chancellor is responsible for the fall in the stock market. Yes, the stock market has fallen, but it is still massively up on where it was five years ago. As for the issue of pensions, we are putting £6 billion more into pensions every year. We have got the pension credit coming up, the stakeholder pension and the new measures on the state second pension. What pensioners in this country remember is the last Conservative Government and the mis-selling of pensions scandal, about which they did absolutely nothing. Whether it is my longevity or his that is the issue, I do not think that a Conservative Government is the answer.

Hon. Members: More.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Q5. [59940] **Tony Cunningham** (Workington): May I tell the Prime Minister that we have a brand new police station in Workington, which was officially opened last week? Superintendent Steve Turnbull is delighted with the new facilities, but he has asked me to raise with the Prime Minister the particular issue of special constables. Will my right hon. Friend look seriously at an initiative in west Cumbria to pay special constables to patrol Workington town centre? If that pilot scheme is successful it could well be used in other parts of Cumbria and the rest of the country.

The Prime Minister: I offer my best wishes to Mr. Turnbull in his new station. The way we attract more people to become special constables is a real issue. The Home Office is looking at paying them an allowance, but obviously that has to be looked at together with other priorities. However, the existence of the new station, plus the neighbourhood warden scheme, will make a great difference to crime in my hon. Friend's community. I hope very much even at this late stage that the House will unite behind the proposals for community safety officers to work alongside the record numbers of police to give our communities the chance of a safer future.

Q6. [59941] **Mr. Alex Salmond** (Banff and Buchan): Could I ask the Prime Minister to muscle in on another area of policy? Presumably this country gives international aid to assist development, ease suffering and stop people dying. Would it not be immoral to use that as a weapon to dragoon developing countries into changing their asylum policies, particularly as two thirds of the refugee problem lies within those countries? Would it not be doubly immoral, not to say pathetic and embarrassing, to go to the Seville summit and ask other European countries to follow that course of action?

The Prime Minister: I do not agree at all. It is not a question of dragooning people but of saying that if we are worried, as we are, about the number of people coming here as illegal immigrants—I have to tell the hon. Gentleman that they are often subject to illegal people-trafficking conducted by organised criminals, some of their lives are at risk and large sums of money are taken off them—there is nothing wrong whatever in us and other European countries working with countries with which we have a substantial relationship, whether in aid, trade or any other matter, and saying to them, "Let's sit down and work out a proper system of co-operation so that people who come into this country do so in the right way." That is a perfectly sensible and laudable objective, which is no doubt why the Scottish National party disagrees with it.

Mr. Tony Banks (West Ham): Did my right hon. Friend notice that when Senegal got through to the quarter finals of the World cup a national public holiday was declared? Does he agree that countries like Senegal, the USA, South Korea and the Republic of Ireland have made this the most wonderful World cup that we can remember since 1966? In the event of England beating Brazil on Friday, we stand a very good chance of going through to the World cup final, which would be a national event of great significance. Under those circumstances, will my right hon. Friend consider declaring a public holiday in the United Kingdom on Monday 1 July so that we can all enjoy the experience or, as it were, get over our disappointment?

That is worth thinking about because, after all, this country is at the bottom of the European league for public holidays. I have tabled an early-day motion, which is supported by five Scottish Members of Parliament as it applies to the whole country. If we get into the World cup final the Prime Minister must go to Japan. If he does so, will he take me?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for his very interesting submission which I shall consider carefully. Shall we first get over the hurdle of beating Brazil on Friday?

Q7. [59942] **Chris Grayling** (Epsom and Ewell): The Prime Minister promised Britain a transport system fit for the 21st century. Can he explain why, on the rather paltry list of road and rail projects approved since the general election, according to the Department for Transport 25 per cent. have been in his own constituency? More important, if the Government cannot be trusted on transport matters, does not that underline the importance of having a robust and fair-minded Select Committee to scrutinise what they are doing?

The Prime Minister: The best answer to the transport problems is the programme of investment over the next 10 years. Of course, that programme of investment is supported by Members on this side of the House and has been opposed by the Conservative party. Whatever the answers to the problems of our transport system, they are not the answers of the Conservative party, which are, first, to cut back on investment in our transport system and, secondly, to ensure that the botched privatisation that gave rise to Railtrack remains in place. *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members may not like to be reminded that that is their policy, but it is.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Is the plea by President Mandela that the Lockerbie prisoner be transferred to a Muslim country being considered?

The Prime Minister: The agreement that we made was that he would come to a Scottish prison—in fact, that anyone who was convicted would come to a Scottish prison. I have to say that I see no reason to change that decision.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): Does the Prime Minister appreciate that while the Conservative Front-Bench team and the vast majority of its Back Benchers are wholly united in their attitude to the European currency, there is growing concern that the Government appear to be disunited, confused and unable to make up their mind? Can he try to resolve the issue by saying clearly and specifically when the five economic tests will be carried out and, if the result is affirmative, how soon thereafter the referendum will take place? If he gives a straight answer to that question he will deal with the issue, but if he again does not, that will simply add to the confusion. The Government cannot make up their mind what to do.

The Prime Minister: First, it is and always has been the case that we will carry out the assessment within the first two years of this Parliament. Secondly, the Conservative party may be a little more united today than it was a few years ago, but that is only because it has driven out anyone of any sense on the Conservative Benches. The vast majority of people believe that a sensible position on the single currency is that if the economic tests are passed and it is in this country's economic interests to join, we should. It would be disastrous for this country if we adopted the hon. Gentleman's true position—he is right that he probably does speak for many people in the Conservative party—and withdrew from the European Union. Our position is that we should remain in Europe and get the best out of Europe for Britain, because Britain's role is as a key player in Europe, not on the sidelines of Europe.

Q8. [59943] **Phil Sawford** (Kettering): In the course of the recent intensive truancy campaign, 12,000 young people were stopped. Twenty-six per cent. of the secondary school children and 83 per cent. of the primary school children were with their parents, and half were deemed to have no good reason to be away from school. In the light of that, and given the links between antisocial behaviour, crime and truancy, will my right hon. Friend encourage more local authorities to carry out such truancy sweeps, and will he impress on parents the importance of attendance at school?

The Prime Minister: The truancy sweeps have been successful, and the link between truancy and antisocial behaviour and crime is clear. Two other steps are necessary, however. First, we must make it clear to parents that they can be liable to penalties if their children are truanting without good cause. Secondly, it is vital that children who are excluded from school should not be truanting, but should be in proper full-time education. As a result of the additional investment that we are putting into our school system, by the end of this year those who are permanently excluded will be in proper full-time education instead of having a couple of hours' education a week, which obviously leaves them free to roam the streets.

Q9. [59944] **Mr. Mark Francois** (Rayleigh): The people of Gibraltar have strong support across Britain, including in this House. Given the rumours that the Anglo-Spanish talks have faltered, can we expect a statement before the summer recess, ideally confirming that the Government have relented on this issue and that we in Britain will show the same trust and loyalty to the Gibraltarians that they have always shown to us?

The Prime Minister: The Foreign Secretary has made it clear that there will be a statement when negotiations and discussions are concluded. The Brussels process, which began under the Conservative Government, is sensible and right and in the interests of Britain, Spain and the people of Gibraltar. However, we have always made it clear that there can be no change to Gibraltar's constitutional status without the consent of the people there. Getting more acceptable relations between Britain, Spain and Gibraltar is in everybody's interest.

Q10. [59945] **Mr. Michael Clapham** (Barnsley, West and Penistone): In view of the recent report of record profits by Jarvis, the company that maintains the rail track at Potters Bar, and by the rail division of Balfour Beatty despite reports that maintenance of the track is a shambles, does my right hon. Friend agree that the culture of complacency shown by the contractors is unlikely to be replaced by one of safety until and unless rail maintenance is brought back in-house to Railtrack?

The Prime Minister: The Secretary of State for Transport met Mr. Armitage, the chief executive of Railtrack, and raised those issues with him last week. There is a clear understanding that the situation must improve; Lord Cullen made recommendations on the matter that will be implemented. Anybody—those in-house or contractors—must abide by minimum standards and rules, and there are penalties for those who fail to abide by them. Although it is understandable that such issues are being raised, it is important to say that, on the whole, rail safety has improved, not declined in the past few years. Collisions are down by some 12 per cent., derailments by 22 per cent. and SPADs—signals passed at danger—last year are the lowest recorded. That does not mean that there is not a great deal more to do, but we need the facts about the recent tragedy before we pass judgment on the contractors as a whole.

Norman Baker (Lewes): In the light of the—*[Interruption.]* I am grateful for the support. In the light of the recent fiasco between the Prime Minister's Office and Black Rod, would the right hon. Gentleman describe Mr. Alastair Campbell's position as unassailable? Is there any truth in the rumour that Mr. Campbell has suggested that, when we win the World cup, the Prime Minister should be on hand with Mr. Beckham to hold the cup aloft?

The Prime Minister: I wondered what the hon. Gentleman would ask. I realised that it would be something trivial that said far more about him than me. I have nothing to add to what I have already said on the subject.

Q11. [59946] **Mr. Robert N. Wareing** (Liverpool, West Derby): President Bush has authorised American Special Services to dispose of the President of Iraq by any means, including assassination. Surely my right hon. Friend could not agree with that policy, could he?

The Prime Minister: I am not responsible, believe it or not, for United States policy. I urge my hon. Friend not to rely completely on media speculation about it.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): It is now impossible to get a national health service dentist in Market Harborough. What are the Government doing about that?

The Prime Minister: It is correct that it is difficult to get a national health service dentist in some areas of the country. However, the sheer brass neck of any Conservative Member who raises that issue is extraordinary. The changes that we have made mean that anyone who wishes to do so can contact NHS Direct or other NHS services and get the name of an NHS dentist whom they can visit. If the hon. and learned Gentleman has examples of constituents who are unable to do that, perhaps he will pass them to the health authority. I am sure that it will be able to do something about the matter.

Q12. [59947] **Mr. John Lyons** (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): My right hon. Friend knows that schools throughout the UK will break up for the summer holidays in the next few weeks. Schoolteachers and pupils will welcome that. However, school cleaners and catering staff will not welcome it. They have no holiday pay for seven or eight weeks, and no right to unemployment benefit. Will my right hon. Friend do something about that?

The Prime Minister: We know that there is a problem with support staff. Of course, the matter is devolved and must be negotiated on that basis. Discussions about it are continuing, but it would be a mistake if we tried to deal with it nationally. I point out that, thanks to the working families tax credit and other measures, some of the lowest-paid support staff receive at least some proper protection and additional payments under the Government. However, when we pay tribute to teachers, it is important to remember that a lot of work is done by support staff, who do a magnificent job.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I am sure that the Prime Minister is aware that members of the American Congress have been taking evidence in this place relating to Gulf war syndrome. Will he give us an assurance that Parliament and our researchers will work even more closely with the Americans than they have in the past to get to the root cause of the syndrome, bearing in mind that it could affect our citizens in the near future, particularly if there are further operations in that area?

The Prime Minister: I understand the concern over this issue. It is correct that we are working with the Americans. I speak from memory, but I think that we are spending somewhere in the region of £7 million on our own research. The important point to stress is that we need to know what the scientific evidence really shows us, and it would not be right or proper to act on behalf of the Government until we have that evidence. This issue obviously arose years before we came into office, but we have made additional provision for research. We will do our best to get to the truth of the matter, and we will act on the scientific truth one way or another.

Prescriptions (Chronic Diseases)

3.31 pm

Mr. Paul Marsden (Shrewsbury and Atcham): I beg to move,

> That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision in relation to prescribing for those suffering from chronic diseases.

The Bill will review the prescription charges levied against the chronically ill, to make the system fairer and more equitable. It will also seek to raise awareness to increase the take-up of the current pre-paid certificates by the chronically ill, and—in the light of a review that recommended free prescriptions—to ensure that there is full take-up.

In 1968, the British Medical Association approved a list of medical conditions whose sufferers should be exempt from prescription charges. Some of the decisions on those conditions were based on medical knowledge current at the time. For instance, children with cystic fibrosis were not expected to live to see adulthood, so children were exempt but not adults. Today, more than 1,000 adults with cystic fibrosis are penalised by the state for living longer. In today's NHS, that is unfair.

Yesterday, I met Janine, a 21-year-old sufferer of cystic fibrosis. She has to work for seven to eight hours each day with her carers to be fit enough to walk up a flight a stairs and do the things that we all take for granted. She is a courageous person who spends her time as an advocate for other CF patients.

Desiree Eriksson Hills had a heart transplant 14 years ago after developing dilated cardiomyopathy at the age of just 17. But, for a transplant recipient, the operation is not the end of the story—quite the contrary. Desiree and others like her have to take drugs for the rest of their lives. It is not right that they have to pay prescription charges. As Desiree says,

> "We cannot live without these drugs, so we are paying a tax on our very existence. That's just wrong."

Thirty-eight-year-old Lorraine Ellard is living with long-term asthma, which is so severe that it prevents her from working, shopping and even socialising. In spite of these factors and the disruption to her life, Lorraine has to pay for her asthma medication. She claims incapacity benefit of £369 per month, but faces a massive monthly prescription bill of £124. If Lorraine is short of cash, the drugs have to be forfeited, but without them she is liable to face a flare-up, with asthma symptoms that could lead to her being rushed into hospital, which represents an added and avoidable cost to the NHS. Without the drugs, Lorraine is placed in a perilous position, as asthma is a matter of life and death. Likewise, someone who suffers from multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease, certain types of epilepsy, or even myalgic encephalopathy will have to pay for prescriptions for basic medicines. For someone living in the fourth richest nation in the world, in the 21st century, that is patently unfair and unjust.

According to the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux, as a result of the glaring anomalies in the current system, about 750,000 prescribed items are never dispensed because people cannot afford them. Pharmacists and GPs say that many patients ask which is the most important item on a prescription, because they can afford only one. It is argued that those with chronic conditions can limit such costs by buying season tickets, but an initial outlay of £89 is too great for many on low incomes. Over the years, the cost of such season tickets can run into many hundreds of pounds. NACAB also discovered that 27 per cent. of those who could benefit from season tickets did not even know of their existence.

The National Asthma Campaign has described prescription charges as an

> "unfair tax on people with asthma".

The Cystic Fibrosis Research Trust has also condemned such charges. Typically, it is the poorest in our society who have the worst medical conditions, yet the Government demand that they must pay. For example, students with chronic conditions are told that they should pay for their medical drugs out of their student loan. That is discrimination of the worst kind, and it is perpetuated by this Labour Government.

The Government have not researched the number of chronically ill patients who have to pay for prescriptions, and the Bill would require such a review to be conducted. The anticipated cost of prepaid prescriptions is some £43 million, and a further £40 million would be required to cover those who cannot afford such prescriptions and those who have not even heard of them. The total cost would therefore be £83 million, but that should be set against the billions of pounds that the Chancellor has raised through tax increases for the NHS. Such a sum is surely a small price to pay for justice for the chronically ill. Liberal Democrats say that the chronically ill are a priority and deserve support.

In 1992—10 years ago—Labour said in its manifesto that

> "chronically sick patients will be a higher priority."

In 1994, Labour said:

> "We will seek to provide free medication as part of ongoing treatment or long-term requirements."

It even cited the example of cystic fibrosis sufferers. In 1996, the then Leader of the Opposition—the current Prime Minister—said that Labour would tackle health inequalities because he believed in a

> "universal health care system paid for by taxation that gives every citizen the best health care based upon need not ability to pay".

The then shadow Health Secretary said in 1996:

> "I want to see greater fairness between patients; the cr[illegible] NHS principle of equity has vanished in recent years."

Labour's 1997 manifesto proclaimed:

> "We will save the NHS . . . Labour commits itself anew to the historic principle that if you are ill or injured there will be a national health service there to help; and access to it will be based on need and need alone—not on your ability to pay."

Hear, hear. I cannot understand why, five years after the election of a Labour Government, nothing has changed for the chronically ill.

Even as recently as 1998, in anticipation of the comprehensive spending review, the then health Minister—he is now Secretary of State for Health—promised a review of the

> "list of medical conditions exempt from prescription charges".—[*Official Report*, 5 May 1998; Vol. 311, c. 350W.]

What was the outcome? A point-blank refusal to change this blatant unfairness. Recently, the Wanless report stated that

> "the present system of exemption for prescription charges is not logical, nor rooted in the principles of the NHS".

[Mr. Paul Marsden]

Labour has reneged on 10 years of promises to the chronically ill, and has allowed this unfairness to continue for five years. Liberal Democrats are determined to make Labour face up to such injustice. The money is there in the form of the Chancellor's tax increases. Liberal Democrats believe in an NHS free at the point of delivery and based on need, rather than the ability to pay. We will speak up for the chronically ill because it is clear that both Conservative and Labour Governments have failed them.

Even last week, the Prime Minister said in relation to prescription charges that the Government were

> "aware of the things that were said previously and we intend to honour them."—*[Official Report*, 12 June 2002; Vol. 386, c. 864.]

The words "honour" and "new Labour" do not sit comfortably together, coming from a Prime Minister who has more spin than Spiderman. The Liberal Democrats will maintain this campaign for the chronically ill until we get justice for those patients.

No more promises, no more maybes and no more excuses. People like Janine, Desiree and Lorraine need help now.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Paul Marsden, Dr. Richard Taylor, Dr. Ian Gibson, Dr. Evan Harris, Mr. David Amess, Sandra Gidley, Mr. Simon Thomas, Mr. Paul Burstow, Rev. Martin Smyth, Dr. Jenny Tonge and John Barrett.

PRESCRIPTIONS (CHRONIC DISEASES)

Mr. Paul Marsden accordingly presented a Bill to make provision in relation to prescribing for those suffering from chronic diseases: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 19 July, and to be printed [Bill 151].

Opposition Day

[3RD ALLOTTED DAY]

World Poverty

Mr. Speaker: Before the debate commences, I inform the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

3.41 pm

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): I beg to move,

> That this House shared the concerns of the Trade Justice Movement about the plight of the poorest people in the world, and congratulates them on bringing these matters to the attention of the public; notes with great concern the increasing levels of hunger and poverty in many developing nations; further notes that international development targets are not being met in Africa; recognises the depth of public concern on this issue; believes that increasing levels of international trade offer the greatest hope for the alleviation of hunger and poverty in history; further believes that the removal of trade barriers will promote economic growth, trade and investment in poor nations; supports the liberalisation of trade; is concerned that the Common Agricultural Policy is failing both British farmers and consumers, and harming farmers in poor countries; is also concerned at the rising levels of farm subsidies in America; and calls on the Government to use the forthcoming G8 Summit in Canada, the EU Heads of Government Meeting, and future World Trade Organisation meetings to further the liberalisation of international trade to promote the alleviation of poverty and combat hunger and starvation amongst the poorest people on earth.

Before I begin my speech, I should like to welcome the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble) to her new post as Under-Secretary of State for International Development. I very much look forward to debating international development issues with her. I enjoyed my debates with her predecessor, and I am sure that the Under-Secretary's knowledge of South Africa will be a great asset to her.

Given that 10,000 people from every corner of the United Kingdom have come to lobby Parliament today, I am delighted that Her Majesty's official Opposition have chosen to debate an issue that clearly matters to British people. We congratulate the Trade Justice Movement on bringing the matter to the attention of the public. We may not agree with everything for which the movement calls, but we share its concern for the plight of the poorest people in the world. The movement recognises that trade can play an important part in reducing poverty and improving our quality of life. It can generate jobs and wealth.

Conservatives believe that trade could be the greatest force for poverty reduction in history. There is no question but that the opening up of markets and increased trade from developing countries would dwarf any contribution that could be made from overseas aid. That is not idealism, but common sense.

Tariff barriers cost poor countries $100 billion a year—twice as much as they receive in aid. We firmly believe that trade restrictions are the main barrier to development. There is a danger that seeking to impose controls on overseas investment in developing countries may make it less attractive for companies to invest, which would deprive people in the developing world of the jobs and trading opportunities that they desperately need.

Much progress has been made in reducing poverty over the past 50 years, but it has been patchy. A whole continent—Africa—is being left behind. It is the only region in the world that is completely off target when it comes to meeting the millennium development goals on health, education and poverty.

That is why we have called for the debate today. Despite the onward spread of globalisation, the World Bank has found that many of the poorest countries are in danger of becoming marginal to the world economy. As it pointed out in a recent report, incomes in those countries have been falling, poverty has been rising, and those countries participate in trade less today than they did 20 years ago.

This is our challenge: the Government and the whole international community must do more to allow countries currently excluded from international trade to reap the immense benefits that it offers.

Much pressure has been placed on poor countries to open their markets and liberalise trade, but rich countries—including Britain—are reluctant to practise what they preach. Telling poor countries to end subsidies and open their markets is like sitting in a glasshouse throwing stones, and today we want to address such hypocrisy.

We can alleviate world poverty by freeing up trade, and I want to set out how it can be done. First, it can be done by market access. If Africa were to increase its share of world exports by just 1 per cent., it would generate $70 billion—approximately five times what the continent receives in aid. Conservatives believe that free trade is the engine of poverty reduction. Several case studies show the beneficial effects of increased global trade. The number of rural poor in China declined from 250 million in 1978 to just 34 million in 1999. The level of absolute poverty in Vietnam has been halved in 10 years. India and Uganda have also enjoyed rapid poverty reduction as they have integrated into the world economy. Poverty in Uganda fell by 40 per cent. in the 1990s, and school enrolment doubled. More has been done to address poverty in the past 50 years than in the past 500, but there is much more to do.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): Will the hon. Lady explain the Conservative position on the Tobin tax, which would raise trillions of pounds a year on international currency speculation? The Chancellor of the Exchequer blows hot and cold about the measure, and is in a cold phase at the moment. It would be nice to know where the Conservatives stood on the matter.

Mrs. Spelman: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, but I do not think that one measure will fix the problems of global poverty. The underlying problem that the measure seeks to address is currency instability, to which many factors contribute. That is the key point.

How does globalisation work to reduce poverty? It increases inward investment and drives economic growth. It has meant that, for the first time, poor countries have been able to harness the potential of their abundant labour to break into global markets for manufactured goods and services. In fact, manufactured goods amounted to less than a quarter of developing countries' exports in 1980, but by 1998 they had soared to 80 per cent.

Poor countries' comparative advantages can be realised when they are able to export freely without unnecessary hindrance. For many people—indeed, for an entire continent—the picture seems less rosy. Many billions of people remain excluded from the process of globalisation, for which a number of factors are responsible, including conflict, sickness and poor government. However, many of them are excluded from trade by the prevailing trade systems. As Kofi Annan pointed out last year, poor countries are caught in a vicious circle—they need foreign investment but can offer little to attract it. In order to break out of that cycle, poor countries need to export and to open markets in which their goods can compete.

Here is the authentic voice of business. The chairman of Unilever wrote in the *Financial Times* last week:

> "For all their talk of development, western nations in effect exclude many African exports from their markets."

That is from the chairman of a company that has been in Africa for more than a century.

Rich countries continue to impose barriers to trade on their poor neighbours. The most obvious are the punitive tariffs imposed on imported goods. Possibly the most well-known example is the recent decision by the United States to raise tariffs against steel imports, but the USA is not the only culprit. According to an Oxfam report published on 11 April this year, the European Union is more protectionist in respect of poor countries than are the United States, Japan or Canada. In fact, only New Zealand has fully opened its markets to products exported by least developed countries.

The least developed countries lose an estimated $2.5 billion a year in potential export earnings as a result of high levels of tariff protection in Canada, the EU, the United States and Japan. Without tariffs and quotas, poor countries could generate an 11 per cent. increase in their exports.

Hugh Bayley (City of York): Does the hon. Lady welcome the European Union's everything but arms initiative, which removes tariffs from everything but arms for the poorest countries? Does she think that that is at least a move in the right direction and will she explain why it did not happen while the Conservative party was in power?

Mrs. Spelman: I will discuss in some detail what the European Union has done to help and where it could do more. When the Conservative party was in power that initiative had not been proposed, but there is no doubt that it represents progress and I shall say so.

It is difficult to quantify the benefits that would accrue to developing countries if there were total import liberalisation. Some estimates have predicted gains of more than $3 billion each for India, China and Brazil and more than $14 billion for Latin America in total. The Government have pledged a number of times to reduce the import tariffs that face poor countries. Progress has been made. The initiative to which the hon. Member for City of York (Hugh Bayley) referred made a start in providing that free access to poorer countries, but the EU still maintains some of its highest tariff peaks on a large number of imported goods. Canada is another example, as 30 per cent. of poor countries' exports to Canada face peak tariffs.

On a slightly different note, another injustice is that typical exports from developing countries, such as agricultural and labour-intensive products, face far higher tariff barriers when they enter major northern markets than industrial products.

[Mrs. Spelman]

The Prime Minister announced in his speech to the Labour party conference that we would offer Africa access to our markets, to practise the free trade that we are so fond of preaching. Are we extending free access to Africa? Perhaps the Secretary of State will clarify how market access is to be extended to Africa. What are the tangible steps to better market access? Which countries do we want to help? What objectives have we set and how will we measure success?

At the EU Heads of Government meeting—

Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): Does the hon. Lady agree that sugar should have been included under the everything but arms initiative?

Mrs. Spelman: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, he has questioned me on a subject about which I know quite a lot as I worked for sugar beet growers for more than 15 years. I wish to give him an informed reply and not a simple yes or no. It is not a simple question. Perhaps he is not aware that, under the protocol signed by African, Caribbean and Pacific countries, many developing countries benefit from the same price as that received by farmers in this country. Automatically removing those preferential terms would create very real problems in the sugar industry of those countries. While I am sure that reform is needed in that area, we must be very careful that it does not hurt our farmers—we must find reforms that will work for them—or have damaging consequences for the most vulnerable farmers.

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): Everyone is in favour of free and fair trade until it comes to specifics. The hon. Lady has worked in sugar and sugar beet, where there are quotas that privilege certain of the poorest countries. The sugar beet farmers of the United Kingdom and farmers in some of those countries ran a campaign to weaken the everything but arms initiative and access for sugar from the least developed countries, and they succeeded to a degree. The hon. Lady is telling us that we should open our markets to the poorest countries, but she wants a position for the sector in which she has worked that is not as good as the one that she proposes overall. The Government's position was that we should have opened the markets fully to the least developed countries. The compromise was reached because, with the help of many Tory Members, who lobbied—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Secretary of State will wait her turn.

Mrs. Spelman: It should be remembered, Mr. Speaker, that 50 per cent. of the UK market for sugar is supplied from developing countries, which is unique among the member states of the EU. The Government have a lot of work to do with other EU member states that do not have such an accepting compromise with the developing world and do not allow free trade both from and to such countries.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Spelman: I want to proceed on this point. We have had an exchange on sugar, and I do not wish to be accused of allowing the issue to dominate the debate. This is a short debate, a number of Members want to contribute, and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be successful later in catching Mr. Speaker's eye.

At the EU Heads of Government meeting in Seville later this week, the Prime Minister should promote the agenda of furthering free market access for poor countries. Could he make public the list of EU negotiating demands on the general agreement on trade in services, which have to be decided before the end of this month? Hon. Members have a real interest in that. Promoting genuinely free trade should also be high on the agenda in Canada later this month, when G8 countries meet. They have the greatest influence in changing trade rules. At the moment, the World Trade Organisation seems remarkably impotent at tackling human ingenuity in avoiding rules that are designed to free up trade. Reform is needed of the WTO so that it is even more effective. We could do more to tackle the scepticism among developing nations, however, as the WTO does not appear to serve them well.

Here is a practical suggestion for the Secretary of State—could we not provide a panel of lawyers and advisers to help developing nations make the rules of the WTO work better for them?

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): The hon. Lady is making the case for free trade as a motor for development, on which we can agree. Does she repudiate the experience of the previous Conservative Government, however, in tying trade to aid? That left a situation in which developing countries, far from being free to trade, were forced to import goods and services, and, often, arms from this country, which they did not want and did not need.

Mrs. Spelman: I am not here to repudiate and analyse history. The important thing is that we gave our support to the International Development Bill—now the International Development Act 2002—which untied aid. As part of that, we recognised the important focus of poverty reduction. I hope that, in everything I have said today, I have made it perfectly clear how committed the Conservative party is to reducing global poverty. I hope that the hon. Gentleman is left in no doubt about that.

Simon Hughes *rose—*

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion) *rose—*

Mrs. Spelman: I will give way to the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes), if his contribution is on a wider point. I know that this is a short debate, Mr. Speaker.

Simon Hughes: On the wider issue of trade barriers, will the hon. Lady first tell us for the record whether the Conservative party is in favour of majority voting in the WTO? Secondly, is it in favour of majority voting in the European Union? One of the reasons that subsidy and trade barriers in agriculture have continued is that the veto in the European Union has kept them in place.

Mrs. Spelman: The hon. Gentleman may know that I spent a great deal of time working with different member states of the European Union on agricultural policy. I discovered that it is very difficult to make headway in negotiations when member states lack the good will to work together for the best result internationally, for Europe as a trading bloc, and, as I hope that I have made clear today, for poorer nations. All too easily, national interest can be over-used. I have seen it used and abused. There are times, however, when the national interest is an issue and when Governments would be expected to argue for the national interest of their country. In the past, the trouble has been that it has been used injudiciously, not by our country specifically, but by a number of other countries that have strong vested agricultural interests. That has led to the use of the national interest to defend a country's position being brought into disrepute. I am therefore wary of making a sweeping generalisation about whether it should or should not be used.

I want to move on to reform of the subsidies, which is a very important area. It is another matter that the Prime Minister should discuss in Seville later this week. Some of the worst distortions of trade are caused by the subsidy systems used by countries to bolster their domestic production. When it comes to subsidy, there is no way in which poor countries are able to compete with the power of wealthier nations.

In dollar terms, agricultural subsidies in countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development are more than two thirds of Africa's total GDP. They account for more than a quarter of farm output in the United States, rising to 40 per cent. in the European Union and to more than 60 per cent. in Japan.

The Trade Justice Movement has provided us today with the example of rice growers in Haiti, who produce rice for local markets. However, as rich countries, notably the US, have subsidised their rice exports, Haiti has been flooded with cheap rice imports so that Haitian farmers are unable to find a market for their crops.

I have worked in agriculture for most of my working life, and I deeply sympathise with the problems that our farmers—particularly dairy farmers—face. The irony is that the common agricultural policy is meant to provide a reasonable standard of living for farmers in the EU, but it does not even provide a living wage for our dairy farmers and directly affects the viability of farmers in the developing world.

Recently, I went to India with Oxfam and Members may not be aware that India is the world's largest producer of milk. However, it cannot compete with subsidised milk surpluses from the EU that are exported to the growth market of the middle east. That is despite the fact that India is the second lowest cost producer in the world after New Zealand.

At the last ministerial meeting of the WTO in Doha, countries agreed to launch a new trade round, including the liberalisation of agricultural subsidies. That was certainly progress, and I hope that it comes to fruition. Nevertheless, the decision came after much foot dragging by the EU, and the scepticism of poor countries results from rich countries' reluctance to keep their side of the bargain in the past.

I am sure that the whole House abhors the decision by the US Congress to vote through an additional $100 million worth of subsidies for American farmers. Total US agricultural subsidies will then amount to $388 dollars per head, which represents a staggering 67 per cent. increase in farm subsidies. However, we should not kid ourselves that those sums get through to poor farmers. Americans may be our staunchest allies in time of war but, on trade, that increase is a retrograde step for the principles of liberty that their nation espouses. The move will cause incalculable damage to the lives of farmers in the developing world as well as to the livelihoods of farmers in this country. I clearly recall the outrage that resulted from the US decision to impose tariffs on its steel imports, but have the Government expressed similar condemnation of the US Farm Bill? When the Prime Minister goes to Canada for the G8 summit, I hope that he will use his good relations with the US President to make plain the damage that the Bill will do.

The US is not the only culprit. EU agricultural subsidies amount to $276 a head—to use the same currency—compared with $338 in the US. The last thing that we want is the equivalent of an arms race in farm subsidies. To prevent that, the CAP must be reformed. Some 1.6 million Africans live on less than $2 a day but every cow in the EU is subsidised to the tune of $2 a day.

Roger Casale: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Spelman: I have already given way to the hon. Gentleman.

The Government White Paper on globalisation pledged to push for significant reform of the CAP, but that has not happened. The CAP must be reformed in a way that will ensure a reasonable living for British farmers and reasonable opportunities for their counterparts in poorer nations. Farmers in Britain face huge problems and they are not well served by the CAP. Conservative Members would like the Government to make a far greater effort to reform the CAP. In their White Paper, they said that they would use every opportunity to work for change to the CAP. When the Prime Minister attends the EU summit later this week, will he try to persuade other EU leaders to agree to a timetable for CAP reform?

There also needs to be reform of double standards. Rules that appear to benefit only the rich at the expense of the poor should not be tolerated. Those groups that accuse the developed world of double standards are right. I recognise that people may think that trade liberalisation is a one-way street for richer countries to get richer, but it does not have to be. I see it far more as a two-way street, with trade going both ways. The Government should tackle trade injustice with more vigour. We are calling on them to show leadership. If any poor nation behaved in the way that America recently did in passing its Farm Bill, it would have faced the wrath of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. It is one rule for some and another rule for others.

Later this month, the G8 will meet in Alberta, Canada. There has been much rhetoric about it being a development summit. The New Partnership for Africa's Development is high on its agenda. NEPAD is a partnership, and on our side that should mean free and fair market access. Partnership is a two-way process, however. In return for opening our markets, we can press for economic, political and social reform in those countries that want to trade with us. There is no doubt that corruption is one of the greatest impediments to development in such countries. One of the most important things that could be achieved in the summit would be a commitment from the G8 to address the imbalances in the trade system.

[Mrs. Spelman]

Some 10,000 people have come to lobby Parliament today on the issue of trade. There can be no doubt that increasing levels of global trade offer hope to millions of people living in poverty. The Secretary of State has strongly defended globalisation in the face of its critics, some of whom are on Labour's Back Benches. The Government's White Paper on globalisation is called "Eliminating World Poverty: Making Globalisation Work for the Poor", but billions of people are still marginalised by the process. The challenge now is to make globalisation work on a global scale.

Mr. Speaker: Before I call the Secretary of State to speak, I must tell hon. Members that there is a 10-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches.

4.7 pm

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"welcomes the lobby of Parliament by the Trade Justice Movement and increased recognition of trade as a key component to reducing global poverty; welcomes also efforts made to draw public attention to these important issues; recognises trade has an important role to play in helping countries achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); is aware that to achieve this a multilateral trading system is needed giving developing countries a fair deal; recognises that the Government is committed to working with developing country partners, and other bilateral donors and multilateral organisations to achieve this; believes that the development challenges faced in Africa require the international community, working together with African countries, to make additional efforts to secure progress towards the MDGs; welcomes the Government's commitment to turning the agreement reached at Doha in November last year into a meaningful 'Development Round' and to achieving real progress on market access and in areas of importance to developing countries; will continue to support efforts to reform the Common Agricultural Policy and reduce trade-distorting subsidies; will support preferential access to developing countries through the Generalised System of Preferences aid to least developed countries through the Everything But Arms initiative; recognises developing countries themselves must undertake effective policy measures to integrate into the global trading system; supports these efforts and engagement in a broad range of activities to help countries participate more effectively in the multilateral trading system; and further welcomes the Government's commitment to doubling support for trade-related capacity building from £15 million in 1998–2001 to £30 million in 2001–04.".

This is a happy day for me. It marks a real shift in the development movement in the United Kingdom and, indeed, in the position of Her Majesty's official Opposition. Different groups have come to understand that more equitable trade rules are essential to create the opportunity for the poorest countries to grow their economies and for the poor of the world to work their way out of poverty. It is important to have such a strong new consensus across the development movement in the UK and across the Floor of the House. That is a significant change and it enables us to try to use our influence on the world stage to bring about the policy for which we all jointly argue.

My Department and I have been working to get the development lobby to take on the case for more equitable trade rules since the Department was established in 1997. Importantly, its powers were enlarged beyond being an organiser of the UK aid budget to include an analytical role in trade, agricultural reform, fisheries, environmental agreements, debt, conflict, humanitarianism and so on. The objective was not just to run a good UK aid budget that was as large as possible, but to get the rules of the international system more equitable so that the planet could be run in a more equitable and sustainable way for all.

I should like to pay tribute to the quality of officials in the Department. It is respected as one of the most high-quality development organisations in the world in both its delivery and its analytical capacity. It is staffed by highly motivated high-quality officials. My first permanent secretary, Sir John Vereker, is no longer with us, but he made an enormous contribution to establishing the new strengthened Department. The UK should be proud of the quality of the people who lead development work for us across the world.

The new Department was established in 1997 with the remit to consider trade and development. Our first hurdle was posed by the Department of Trade and Industry. The official, now retired, who led on trade in that large Department was struck with apoplexy at the thought that the Department with responsibility for development dared to have views about trade. There was an enormous battle between the trade part of the DTI and my Department. Up to then, the DTI had been asked to promote only UK trade interests, and suddenly we were changing the grounds for discussion by saying that it was in the UK's interest to have an equitable set of international trade rules that allow the poorest countries to grow their economies.

That change has taken place. There was a lot of joint work and a lot of research, and by the time we got to Doha, DTI representatives—Ministers and officials—were more progressive than trade representatives from most other OECD countries because they saw more equitable global rules as being in everybody's interests. Today we are celebrating a long journey, and the first part of it involved legitimising the DTI's concern with the global management of trade rather than the simple duty to promote UK trade interests, regardless of the interests of others.

From there we moved forward to Seattle. Everyone will remember that almost every lobby and force, including the whole British NGO development movement, was opposed to a new trade round at Seattle. Many voices called for the WTO to be closed down. We had a debate in the House of Commons—I see the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) nodding—in which a few of us argued that the WTO is a useful organisation that gives us a chance to strengthen global trade rules and make them more equitable.

The Clinton Administration, particularly President Clinton himself, the entire international trade union movement, led most strongly by the US but including Britain, the whole British development lobby and all the British environment NGOs were completely opposed to a new trade round. They believed that the WTO was a reactionary organisation that wanted to add to trade rules and conditions on labour and environmental standards, making it impossible for developing countries, which of course want to raise those standards, to meet the rules and have access to global markets. At that time, the trade spokesman for Her Majesty's Opposition did not mention, in explaining the party's position, the interests of developing countries.

Let us remember where we have got to. Today, with the movement of Churches and development NGOs, there has been an important shift forward. The last time there was trade competition in the world and countries were erecting barriers against each other, as we see with steel and with the US Farm Bill, was in the 1930s, when there was depression in some parts of the world. Country after country imposed tariffs, which threw the entire world economy into the most terrible depression. That led to the second world war and to fascism and all that flowed from that.

Following the second world war, we started off with the general agreement on tariffs and trade. I believe that the first trade round after the war was called the Torquay round, which is rather sweet. Not as many countries were members of GATT, and the negotiators were blocs of rich countries. There were rounds of trade talks to try to reduce the tariffs that remained from the 1930s. That was a worthy process, and it was better than what it took over from, but following the Uruguay round, the WTO was born. It is only five or six years old, and it really was an advance.

The WTO is an organisation which countries join by choice, and which is based on rules that apply equally to all. It negotiates by consensus. I do not think that any hon. Member will agree with the proposal made by the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) that the WTO should make decisions by majority. These matters so deeply affect the interests of individual countries that we have to move forward by consensus. It is remarkable that, in negotiating multilateral agreements on the environment and trade at Doha and elsewhere, we manage to reach global consensus.

In my view, and I think that this position is now more widely recognised, the shift to the WTO gave us a chance to get more equitable trade rules. Now, the majority of WTO members are developing countries, and if they come together in a trade round and work together, they will make gains. It is possible now to have a set of global rules that are fair and that give developing countries the chance to grow their economies.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): Will the Secretary of State comment on an article in the *Financial Times* this morning which reports that the WTO trade negotiations are faltering badly and there is not much optimism that an agreement will be reached?

Clare Short: To be honest, I read the headline, not the whole article, but it appeared to suggest that because of the moves on steel and the US Farm Bill, there was a real danger that the Doha development agenda, which is an agenda for a trade round, would not be taken forward and we would not get a trade round, and that would grossly weaken the WTO. I agree that taking the WTO as an institution for granted would be a grave mistake. If the Doha agenda is not taken forward, the WTO will start to break up and lose its authority, which depends on consensus in the international system. We could easily end up with the rich countries making regional and bilateral trade agreements and the poorest countries being squeezed out of the rule making on international trade. If that danger were realised, it would be a terrible loss for the world and for developing countries.

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): Does the Secretary of State agree that one of the reasons why it is essential to maintain agreement by consensus in the WTO is that without it the disputes procedure, which arbitrates in extremely difficult cases and is widely respected, simply could not continue to operate?

Clare Short: I agree. It gives one pause for thought to consider that whereas in national politics we have the conflictive style of politics that we all know and love, on crucial matters such as multilateral environment agreements and world trade agreements, all the world's countries are represented in a set of negotiations and manage to reach agreement by consensus. That is the only way to enforce such agreements—there is no world army that can make any country that gets out of line get back into line. Only through consensus and everyone understanding that it is in the world's interests that we all play by the rules and accept fair ways of decision making can we equitably manage the current phase of human history. I strongly agree with the right hon. Gentleman.

There is no doubt that in the run-up to Seattle there was a general view among developing countries that they had achieved less by the Uruguay round than had been promised, and there was resistance to a new trade round as a result. That was understandable: many of the agreements made during the Uruguay round were more difficult to implement than countries had understood when they made them. The rules of world trade are now enormously complicated, and they are difficult for all countries to implement and individual Ministers to grasp and negotiate. The agenda is now extremely complex and extended in scope.

The argument that we advanced prior to Seattle—I made a speech to this effect in early 1999 at the UN conference on trade and development—was that if world trade rules were unfair to developing countries, the only way to make them fairer was to have another trade round. My mother would have said that we would be cutting off our nose to spite our face if we said that we would not have another trade round because the rules were unfair. A lot of work went into building momentum so that developing countries, rather than feeling hurt and aggrieved by the consequences of the Uruguay round, would agree that another trade round was in their interests. The South African Government have played an important role in building an international coalition of developing countries. They started their efforts in the run-up to the Seattle conference and continued that work on the way to Doha.

To help developing countries to advance their interests, my Department announced—in 1998, I think, during a prime ministerial speech at the WTO in Geneva—a big increase in UK funding on trade capacity building. That is not a large part of development aid spending, but it is important technical work that enables countries to consider economic strategies—to see in which sectors they have a comparative advantage that will enable them to expand their economy and take up trading opportunities, giving them the capacity to enter the international system and negotiate to advance those trade interests. We have done a great deal of work in that area. It helped many developing countries to build the confidence to advance their interests at Doha and demand the sort of development agenda that was agreed there.

We also worked hard—this is an interesting story, which answers one of the questions from the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman)—to build a legal advisory

[Clare Short]

centre in the WTO to provide advice from trade lawyers to the poorest countries free and to low income countries extremely cheaply—a law centre to enable low income countries to exercise their rights under the rules of the World Trade Organisation. When we tried to promote the proposal early on, we met massive resistance, first within our own Government, which we overcame in the ways that I described earlier. *[Interruption.]* It is all part of a process to get everyone to globalise their minds and look for a way of running the world that takes account of everybody's interests. It is a movement that is taking place in political analysis across the world, rather more rapidly in some places than in others.

Then we encountered resistance in Brussels, where we were told that we could not give countries money so that they could get advice, which might mean that they would take action against an EC country under the WTO. I said, "We give legal aid to murderers." There was a ferocious battle. It was interesting to see the two mindsets on trade. Do we want a rules-based, fair system under which everyone can apply the rules and has rights? Trade lawyers cost a fortune. Anyone who thinks lawyers are expensive should look at the bills of trade lawyers. Poor countries would be unable to exercise their legal rights without some support.

The resistance to setting up a legal advisory centre was an interesting example of the way in which people regard trade as their vested interest against someone else's vested interest, as opposed to our joint interest in growing the global economy and giving the poorest countries the chance to grow their economies, which is not against our interest. It is in our interest. If the poor of the world had the capacity to consume more, the people employed in industry and manufacturing in this country would have opportunities to produce and export, which would be beneficial to them and everyone else.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): As usual, the Secretary of State is being honest and open with the House. Will she tell us which countries caused the most trouble? *[Interruption.]*

Clare Short: That would be very honest. The hon. Gentleman knows, as I do, that it is incredible that the world reaches agreement by consensus in the global negotiations that are more and more important to us. The "globaphobes" attack all those intergovernmental meetings and say that there is no proper democratic accountability, but the proper accountability is to each democratic Government's Parliament and civil society. We each send our representatives to global meetings to reach agreement and there are many difficulties on the way, but we frequently make progress. That is remarkable.

We are at a turning point in history. I am not in favour of globalisation, and I am not against globalisation. Globalisation is history, and it is stupid of anyone to be for or against it. It parallels what the industrial revolution meant for Europe—an opportunity to spread technology, trade, economic growth and investment across the world. The question is how we are to manage it and who will benefit. Will everyone be included or are some countries to be marginalised? It is one of the leading tasks of politics to bring about a more just world and a more sustainable and stable world for future generations.

The first big, violent outing of the anti-globalisation protesters was Seattle, where they called on everyone to oppose trade and claimed that poor countries cannot afford to open their markets and do not want to be exploited by multinational capital. They said that the WTO is dominated by multinational capital trying to impose its rules on the poor of the world. That was the rhetoric. There were massive demonstrations, with many legitimate groups on the streets, as well as the groups that went around smashing up windows in Seattle.

I believe that after Seattle, if one had gone down most high streets and spoken to decent, caring people, most of them would have said that the WTO is an evil organisation that is trying to exploit the poor of the world. It is a danger of these times if the anti-globalisers are seen to be the ones who care about the poor. They advocate policies that will harm and divide the world and harm the interests of developing countries. That is why our own dear development NGOs' move to calling for equitable trade, instead of opposition to developing countries opening their markets to trade or having the opportunities to attract foreign direct investment, is a very important change. It puts the UK in a strong position to advocate for a more just, equitable and sustainable world.

I pay a tribute to the spokesperson for the Liberal Democrats on trade and industry. He has written a pamphlet or small book on globalisation. At the time of the Seattle talks, he was speaking strongly—the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon was another, but there were not many others—in the spirit that I am putting before the House, which I think now has cross-party consensus. This is an important day and the unity in the country is important. The shift of development organisations is important.

I shall say a word on behalf of Mike Moore, the retiring director general of the World Trade Organisation. One of the reasons for the Seattle talks going wrong was the delay in agreeing who should take over that post—whether it should be Mr. Supachai or Mike Moore. After a long delay, during which we should have been preparing for the Seattle talks, there was an agreement that they should divide the job, I think for three years each.

The two men have worked well together. Mike Moore worked extremely hard to get us to Doha and to the Doha development agenda. In the past few days I read a savage attack on Mike Moore in a newspaper. It came from Kevin Watkins, of all people, from Oxfam, who is usually a reasonable person. He suggested that Mike Moore had no concern for developing countries. That is completely false, untrue and unfair. Mike Moore worked hard to enable the world to reach a consensus. I pay tribute to him and to the incoming Mr. Supachai. They have worked well together and they will take the world forward.

I am optimistic because it is possible to take on complex issues when we do not have agreement in our own countries. It is necessary to arrive at global agreement if we are to take the world forward. In a relatively short period we can see a big shift in public opinion. If these moves can be made, we can take ourselves forward into an era of better management of the global economy.

After Seattle, we were working with the World Bank to ensure that the bank took more interest in trade and the need for developing countries to make advances in trade access to improve their economic position. There was slowness and reluctance, but since then the World Bank has undertaken more work and produced the statistics that are quoted about how trade opening and trade liberalisation would be much more beneficial to developing countries than increases in overseas development assistance, although we need that to create institutions in developing countries that will enable those countries to run their economies and public services properly, and then to take advantage of trading opportunities and the opportunity to move their economies forward.

The considerable task that remains is to move the world forward into implementation of the agenda that was agreed at Doha. On the way to the world summit on sustainable development, which will take place at the end of August into the beginning of September at Johannesburg—that is 10 years on from the Rio UN conference on the environment—a preparatory meeting took place recently in Bali. It was the cause of great derision. Happily I did not go to Bali, so I do not have to be criticised. I have been there under my own steam, having paid for myself. The meeting went sour, but that did not mean that it was a disaster. It went sour largely because the G77, having seen the action on steel tariffs and the US Farm Bill, is ceasing to believe that the world meant what it said at Doha and then at Monterrey about finance for development.

We have been building up a fantastic consensus throughout the world, from the millennium development goals to the UN millennium assembly. At Doha, there was a round of talks to make trade rules fairer. At Monterrey, finance was discussed, and what would be a sensible reform agenda for a proper balance between the public sector and the role of markets. There was a commitment to a reversal in the decline in development assistance that is available to the world.

We want to go on to Johannesburg to integrate the environment in the analysis and to overcome hostility between OECD countries, environmentalists and developing countries. Instead of environmentalists saying, "We don't want development", we want them to say, "We want sustainable development, and we must guarantee development to the poor in a way that is sustainable for the world." That is the only way that we will keep the world united.

Our commitment to implement what was agreed at Doha is absolutely crucial if we are to keep the sort of consensus that we have been building to drive forward progress towards a more just world. That will not be easy. As I am sure that hon. Members know, it was very difficult for France to agree to the commitments made at Doha on reduction of subsidies and reform in the agricultural sector. It held out until the end, and that was the most difficult part of the agreement. Changes have taken place in the US and some of our European Union colleagues have difficulties with holding to what was agreed at Doha.

We now have a fantastic consensus in this country, but we need to appeal to all our parties in all our networks throughout the world and to all the NGOs and faith organisations that are mobilised so impressively here today. We need to ask them to reach out to their networks in Europe and especially in the United States. Through the Church networks in particular, they need to say to the United States, the biggest economy in the world, "Please don't think that you can run the world without multilateral rules." To achieve a just and sustainable world, we need the US to work with other countries to give everyone the chance to grow their economies.

There is a lot left to do, but this is a very important moment for the UK to have built the sort of agreement that we have got. It now suits our country very well for us to go out to bat on the world stage for more just rules for trade and in other areas, in order to make the world safer and more sustainable and decent.

4.31 pm

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): I thank the official Opposition for securing this debate. This is a very good day on which to have it; I am only sad that they could not negotiate the 7 o'clock slot, because many hon. Members are outside enjoying the Mexican wave and the trishaws that I was lucky enough to enjoy yesterday. They are out there meeting their constituents, so it would have been much better to have had the debate afterwards so that they could have participated.

Today's lobby is one of the biggest ever; it is estimated that 10,000 people are out there in the sunshine. The Jubilee 2000 campaign was successful because it was a broad coalition that attracted all-party support. Likewise, I know that the Trade Justice Movement is a fantastic coalition of more than 40 non-governmental organisations that is attracting all-party support. The Liberal Democrats will certainly support the motion and also the Government amendment. Hon. Members can make of that what they like, but that is what we will do, as we do not want any division on these issues.

I have received hundreds of postcards from my constituents and thousands more have flowed in to all MPs during the past few weeks. An all-party early-day motion on this subject has been tabled today and I hope that all hon. Members will sign it. We know that the European heads of state are meeting very soon this month, the G8 summit is at the end of June, the world summit on sustainable development will take place in Johannesburg in September and the world trade talks are continuing all the time. This is a vital time for developing countries.

We all know that many factors affect developing countries. We have rehearsed them many times in the Chamber. They include civil war and conflict, the arms trade, lack of education, health care, AIDS, HIV, lack of clean water, environmental disasters—to which our greedy consumption in the west often contributes—a lack of decent Governments, and corruption. The list goes on. We distribute aid, but not nearly enough. The proportional increase in the aid given to developing countries is very welcome, but the amount is not yet nearly enough. To introduce a dissenting note, I am still very disappointed that the Conservatives seem to have abandoned the 0.7 per cent. of gross national product target on aid for developing countries. That is very sad and I hope that they review the matter in due course.

Wherever I go in the developing world, I hear the same message: "Your aid is welcome, but if only you would let us have free and fair trade"—I emphasise the word "fair"—"we would develop more quickly."

Throughout the 19th century, we exploited our colonies, using them for labour, raw materials and things that could make our lives better. The rich countries continue to exploit them through unfair trade agreements. The European Union and the USA in particular have a

[Dr. Jenny Tonge]

duty to lift the developing world out of poverty. The connections between 11 September and poverty have often been rehearsed. It is no longer only right to help the poorest countries, but in our own interests too. It took an event like 11 September to teach us that lesson.

A 1 per cent. increase in trade for African countries would generate $70 billion or five times what Africa receives in aid. Import tariffs cost developing countries $100 billion, which is twice as much as they receive in aid. What nonsense—we give with one hand and we take away with the other. Last July, in Zanzibar, prior to the World Trade Organisation meeting in Doha, developing countries called on the rich countries to abolish subsidies for their products and open their markets, but there has been little progress on that. The Uruguay round, which the Secretary of State mentioned, was good news at the time because it committed developing countries and rich countries to a reduction in tariffs and subsidies. With the general agreement on trade in services—GATS—it got the developing countries to open up their services to private companies.

To a large extent the developing countries have done so. But did the rich countries keep their side of the bargain? Did they heck. One problem is that tariffs and subsidies remain, and GATS is still a subject of great contention. However, I do not agree that services such as supplying water must always be controlled by the public sector. I recently visited Ghana to look at its Government's proposal to privatise the water supply in Accra. The public sector there is certainly not delivering clean water to the people of the city. The situation is appalling, because 52 per cent.—a rather optimistic estimate—of the water supply is lost or goes to cowboys who sell it to the poor at extortionate prices. The argument that a multinational company may make water even more expensive for the poor does not wash, if that is the right word. I think that it could be cheaper under a privatised system.

Clare Short: I have had a briefing on this. GATS is a bottom-up agreement—countries open up services as they wish, and there is no requirement to privatise education and health care. Privatisation is the only way to get the investment that those countries need in things like banking, tourism, telecommunications and services such as water under good regulatory arrangements. I agree that the campaign saying that there should not be a voluntary scheme to open up services in that way is misguided.

Dr. Tonge: I thank the Secretary of State for her contribution. The key to privatising Accra's water supply is the regulatory service. I admit that I was worried about that, and the Ghanaians will need assistance in regulating services to provide water.

The common agricultural policy is a bone of contention. It is another gross violation of international justice. The European Union spends $41 billion on agricultural subsidies. Rich farmers in rich countries continue to be subsidised and to flood developing countries with their produce, forcing their poor farmers out of business. I hope that we shall get some good news on that front in due course, because it is time that the common agricultural policy was looked at.

As the Secretary of State told us, the European Union introduced the everything but arms initiative to give at least 49 of the least developed countries tariff-free and quota-free access to our markets. However, it quickly became the everything but arms, rice, sugar and bananas initiative, thus re-erecting barriers to some of the main exports from developing countries. Before Conservative Members get too self-righteous and pleased with themselves about their newly discovered philanthropy, I remind hon. Members that it was lobbying by many Conservative Members on behalf of the sugar beet industry that led to sugar being excluded from the EU initiative. We shall not forget that, and it is worth remembering. They cannot preach free trade and call for trade liberalisation, as they are doing today, while lobbying to protect our own domestic interests.

Why does that remind me of the United States? In May, the US, having acknowledged that poverty indirectly leads to terrorism, passed a Farm Bill that will increase subsidies to American farmers by 70 per cent. over the next 10 years. As I discovered on my recent visit to Ghana, northern Ghana used to produce lots of rice, which was eaten by people all over Ghana. Urban Ghanaians now eat American polished white rice, which is ludicrous. Their farmers have no markets at home or abroad and are in poverty. In 1998, 68 per cent. of Ghana's labour force was in agriculture. What are they to do in the short and medium term to fill that gap? It is a mad, mad situation.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Does my hon. Friend agree that protectionist elements in Europe give the American Administration an excuse for introducing their Farm Bill? This morning, I had a conversation with an American Congressman who was here in the House, and he said that the protectionism adopted by several European states through the CAP provides an alibi for the Farm Bill. That is a problem.

Dr. Tonge: I agree. I do not exclude Europe from blame. Both the European Union and the US have to search their souls on this issue. If we mean what we say about opening up our markets and bringing developing countries into the real world to share in its prosperity, we have to give a little on our side. That cannot be done if we continually protect our own interests. I accept the argument advanced by the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) in so far as sugar beet farmers would have a tough time if their market fell, but could we not consider other things that they could grow? The biofuels industry represents one possibility.

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Dr. Tonge: I shall not at the moment.

We have alternatives that may not be available to developing countries, and we must do something about that.

Mr. Curry: I hope that the hon. Lady tried to disabuse the American Congressman by pointing out that when the United States introduced its Freedom to Farm Bill, which liberalised the American system, the CAP was a great deal more protectionist than it is now, and that the Farm Bill has been introduced at a time when the CAP is being liberalised rather more than many people think.

Dr. Tonge: That point has already been made, and I want to move on. However, I emphasise that we must all recognise that something has to give if developing countries are to be relieved of their poverty.

I shall not have time to deal with many other aspects of world trade and its effect on developing countries, such as joined-up government. This morning, my hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) noted that there is no point in the Department for International Development having wonderful policies based on sustainable development when there are shenanigans such as those between the Department of Trade and Industry, the Ministry of Defence, Barclays bank and British Aerospace on the air traffic control system for Tanzania. We must tackle that aspect of trade and ensure that all Departments tackle the core theme of sustainable development. We cannot relieve Tanzania of debt only to plunge it immediately in £28 million more debt by selling it an inappropriate system that will benefit our industry but not Tanzania.

I shall not go into the trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights, because I confess that I do not understand the ramifications of the TRIPs agreement. The arguments about the problems have been well rehearsed. Many Liberal Democrats worry that the part privatisation of the Commonwealth Development Corporation has caused it to take its eye off the ball in the interests of attracting shareholders. Agriculture, especially agribusiness, in the poorest countries has consequently suffered.

The activities of the multinational companies require a debate. Such companies probably constitute one of the greatest forces for good or evil in the world. Huge companies that wield massive power and also make much needed investment in developing countries to improve their trade are part of globalisation. However, we need to ensure that they behave decently and sensibly, and stick to Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development guidelines wherever they operate.

I want to speak about an important factor that the Secretary of State mentioned. Developing countries must be helped to participate more effectively in the World Trade Organisation and the WTO must commit itself with the rest of the world to the international development targets. I understand that only 30 of the poorest countries are members of the WTO. All developing countries face major difficulties representing themselves there. They do not have the capacity or expertise, and I welcome the initiatives by the Secretary of State and the Department to try to build such capacity in sub-Saharan Africa and its regional organisations. I hope that when the Minister sums up, she will tell us more about the enhanced integrated framework pilot schemes, which will operate in Cambodia and Madagascar, and how those countries can represent themselves better.

In the north, we get increasingly richer by protecting our markets while forcing the poorest countries to open theirs to our trades and services, making them poorer. We have declared a war on terrorism when what we really want is a war on poverty.

4.48 pm

Hugh Bayley (City of York): I begin by congratulating—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): I apologise for interrupting the hon. Gentleman, but I must remind hon. Members that Mr. Speaker has imposed a 10-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches.

Hugh Bayley: I shall use my nine and a half minutes wisely, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I congratulate John Whitworth and his team of supporters from York who have joined the lobby today and whom I have had the benefit of meeting. I do not say that simply as a courtesy, although I am glad to see constituents coming all the way from York to Westminster. We all need—this includes Parliament and the Government—a grass-roots campaign that backs our actions. The Secretary of State made it clear that we have to argue our corner in international institutions such as the EU and the WTO. It is important to show that a fan club exists for development and the actions of the Secretary of State and other members of the Government.

Until recently, trade policy was one of those dry-as-dust subjects that interested only a few underpaid development agency workers and a few extremely overpaid international lawyers who argued disputes at the World Trade Organisation. In recent years, however, it has become a battlefield. The Secretary of State is right to say that there has been a sea change since Seattle, which was quite literally a battlefield, but there is still conflict between pro and anti-globalisers. We must ensure that the world's poor are not crushed by those contending forces.

Trade is not a panacea, but it is true that the countries with the smallest share of world trade—a share that is still declining—are those with the largest proportion of their population living in absolute poverty. Trade can lift people out of poverty, but it will succeed in doing so only if trade growth is supported and complemented by good pro-poor development policies.

I want to emphasise three things to the House. First, trade creates wealth; it makes people richer. It increases production and, therefore, consumption; for most people living on the breadline, consumption is a measure of their disposable income and their standard of living. The World Bank showed, in its publication "Can Africa reclaim the 21st century?", that if Africa had the same proportion of world trade now that it had at the time of decolonisation in the 1960s, it would have an income of some $70 billion a year more. In other words, its income would be about 20 per cent. higher. One of the things that we need to achieve, therefore, is an increase in the volume of trade with the poorest countries.

Secondly, trade does not necessarily result in a reduction of inequality, even in the regions where the volume of trade is increasing. The benefits of trade do not necessarily trickle down to the poor. That is why we need to change the terms of trade, as hon. Members have already mentioned. That requires policy change in developed countries such as ours—most notably a change in the common agricultural policy, in the case of Europe—and in developing countries.

That also means that trade policy needs to be embedded in development policy, and needs to appear in the country strategies—for example, those being drawn up by our

[Hugh Bayley]

Government and by the World Bank—for developing countries. Trade policy needs to be mainstreamed into development policy just as the environment, gender and other matters have been in recent years.

Thirdly, I would like to remind the House that trade takes place not between countries but between companies. Trade policy must encourage investment in private companies and entrepreneurship, and must recognise the role of the private sector in international trade.

Why has Africa lost some of its share of world trade in the decades since the 1960s? As hon. Members have stated, it is in part because the rich world—the developed countries—has been far from generous in its trade relations. We have been protectionist—above all, in relation to the commodities that the poorest people in the poorest countries have some possibility of exporting to us, particularly in agriculture.

Mr. Dennis Turner (Wolverhampton, South-East): Textiles, too.

Hugh Bayley: Textiles and clothing, too, as my hon. Friend rightly says.

Also, many sub-Saharan African countries have followed poor policies themselves, which helps to explain why their trade performance has been poorer than those of some other developing countries, such as those in east Asia. Our policies need to change, and their policies need to change. That is why I am so excited by the New Partnership for Africa's Development, which recognises that if we both change things, life will change for the poorest people in the poorest countries.

One of the things that the developing countries in Africa got wrong in the past was setting fixed exchange rates that overvalued their currencies. When I visited Uganda in the early 1980s, the official exchange rate was 120 Ugandan shillings to the pound, but the real market exchange rate on the street was 600 or 650. What did that mean in practice? The Ugandan elite could import Scotch whisky for a quarter of its real cost, and Ugandan farmers had to export bananas or any other agricultural products at four times their real value. It is therefore not surprising that it was difficult for the poor to export from Uganda and other such countries.

There were further problems with fixed interest rates. They were fixed by African Governments for the good reason that, in their view, setting a low interest rate made borrowing more affordable. However, borrowing is assisted only if a rate is set that encourages people to invest. Many African countries had an interest rate that was lower than the inflation rate. The resulting real-terms negative interest rates meant that no money was put into banks, or that it was put into banks in the developed world, rather than into African banks. Those economic policies need to change. Such failures reduced exports, squeezed out investment, and fuelled the growth of corruption as people tried to get round the policies enforced by their Governments.

Hon. Members have spoken eloquently about the contradiction between what we in the west preach on free trade, and our practice of agricultural protectionism. If we are to make the Doha trade round a development round, we certainly need to reduce the level of subsidy for European Union agricultural exports, and for domestic production. We need also to address the timetable for CAP reform. As I understand it, the Commission has agreed to complete the CAP negotiations by 2006, yet at Doha all WTO countries offered a commitment to complete the round by the end of 2004. If we are to make the necessary contribution to the Doha round in terms of CAP reform, we need to advance the CAP timetable.

In many ways, it was the events of 11 September that brought the world together to agree a deal at Doha. Compromises were made on all sides. France agreed for the first time to negotiate on the elimination of farm subsidies; India backed off from outright opposition to negotiations on public procurement and investment; and the United States agreed to consider negotiating the anti-dumping rules that were used in recent weeks in relation to steel. Those compromises made the Doha round a development round, but to keep it that way, it is essential that the WTO sign up to the millennium development goals. Target 12 of those goals calls for

> "an open, rule-based, predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system."

That cannot happen unless the WTO makes that its policy. Targets 7 and 8 pledge to halt the increase in incidence of HIV/AIDS and malaria, but that will not happen unless the WTO agrees to change the current rules for patent protection for the pharmaceutical industry, under the trade-related intellectual property rights agreement.

4.59 pm

Tony Baldry (Banbury): I want to make three brief points. First, considerable consensus exists in the UK on these matters, and we should build on it. Given that we all agree on the motion before us, it seems a little crazy that the rules of the House require us to divide on it. However, that is something for the usual channels to work out.

Today, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry welcomed the Trade Justice Movement, and acknowledged that

> "international trade rules should work to the benefit of developing countries."

Before she went to Doha, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry said:

> "Halving protection in agriculture, industrial goods and services could boost developing country incomes by around $140 billion a year—three times the value of all aid budgets put together . . . We recognise that inequities remain in the international trade system and want to make sure that this round fully addresses the needs and concerns of developing countries . . . The next round"—

that is, the Doha round—

> "provides an opportunity for further opening of agricultural markets and significant reductions in the level of trade-distorting agricultural subsidies. With a majority of the poor in developing countries living in rural areas, this would make a substantial contribution to the UK's commitment to eradicate poverty."

Responding to a recent debate in Westminster Hall on fair trade, the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs said:

> "However, the subsidies given to farmers in the north—both in Europe and the United States—amount to more than the total combined gross domestic products of sub-Saharan Africa . . . Today, rich countries pay out $1 billion a day to their farmers in agricultural subsidies. Annually, the figure is more than four times all the development assistance that goes to poor nations."—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 14 March 2002; Vol. 381, c. 1121–22WH.]

I do not think that there is any dispute about what the issues are, and there is agreement across the House about some of the issues that need to be addressed. However, my second point is that painstaking work will have to be done. No big headline quick fixes can be done: painstaking work will have to be done to reform the CAP and during the Doha process.

The European Commission is scheduled to produce proposals under the CAP mid-term review in late June or early July. I think that the latest date for that is 10 July. That will not be easy. Many hon. Members present represent agricultural constituencies. We know from discussions with others that it will be difficult to persuade colleagues from other EU states that have been bribing farmers for votes even longer than we have that there needs to be substantial CAP reform.

I hope that, in the process of the CAP reform and World Trade Organisation negotiations, we will be able to do some work on the development box in the WTO agreement on agriculture. Little reference has been made to that this afternoon. I suspect that a lot of work at official level is still needed to determine whether a development box on agriculture in the WTO agreement would work to protect farmers in developing countries.

When the hon. Members for Clydebank and Milngavie (Tony Worthington) and for City of York (Hugh Bayley), and my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) and I were in Ghana and Nigeria recently we were struck by the fact that, in Ghana—a country that produces huge numbers of fantastic tomatoes—all the tomatoes in the supermarkets are tinned tomatoes from Italy. That is completely crazy. When one asks people whether there is not a tomato processing plant in Ghana, they say that there used to be one but that it fell into disrepair and that no one has been prepared to invest in it.

We need to see whether more can be done within the WTO rules to protect countries like Ghana from the dumping of EU agricultural surplus. I am agnostic as to whether that should be done through a development box in the WTO agreement, but I hope that more work can be done on the matter by officials. When the Under-Secretary of State for International Development winds up the debate, I hope that she will tell us what the Government line is on the subject. It is important that we have some understanding of whether such a course of action could help and protect people.

My third point is that we need to support reformers in developing countries. We hear a lot about the bad guys, and we hear incessantly about Mugabe. It is quite right that we should, but there are also some good guys. I make no apologies, in the remaining couple of minutes, for reading a piece that I saw when several of us were in Washington the week before last to lobby members of the US Senate and Congress to do more on international development.

The piece appeared in the *Washington Post*, and it is worth sharing with the House. It stated:

> "Media coverage of the protests against globalisation has diverted attention from what may well be a more striking and historic development: the growing consensus between African countries and their Western partners on the importance of trade in overcoming global poverty."

It is not simply a consensus in the United Kingdom, it is a consensus between us and our African partners. The article continued:

> "From President Bush to the rock star Bono . . . to the leaders of the 54 African countries represented in the Organization of African Unity, there is now a broad agreement that no national or international strategy for addressing poverty can be successful unless it promotes expanded trade and investment.
>
> For too long, Africans and their partners in the West have looked to international aid as the answer to the poverty and economic challenges confronting developing countries . . . While well-intentioned, this over-emphasis on aid has actually handicapped Africa by promoting a dependency mentality and the impression that African countries could not compete in the global economy.
>
> By itself, aid cannot transform societies. Only trade can foster the sustained economic growth necessary for such a transformation . . . Africa does need development assistance, just as it needs debt relief from its crushing international debt burden. But aid and debt relief can only go so far . . . We Africans are no longer looking for handouts. Rather, we are asking for the opportunity to compete, to sell our goods in Western markets, to be considered for private investment funds, and to participate more fully in the global trading system. In short, we want to trade our way out of poverty".

That was written by Mr. Museveni, the president of Uganda. I thought that it was a gripping article, worth sharing with colleagues. He also said:

> "we Africans must do more to put our own houses in order."

We must remember that, for every Mugabe, there are reformers in Africa, whether they be in Uganda, Ghana or South Africa, whom we should support.

Mr. Museveni has also been reported as saying:

> "The biggest request we are making of Western countries is to open their markets . . . Debt relief has saved us some money, but the real money will come from trade. Give us the opportunities, and we will compete."

Today's lobby has been fantastic; it will ensure that international development and related issues stay high on the political agenda in this country and that everyone has the confidence to take them seriously. I think that the House and everyone of good will has come to a consensus on what needs to be done. We need to turn to the detailed, painstaking work that has to be done to reform the common agricultural policy and the Doha round. Much of that work will be complicated and very tetchy, as the earlier exchanges on sugar and other commodities have demonstrated. We must also give strength and support to reformers in Africa because, with their help, we can ensure that many countries can trade their way out of poverty.

5.8 pm

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): I apologise to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development and Opposition Front Benchers for not being here for the beginning of the debate. I was with my constituents, on the other side of the River Thames, listening to the concerns that they expressed with great lucidity and cogency. It is a most wonderful rally or demonstration, whatever we want to call it. However, as I said to my constituents, I wondered why they were here, preaching to the converted, and not campaigning outside certain foreign embassies in the capital.

It seems to have been a comparatively short time—certainly a decade—since the feeling in the country at large and in the Chamber has moved from the idea that we can transform poverty, eradicate disease, introduce education and actively assist countries to develop exclusively by increasing the amount of aid that we pour

[Glenda Jackson]

into the begging bowl. The posters this afternoon were entirely different from those that would have been seen 10 years ago.

Clare Short: Two years ago.

Glenda Jackson: Indeed. Then, they would have been about aid, while today's are about fair trade—fair being the operative word.

Without exception, my constituents paid tribute to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the Chancellor for putting the eradication of poverty at the top of the world's agenda.

There are still areas about which my constituents are very concerned. I was interested in my right hon. Friend's view of globalisation, with which I concur. One cannot be for or against it, but one must acknowledge that it is here and that it is not going to go away. The question is how it is best managed in the interests of the vast number of people in the world who seem to have absolutely nothing.

Within the public perception of what the Government are doing on their own and in concert with European Governments and the wider world community, there is a view that we are not acting speedily enough or delivering enough results because we still talk about fair trade. Some believe that the best way to eradicate poverty is to keep people in a sort of village environment, where nothing to do with machinery or the crudities of the developed world will ever impinge on the tranquil and pastoral nature of their lives. I have visited some of the countries where there is a pastoral nature to people's lives. I have stood beside representatives of non-governmental organisations who, on hearing a group of people singing a traditional song, have lamented to me that it seems a shame that teaching their children to read will interfere with their culture. I am sorry, but I think that that view is crazy. To deny anyone the right to read is the antithesis of what today's demonstration outside was about and of what we have been cogently arguing for in this Chamber for a considerable time.

We talk easily about the problems of the developing world, but it seems to me that the problems are essentially of the developed world. As the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge), who speaks for the Liberal Democrats, said, we have to begin to examine what we are prepared to give up. I will give a precise example of what I mean. One of my young constituents raised with me the privatisation of water in India and Ghana. I find it deeply offensive that someone should argue that the largest democratic society in the world—India—or any other independent nation state should be told by the developed world whether it may begin to privatise its utilities. Those concerns were not expressed to me when New Zealand privatised its water supply, or when Australia or any other country in the developed world did so.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for City of York (Hugh Bayley) that we have to take this opportunity to make this a grass-roots, committed change on the ground.

Clare Short: On non-governmental organisations, Blake's poems opposing the industrial revolution in the United Kingdom are an equivalent. We still sing "Jerusalem", but it was written to oppose industrialisation and the wealth to which that led.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): It is a great hymn.

Clare Short: It is an interesting parallel.

Ghana has not privatised; it has asked a private company to manage under a regulated arrangement a more efficient system of delivery in urban areas. Christian Aid is campaigning against that democratic decision of the previous Government, supported by the Opposition, to deliver water to people who did not have it—it had to be brought to them by the bucket at great expense. That is a mistaken approach and we must resist it.

Glenda Jackson: That is my final point. It is beholden on us all to make it abundantly clear to people out there, who work extremely hard for what they believe in—let us not diminish what they do—that many of their ideas will not produce the results that they desire. It is certainly not for us or any other democratic nation to attempt to impede the decisions that, in the two examples that I gave, will, we hope, deliver clean, affordable water to people who have none at the moment.

5.13 pm

Mr. Michael Portillo (Kensington and Chelsea): I find myself speaking in a House full of hon. Members who are experts in the subject, and I am anything but. My purpose today is mainly to congratulate those on the Conservative Front Bench for raising this subject. My hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) made an elegant and splendid speech and I wish that we had many more people like her who were able to make such speeches.

I congratulate my hon. Friend on showing clearly that there is no reason why any party in the House should have a monopoly on compassion. She demonstrated that the Conservative party feels strongly the pressures and difficulties faced by developing countries. My hon. Friend also expressed very ably the reason why trade and globalisation are part of the answer to the question, and there appears to be consensus on that point.

I also wish to congratulate the Secretary of State, because she has attacked as nonsense the position of those who argue against globalisation—an important stand. She took that stand at a time when to do so was not straightforward, and it was very influential, because of where she comes from on the political spectrum.

Many hon. Members on both sides of the House argue that the liberalisation of trade will be effective in eliminating poverty and raising living standards all around the world. We have evidence of vast transfers of wealth from the rich world to the poorer world in the form of investment, equity and commercial loans. We also have evidence that such direct investment often helps to underpin struggling democracies or to topple dictators, and brings increased living standards in such simple things—to our eyes—as access to telephones for hundreds of millions of people. With all those proven benefits and what we have seen of the ways in which living standards have been transformed—especially in China and other countries of the Asia-Pacific region—it is extraordinary that we still have a vocal lobby against globalisation.

In this debate, I have been concerned that the amount of consensus in the House leads us to underestimate the extent to which an irrational argument is going on outside. The anti-globalisation point of view appeals to a surprisingly large number of people. In the examples of Seattle and Genoa, I was struck not so much by the demonstrations and violence on the streets but by the fact that an incoherent argument could strike a chord with such a broad spectrum of public opinion. That is true of public opinion in Britain and in much of Europe, and to a lesser extent in the United States.

Today, we have a broad-based commentariat who are influential in creating public opinion. In this country, we have a large middle class, of which only a small minority is involved in the process of wealth creation. As a result, the anti-globalisation movement, and the echo that it has in public opinion, is a demonstration of a widespread lack of understanding—even a distrust—of enterprise, commerce and business.

My second purpose in speaking in the debate is to propose to my hon. Friends on the Front Bench that they should go further than the step that they have taken today. There is an important battle to be fought to win the case for free trade, enterprise and wealth creation, because the amount of hostility to wealth creation generated by the anti-globalisation movement is merely symptomatic of a broader misunderstanding of wealth creation and a mistrust of the way in which companies perform.

I do not claim that there are no examples of companies behaving badly, even disgracefully. Indeed, because what happens here and what happens in developing countries are linked in people's minds, business often does itself no favours. The frequent flurries that we have over executive pay are just one example that makes it difficult to explain to people on low incomes in our own country, let alone those in other countries, why the enterprise system is valid. Today, there has been another rumpus over executive pay at Vodafone. On each occasion, the problem is not that executive pay cannot be justified; it is that people are unwilling to be transparent about their policies on executive pay.

The same is true of the development question. One of the reasons why anti-globalisation has struck a chord with a broad group of people is the sense of a growing lack of accountability in all sorts of areas. There is a feeling that more and more of our lives, and of the lives of people around the world, are being determined by people who, in the end, are not answerable to voters and are not accountable.

Some of the fire has been directed at international institutions. For example, the International Monetary Fund is now in an extraordinarily strong position to impose policies that have very severe political consequences, such as changing Governments. Sometimes, those policies change Governments that are very bad—in my view—into better Governments. That is not a justification in itself, however, as an organisation that has that kind of power, and that makes decisions that have such consequences, needs to be transparent and accountable. I would like my hon. Friends to argue for that.

Let us take the example of an organisation such as the World Bank. The criticism that has largely been made of the World Bank is not so much that it has gone around the world being high-handed but that it has been attracted to faddism—it has followed different initiatives of different non-governmental organisations.

While we are talking about accountability, let us include the NGOs in that discussion. I am pleased that those questions have been raised in several Labour Members' speeches. People who work for NGOs, for Oxfam or for Christian Aid now wield great influence, but they have a duty to account for their positions and their legitimacy in arguing cases that may simply be matters of personal political opinion or prejudice that have no democratic legitimacy. Indeed, the benefits that they bring to the people in developing countries whom they claim to represent may be questionable or not to their benefit at all.

Clare Short *rose*—

Mr. Portillo: I have only a couple of minutes left. I hope that the right hon. Lady will forgive me if I continue.

In the same way as it was Richard Nixon who could go to China, I believe that parties of the right—the Conservative party is one, but there are other such parties in other countries—can do the most to persuade business of its obligations and responsibilities. The strongest case exists for arguing that free enterprise will be the greatest influence in reducing poverty, raising living standards and reducing inequalities. There are powerful examples of companies that, through their investment, have lifted and improved the living standards of people who were previously held in much worse conditions of employment by local mafias and groups of thugs. We know that this is a complicated matter, as developing countries do not wish us to impose labour standards on them that will be protectionism in disguise.

That is another reason for transparency. My party and other right-of-centre parties should be working with enterprise and the private sector to persuade them to be very transparent, to adopt codes of practice, and to open them up to scrutiny, discussion and monitoring. That will demonstrate that enterprise is the solution to poverty in the world and not the cause.

There is a very broad battle to be fought and won. In the end, it is not only a question of development. As long as a vast section of our commentariat—our middle classes—distrusts business, it will be difficult for our enterprise system to function successfully, as it should.

5.24 pm

Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): I am delighted to follow the right hon. Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Portillo) for two reasons. First, although there is a lot of consensus in the House, we are all struggling to find our way forward. He approached the topic with a very welcome openness. I shall return to his second point on transparency and its importance in causing development.

I want to return to the Secretary of State's opening remarks on rejoicing about today, the movements that have been made, and what those movements meant. We have moved from a development model in which a development Minister goes around the world opening her purse or his wallet and disbursing an ever-diminishing amount of money. Development policy must now be Government policy.

The chairman of the Select Committee is present and he will remember what happened the first time members of the Select Committee visited the department of the

[Tony Worthington]

Trade Commissioner in Brussels. That was enormously important and would not have happened in the past. Why should members of the International Development Committee visit the commissioner? We were greeted with pleasure because the relevance of our visit was recognised. I am delighted to say that Pascal Lamy, the Trade Commissioner, will come to speak to us next week about development. That is an enormous step forward because, in the past, the commissioner's job was seen as building fortress Europe. The man responsible for the everything but arms initiative will come here to talk about how he can assist development.

I congratulate the Opposition on choosing this theme. We should take an important step forward and work with the British people. Many of them have realised that appalling trade rules are in place and that such rules benefit the wealthiest companies and the wealthiest countries and poison the future of the poor.

I return to the point about transparency, but wish to refer to an issue that has not been mentioned. It is not part of the Trade Justice Movement campaign, but it involves the most fundamental kind of trade justice. We should take action to stop corrupt rulers and elites robbing countries of their natural resources and condemning their people to poverty.

Simple transparent changes in the accountancy rules and financial regulations for our companies—particularly those that work in extractive industries, such as oil, diamonds and gold—would make an enormous difference. We should require oil companies and others to publish what they pay to the Governments of the countries in which they work. That would curtail the looting that impoverishes developing countries. The campaign, "publish what you pay", has been launched by George Soros, Global Witness and some of our best companies and non-governmental organisations. It would simply require companies to say what they pay to countries in the developing world.

Let me give a personal example. I have been going to Nigeria for about a dozen years, and I had been looking forward to going with the Select Committee to see for the first time Nigeria under a democratic Government. Previously, the country was run by deeply corrupt military dictatorships, and the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) will share my views on that. It was a deeply disillusioning experience to go there.

Nigeria discovered oil and plunged into poverty. There is not the slightest doubt that it is a wealthy country that achieved deep poverty because it discovered oil and because Nigerians robbed their country of its resources. When I went there, it was clear that the gravy train continued. It was a democratic society, and it was clear that the politicians had learned their scripts about the forgiving of debt and returning the Abacha money. However, they could not answer a single question about how much money was going from the oil companies into the Nigerian Exchequer. The oil companies and the Government do not say.

After three years of democratic Government, it should have been possible to point to the schools, the clinics and the services that were there because democracy was in place. However, not one politician or civil servant could point to the improvements that had occurred and that would have resulted if 90 per cent. of the oil resources—or whatever the figure may be—had gone into the Nigerian economy.

I do not question the credentials of President Obasanjo, but he is imprisoned by the system within which he has to work. We have probably all worked in circumstances that were mildly corrupt and in which the whistleblower was everyone's enemy. The whistleblower might even fear for his life. The fact that it has been relatively peaceful in Nigeria at a central Government level indicates that the gravy train continues. That will not change until we help by changing our rules. We need to say to BP, Shell, Exxon, Elf Aquitaine and other companies that work in those areas, "Publish what you pay." That would be an enormous step forward.

I back the campaign by George Soros, Global Witness, Oxfam and many of our best companies. BP wants to declare what it pays, but Sonangol, the Angolan company, threatened it with losing future rights if it did. Companies must declare what they pay because then the people will know what resources are in their countries.

Let us take Angola. We rejoice that Savimbi has gone. He was sustained by diamonds. The dos Santos Government in Angola were sustained by oil. But the people of Angola were sustained by nothing. In 2001, the UN had great difficulty raising the $200 million necessary to feed 1 million Angolans who were dependent on emergency food aid. In the same year, Global Witness calculated that more than $1 billion—about a third of state revenue—went missing in unaccountable loans and in paying for highly overpriced military goods, which came in particular from Russia.

We can have no faith that Angolan politicians will put that right on their own. We have to help by ensuring that developed world companies are not part of the problem. About 90 per cent. of Angola's revenue comes from oil. Whereas in the developed world it would be routine for BP, Shell or any other company to publish what it was paying to the Government, that is not the case everywhere.

Global Witness has done wonderful work around the world. I see colleagues in the Chamber who visited Cambodia, where we heard that the forest would be gone within about three years because the military was robbing the country of its forests. There are no resources there.

Global Witness is doing great work in Sierra Leone and Liberia. The simple measure of requiring companies worldwide to say what they put into a developing country would give the people of those countries the power to hold their Governments to account. At the moment, they cannot, and I commend the work of Global Witness and the campaign, "publish what you pay". We all agree about aspirations, but we need concrete specifics on what we should do.

5.33 pm

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): I shall concentrate on the agricultural aspects of trade because they have featured heavily in our debate.

When people returned from Doha eight months ago after reaching what was an unexpected agreement, a great deal of optimism was in the air. After all, we had pulled it off. The French had had difficulties but they finally produced acceptable phraseology, although subsequently it was slightly disputed, and the Commission said that we had agreed to achieve an accord on the modalities of common agricultural policy reform. Modality does not mean the framework but the detail—the nitty-gritty—of CAP reform, which is to be achieved by May 2003. It is important to realise that we are talking about trade-distorting subsidies. No one is talking about eliminating agricultural subsidies. The Government are talking about transferring subsidies to achieve other public good purposes, however they are defined, away from trade-distorting or production-related subsidies. It is important to be precise about that.

We then had the body blow of what happened in the United States. There is no point in blaming President Bush; the initiative was started by Democrats in Congress. Republicans ran with it and the President did not want to argue against it. Given the characteristic honesty of the Secretary of State, I am surprised that the Government motion does not mention the American Farm Bill. After all, it has been the villain of the piece throughout this afternoon's discussions, and rightly so.

It is envisaged that the Bill will give $190 billion over 10 years to 2 million American farmers. The interesting thing is how the Americans chose to defend it, because Ann Veneman, the Secretary for Agriculture, effectively said, "Over the past four years, we have piled additional appropriations into agriculture year after year. This is not a unique example of sin. We have been doing it all along and we have put in some $30 billion—you just didn't notice it." Now that the big numbers are there, we have suddenly noticed the context, which is the impact on the world trade round.

It is true that the so-called American "cap" in the WTO is just over $19 billion, so the American expenditure falls below that. However the problem is that the Americans seem to be moving towards that almost as if it were a target, whereas other major regimes have made an effort to wind down some forms of support and change their purpose. The Europeans were dragged kicking and screaming into the Uruguay round, but in fact the greatest influence on reform of the CAP has been the restrictions that are in place, which still persist in the Uruguay round, and the demands of retailers and consumers.

What is happening in America is horribly counterproductive. The measure represents a deficiency payment, so increases will go straight through into land prices, and it will provide production incentives, which will keep world prices low. The Bill will not have a long-term benefit for American farmers; I think that it may be of greater benefit to the competitive position of south American farmers. However, it will have a much wider consequence for the rest of the world because the low level of world prices is one reason for the amount of competition on the world markets. That is why it is so easy to export to developing countries and to shut them out of some marketplaces.

The second wider consequence is that President Bush's action in signing the Bill was manna for every protectionist throughout the world, as we can see from the speed and alacrity with which some of the farm lobbies jumped on it. Their dexterity was amazing to behold. The politicians have piled in on top. The odds of reaching agreement on CAP reform and in the WTO round seem to be much longer, and one reason is that the pretext has been broadcast from Washington. Its action seemed to be so much at odds with the philosophy so habitually espoused by the Americans.

I venture to say that there is a real challenge for those of us who are strongly pro-American and who instinctively think of America as our partner to persuade that great country to re-engage in collective action in all sorts of spheres across the globe. We have seen the United States apparently refusing that collective action—in discussions on climate change, on the alleviation of poverty, on mechanisms for international justice, on steel and then on the Farm Bill. There is a serious concern that, when we all accept the need for collective action to combat terrorism, such action should spread more widely throughout what we call the international community.

I said that the American action would promote protectionism, so step forward, right stage, Jacques Chirac, who has just been re-elected President of France with an enormous majority. I am sure that the Prime Minister will welcome the defeat of a Socialist Government who were so resistant to liberal economic reforms, but I hope that he has no great faith in President Chirac's conversion to the liberal economic model, which has yet to be espoused with great enthusiasm by any French politician brought up in the Napoleonic tradition.

The real significance is that we are facing the mid-term review of the CAP. Commissioner Franz Fischler is due shortly to produce his proposals. Those who say that the CAP does not change and that it is still a desperate aberration have not noticed what has happened over the years. I have spent almost all my political life fighting for reform of the CAP, and I continue to do so, but it has shifted enormously. It is moving away from production-related subsidies and towards the espousal of rural development more widely, which makes a great deal of sense, and that is one of the purposes of Mr. Fischler's reform.

The Europeans are retreating from production-led subsidies just as the Americans seem to have reverted to production-promoting subsidies. It is extremely important that Mr. Fischler wins his battle with the Council of Ministers, but it now looks like a harder battle to win. President Chirac was a farms Minister, and his main complaint about the CAP is probably that there is not enough of it. It will be a difficult argument to get consensus and build a majority in the Council of Ministers in favour of promoting liberalisation.

Liberalisation is in our interests. Some hon. Members might enjoy eating Polo mints. The sugar-free Polo mints are made by Nestlé Rowntree at York; the fruit-flavoured Polos are made in eastern Europe, because thus they escape the sugar regime and the costs it imposes on business. If hon. Members look at some of the oils produced by Cargill, they will find that investment is now going to Turkey or Ukraine, even though European prices in the grain and oilseed sector are now much closer to world prices and have become manageable.

We have to face the fact that it is entirely possible that in Germany Mr. Schröder will be defeated, if there is indeed a rightward swing taking place across Europe. Edmund Stoiber is promising to liberalise, despite the tradition of Bavarian-run agriculture in Germany, and I doubt that he would be dragged along on French coat tails, as has too often been the story of German policy. However, the Germans want enlargement, and they cannot

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afford enlargement unless there is reform of the CAP and their contribution decreases. There will therefore be pressure on Mr. Stoiber to maintain some form of liberal agenda.

All those factors come together. CAP reform has implications for enlargement, and those two factors combined play into Doha. The important thing for all of us is to maintain that movement for reform so that we are able to benefit developing countries, which stand to gain from trade. The victim concept of world trade is incorrect and misguided. Liberalisation, domestic and international, has benefited developing countries and has reduced poverty. A 2002 World Bank study called "Globalisation, Growth and Poverty" has shown that most effectively.

We need to reassert the WTO agenda. The Prime Minister is dining with Mr. Chirac tonight, and he is shortly to visit north America to discuss the broader issues. It is important that we make the point that liberalisation works. Whether we prefer to describe the case for helping developing countries as philanthropic or self-interested, all of us have a self-interest in ensuring the promotion of liberalisation, so that the world can continue to grow richer through the spread of liberal political philosophy.

5.42 pm

John Barrett (Edinburgh, West): As several hon. Members have said, it is good to see so many people on the streets outside Parliament today. People from all parts of the country have travelled to London to make their voices heard and to hear what we have to say. I hope that we do them justice and that contributions from both sides of the House continue to be positive and constructive.

The issue we are debating has struck a chord with many people from all walks of life and with hon. Members on both sides of the House. As with the Jubilee 2000 campaign to which my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) has referred, the number of people who have become involved in this issue, who have raised it with me during surgeries and who have written letters and sent postcards, is quite incredible. For thousands of people to come to London today, something is clearly wrong—so badly wrong that people feel a sense of outrage and injustice. People outside are not asking for a better deal for themselves. They are saying, "Give the poorest of the poor and the hungry and the starving of the world a fair deal—let them have a chance to help themselves, and end a trading system that kicks people when they are down."

If life is about choices, the contrast between rich and poor has never been so stark. When shopping for food, we often have a choice of 20 different types of cheese, a wall of cereals, and teas and coffees from around the world; meanwhile others no less deserving than ourselves eat grass or sawdust, or starve to death. As if things were not bad enough for the poorest of the poor, the rules of international trade—those relating to the provision of the basics in life, such as food and water—seem to be designed to make them even worse off.

If a Jaguar fighter bomber, a combat helicopter or submachine guns is required, the wheels of commerce with developing countries spin at great speed. We have only to look at the latest strategic export controls annual report, which details arms deals approved by the Government in 2000, to see that poverty-stricken states such as Bangladesh, Malawi and Sudan are not kept out of the trade loop entirely.

If finance and credit arrangements can be developed to fund some very dubious purchases, such as the £28 million air traffic control system for Tanzania, surely it is not beyond our capabilities to introduce fair trading rules for some of the most basic items that sustain life itself, but we have not done very well so far.

We have developed a system that undermines the price of crops in developing countries so that farmers cannot sell on the world market, because wealthy nations of the world have subsidised crop prices to a point where their crops are effectively dumped on to the world market. We have a system that can leave the poor without drinking water, while tourists at expensive resorts nearby have their thirst quenched by a water system that has been priced out of the range of local people by a trade agreement which stops their Government providing socially desirable drinking water.

We have a system under which farmers who for generations have used seeds to grow crops are told that the right to purchase that same seed is now owned by a multinational company which has purchased the patent, and that farmers must not only buy the seed from it, but must pay the new owner a royalty for using the seed. When we have such a system, we have a rotten system, and we had better do something about it, or the people outside will want to know why.

What has outraged so many people outside Parliament today is that existing trade agreements and proposals around the corner are grinding the poorest of the poor into the dust, while improving the lot of the better off. The real tragedy is that it need not happen at all. The United Nations estimates that poor countries lose £1.3 billion a day because of unjust trade rules—14 times more than they receive in aid.

Although there are moves to write off the debts of some of the poorest countries, and some progress is being made in that direction, the scale of the remaining problem is daunting. More than half of the heavily indebted poor countries are spending more on servicing debt than on primary education, and two thirds of the world's poorest countries are spending more on debt than on health care.

In order to trade, those countries must have the shackles of debt removed at the earliest opportunity. In respect of countries to which loans have been provided, we should end the conditions that force them to open up their markets too quickly to the full strength of competition from industrialised countries, which can undermine local producers with subsidised goods or, in the case of farming, expose local farmers to competition from the relatively protected farmers of Europe and the United States. That can have a devastating effect.

Hon. Members have mentioned examples from around the world, such [illegible] Ghana, where the market for rice collapsed while rice [illegible] the US was flooding in. In contrast, there are good examples as well. For instance, Mauritius adopted a positive trade regime which resulted in a wide range of products being exported, economic growth, a reduction in income inequality and an increase in life expectancy. A targeted trade policy with the right incentives can help exporters and produce a win-win result.

The World Bank estimates that the reform of the international trade rules for developing countries could lift 300 million people out of poverty. We must make a start. In Europe, we must reform the common agricultural policy to stop dumping and agree deadlines for doing that. Pressure should be maintained on all those who attend the ever-increasing number of summits, such as the world summit in South Africa later this year.

There is no excuse for patenting any plant form that has been grown for generations, and changes must be made to stop that scandal. Markets must be opened up to developing countries and the practice of dumping agricultural products on world markets must be stopped. The EU has failed to provide access for all exports from the 49 poorest and least developed countries in the world, and that must change. Recently, as was mentioned earlier, the US Farm Bill increased subsidies to American farmers by 70 per cent. over 10 years, making it even harder for developing countries to compete or enter the US domestic market.

Trade agreements should be developed to help the poor, to protect the environment and to be a force for positive change. If that development does not take place, we shall all suffer as we help to develop a world where the obese watch the poor starve to death on television. All that is being asked for is what is fair. We should settle for nothing else.

5.50 pm

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): I congratulate my right hon. and hon. Friends on recognising the importance of the issue by devoting the debate to it. I congratulate also the 10,000 people who have emphasised their concerns by coming to London and demonstrating on the streets of London. Somewhat unusually in an Opposition day debate, I congratulate the Secretary of State on a constructive and, in some ways, brave contribution, and one which I welcome.

I was keen to participate in the debate because before I was elected to the House, when as my mother puts it, I had a proper job, I was for the best part of a decade involved in working on aid programmes in developing countries. I have always been concerned about these issues. I reached one conclusion overall as a result of those years of experience that was rather unfashionable at the time. That was that peoples in developing countries—I worked primarily in Africa, but also in Asia—can and will become prosperous in due course, as other countries have before them, by their own efforts and not as the result of aid provided for them by others. Aid has an important humanitarian role in dealing with famine and in supporting health and other infrastructure, but ultimately countries can and will develop through their own efforts.

I had experience in developing countries and I was unable to identify an industrial project that could not be financed privately and that needed aid finance. Indeed, I undertook a study for the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. It was welcomed by that body, and it was so keen that it wanted to provide support for it. Such is the speed of bureaucracy that by the time it got round to it, every project that I had identified in countries that allowed free enterprise to operate had spontaneously been put into operation by local entrepreneurs, using local savings or employing outside investment.

These countries can develop themselves, but the speed and ease with which they do so will depend on the opportunities open to them, and above all the opportunities to trade with the already prosperous and developed countries.

As the Oxfam report suggests, trade is far more important than aid in quantitative terms for the growth of developing countries. That is why the hypocrisy of the developed world, which pretends to be in favour of the development of less developed countries but reserves its most severe protectionist measures for the poorest countries and the poorest people in them, is so tragic. It is shameful to us as members of the European Union that the Oxfam report, in its double-standards index, singles out the EU as the worst hypocrite in that respect. Our tariffs and protectionist measures tend to focus on areas that are most important to the third world, such as agriculture, labour-intensive manufacturing and anti-dumping measures. They are focused on the products that are in the most competitive markets. There are about 145 EU anti-dumping measures against products from developing countries. There are a further 80 from the United States and 22 from Canada.

I believe that such shameful hypocrisy is sustained by three fallacies. The first is the belief that trade is a zero sum game. It is thought that if someone does well, that is at the expense of someone doing badly. It so happens that a benign providence has ordained that both parties benefit from trade. We need to convince our colleagues, including our French colleagues, who are perhaps less familiar with this concept, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) said, that it is possible for both us and the developing world to benefit from opening our markets to them.

The converse is that both sides suffer from protection. Protection is much the same as imposing an embargo on a country. I think that it was Winston Churchill who said that prohibiting access to imports is what we do to our enemies in times of war and to ourselves in times of peace. We must convince our colleagues in the EU that preventing our people having access to the products and services that those in developing countries can competitively provide us with is damaging to us as well as being cruelly damaging to them, and utterly indefensible morally.

The second fallacy is the patronising belief that less developed countries cannot compete. That leads to a sort of new liberal imperialism, to a view that developed countries should be kept outside the global market, to be sustained by aid and hand-outs unless and until the rules can be changed to bias the system in their favour so that they can compete.

That is often expressed in calls that contrast free trade with fair or just trade. That is an unwise mistake. For the developing countries, free trade in the sense of free access to our markets is what is fair and just and what they need. We must not offer an excuse to those who wish to delay the dismantling of protection by saying, "We cannot do that until we have fair trade, or just trade. Free trade is a wicked, dangerous liberal Anglo-Saxon invention."

That approach is also dangerous in that it is used to justify the contrast between free trade and fair or just trade. It is used to justify the restrictions that are often upheld by the third fallacy that I wish to mention, which is almost the opposite of the second. It is the belief that

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far from developing countries being unable to compete, they are able to compete with our industries unfairly because they are willing to accept subsistence or poverty wages, which are said to be an unfair means of competition that will have the effect of driving down pay in Europe to levels elsewhere.

That argument is often used to justify anti-dumping restrictions on trade from countries where pay is extremely low, where employment conditions are inadequate or where environment standards are low. However, it is ultimately an absurd argument. It condemns people in developing countries who at least have minimal or dreadfully low rates of pay to have no pay, and no access to our markets until somehow, miraculously, they are in a position to receive higher pay.

Pay reflects productivity. No one can charge more than the value of what he produces because he will price himself out of the market. Pay is low in developing countries because productivity is low. It is not because people are incompetent or inefficient. It is because they have not had time to accumulate the capital, both physical and intellectual, which works alongside the labour of developed countries and enables an individual to produce perhaps 10 times as much in value as those in developing countries.

As developing countries are allowed access to our markets and build up and acquire capital—especially the intellectual capital of experience—they will increase their productivity and their pay will rise. The idea that they willingly accept low or subsistence wages and are prepared to continue doing so until they have driven us all out of business is nonsense and defies the experience of countries that have satisfactorily entered the world market, built up export markets and built up their own economies.

We must fight these fallacies if we are to overcome the hypocrisy that unfortunately means that we impoverish the third world at the same time as diminishing our own well-being. We can convince the people of Europe, as of our own country, that it is in our interests as well as being our moral obligation to those in poor countries to open our markets to their goods, and that we shall benefit as they benefit. We can then do ourselves a good turn as well as fulfilling our obligation to the poor and needy of the world.

6 pm

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): I should like to concur with everything that my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) has just said in an excellent speech. As you have been in the Chamber, Madam Deputy Speaker, I do not think that you will have had the opportunity to go outside and see the huge number of people taking part in today's demonstration and lobby of Parliament. What is most impressive about the demonstration is that it shows how many people care deeply about world poverty. That is extremely important and very encouraging for us all. The Secretary of State said earlier in a sedentary intervention that the Conservative party had changed. She is quite wrong, as huge numbers of the people outside are Conservatives. Indeed, huge numbers of supporters of the NGOs have always been Conservatives, as I suggest she knows full well. I do not know whether the majority are Conservatives, but there is certainly a great number of them. None the less, this is not partisan issue and there is general agreement throughout the House in all the speeches that have been made.

Clare Short: I was not trying to speak in a sectarian spirit in raising the issue, but the record of the Conservative party in power is different from the welcome position that it has now adopted and to which the hon. Gentleman makes a big contribution. That is a very welcome change, but it is change none the less.

Mr. Robathan: I shall not get into that argument in a 10-minute speech. I disagree with the Secretary of State on this issue, as on few others relating to development, although I disagree with her profoundly about many other matters. It is a pity that the Government have tabled an amendment to the motion, as it contains nothing that is offensive to them. I will be sorry if it forces us to a Division, because everybody who has spoken has generally agreed.

The problem about speaking late in a debate, as I always tend to do, is that all the points that one had wanted to make have often been made already. I will not repeat them, but excellent points were made by my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) about Italian tomatoes in Ghana, by the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) about NGOs and how they sometimes wish to stifle changes in culture, and by my right hon. Friend the Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Portillo), who referred to the accountability of NGOs, which we should revisit as a House. My fellow member of the International Development Committee, the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Tony Worthington), spoke about the oil corruption that he saw in Nigeria, but which I did not see.

I do not want to reiterate all the points that have been made, as it would bore the House, apart from anything else. I should like to stick with three issues. The first is the common agricultural policy, which was eloquently described by my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry). The policy is changing, and that is all to the good. I should state that I have an interest, as I am a farmer. I probably should not be arguing for greater reform, therefore, but I do so, because I think that the way in which farming and export subsidies are given is absolutely outrageous. It is sometimes very difficult to look the developing world in the eye with regard to this issue, on which I think that the Government and the Opposition are at one. This dumping—some of what is happening is dumping—costs us almost half the European Union budget, at a cost of 41 billion euro, and works against the environment, the consumer, farmers, who are driven out of business, and the developing world.

The second point, which was again raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon, is about US farm subsidies, which are moving in entirely the wrong way, representing some $180 billion or $190 billion dollars over 10 years. In so far as one should support any foreign Government, I support the Government of George Bush, but I regret the decision. My right hon. Friend pointed out that it was a Democrat-led decision as much as anything else, but I think that we would all agree that it was a retrograde step.

Indeed, we can see the developed world getting richer. In my lifetime, it has become profoundly richer. We have bigger cars, we eat more and we have problems with obesity—problems that did not exist when I was born in 1951. We are all getting richer, and while that is happening, parts of the developing world, especially in Africa, are getting dramatically poorer. That is very disturbing and distressing. My third point is this: what are developing countries doing for themselves?

I recently visited Sudan, and I visited the Congo last year. The sort of conflict that has taken place there destroys trade and deters inward investment. Besides killing people or making them starve, it exacerbates and causes poverty. From speaking about the Congo, one can move on to Zimbabwe, which has traditionally exported agricultural products, but is now starving. While it is starving, the kleptocracy of the military in Zimbabwe is looting the diamonds of the Congo. We are not responsible for that—those people are.

My hon. Friend the Member for Banbury mentioned tomatoes in Ghana—a country that is doing well and improving. I visited a tomato field there where four big pumps had previously been used to irrigate an area of about 45 hectares. At the time of my visit, however, only about eight hectares were being irrigated with one smaller pump. The reason was straightforward: nobody had bothered to invest in the pumps. There had been appalling management and a lack of investment—for all I know, there may also have been corruption—but it is no good blaming the developed world for that.

I am afraid that such problems are due to lack of capacity. The Secretary of State talked about increasing capacity in developing countries and that is what we need to look at. I think that the plant was run by a co-operative, but it could just as easily have been a foreign-run company. We moved on from the unirrigated fields to the tomato processing plant, which had closed down two years before and was a derelict site. Again, that was not the fault of the developed world, but was purely a fact—so it appeared to us and so we were told—of inefficiency, maladministration and poor management.

Oxfam raised the issue of rice in Ghana with me just before the visit, so while in Ghana I asked what had happened to the rice industry. The Ghanaians replied that the rice produced there was not very edible and that they preferred the imported rice. I do not know about that, but it appears to be the case. Again, we must not always blame the developed world.

My real point about this issue—the Secretary of State will not be surprised to hear me say this, as we have been smiling at each other about it—concerns corruption. We have heard about Uganda and how poverty there fell by 40 per cent. in the 1990s. Why not Nigeria, the second country that the Committee visited this year, which was mentioned by the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie? I understand that in 1980, its GDP per capita was approximately US$1,200, but by 2000, it was down to not much more than $300. Yet that country has oil revenue of US$18 billion a year. Where is that money going? Why are two thirds of the population living on less than a dollar a day? I am afraid that it is very obvious where that money is going; it is being picked from the pockets of the poor by the kleptocracy that runs that country. As the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie—I hope that he is also a friend—said, it may call itself a democracy, but we need to see a lot more action there.

Other hon. Members want to speak, so I shall end my speech with these final comments. Yes, we must make trade fair. That is absolutely essential. It must be equitable, but equity and fairness must extend and reach down to the very poorest in the developing world, because it is the poor who suffer most from poor governance. Let us ensure, of course, that our trade is fair, but let us also help the countries of Africa to develop good, open, fair and honest government. That is not easy, but it is absolutely essential.

6.8 pm

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry), I want to concentrate on food and agriculture issues, but I am in an unfortunate position, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) has already dismissed part of my argument as an absurd fallacy. I hope that I can persuade him to retract at least slightly.

As somebody who has spent most of his working life in or close to the world of agriculture and food production, whenever I visit any foreign country, but especially those in the developing world, I immediately consider that aspect of their world and their rural community. Like other hon. Members who have spoken from all parts of the House, I am often horrified to discover the amount of food that is being imported by a poor country that patently has the natural resources to produce that food itself. There are very few countries that could not meet most, if not all, of their basic requirements if the political and economic situation allowed them to do so. I do not think that many countries have such a natural disadvantage that they could not make a significant contribution.

Clare Short: The right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) mentioned the distortions of international trade and low prices. Commodity prices are still falling and falling, and that feeds into inefficiency. Allowing Africa to process its agricultural production, bring it into our markets and use its cheaper labour would create more efficiency. We are partly responsible for the gross inefficiencies because prices are so terrible.

Mr. Paice: With respect, I am not quite sure of the point of the Secretary of State's intervention. I do not dissent from her argument, as I said that there are not many countries with natural disadvantages such as climate and soil that would prevent them from becoming largely self-sufficient. However, I shall come on to the many other reasons that may stop them.

It is misguided to think that there may be simple solutions. All these countries face the dilemma of whether their priority should be to produce food for their own consumption and make sure that their own people have the necessary nutrition, or whether to earn money from exports, which go much wider than agriculture alone. That has been a dilemma for decades. Some of us are old enough to remember the abortive groundnut scheme which created a furore because it was aimed at exports rather than self-sufficiency.

A few years ago, I visited Zambia with the hon. Member for City of York (Hugh Bayley). We went to York farm, a large operation, developed by the

[Mr. Paice]

Commonwealth Development Corporation. It has since been sold, but it produced vegetables, primarily green beans, mangetout and so on, for export to supermarkets in this country. Many of its products were for the consumer who wanted to buy temperate vegetables all year round. Although it earned valuable income from exports, there was something almost obscene about the fact that the farm managers had to give all the workers a glass of glucose drink in the morning because they were so malnourished that they could not do a day's work without it. That is a sad indictment of the balance that we have managed to achieve in world trade.

There is huge potential in Zambia and many adjoining sub-Saharan countries. Several hon. Members referred to Zimbabwe as a prime example of self-inflicted problems. Having once been a major producer of food, the country is now in dire straits. However, protection and protectionism are not the right way to proceed. There are a lot of siren voices and there is a superficial attraction in a protectionist attitude that allows a country's agriculture to develop free from cheap imports. That attraction, however, is short term and stifles initiative and progress. As the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) said, it smacks of preventing any development or advancement for people. There is no long-term future in peasant agriculture, and increasing affluence will lead people away from it of their own volition.

The Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Hilary Benn), the previous junior Minister in the Department for International Development, said:

> "Africa loses 40 per cent. of the savings that it generates each year. That money flees the continent every year."—*[Official Report, Westminster Hall,* 10 April 2002; Vol. 382, c. 19WH.]

I submit that that is partly because many people do not have the confidence to leave their money in Africa as a result of the political instability, corruption, maladministration and sheer bad economic management that are at the root of many its problems.

On agricultural policies, as other hon. Members have said, the CAP is a major part of the problem, but it has changed and is changing. However, that change needs to go much further, as it does in agricultural policies in other parts of the world. I wholly support the need to eliminate export subsidies, which do much damage to indigenous agriculture. There is no dispute among hon. Members about that. There is no justification for any tariff barrier imposed directly on food products and I strongly support eliminating production subsidies. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon rightly said, the Doha agreement refers to reductions in support that distorts trade, rather than reductions in all support. I share the concerns of many people about the hypocrisy of the United States in supporting the Cairns group in WTO talks for moving towards free trade on the one hand and on the other introducing the Farm Bill, which was rightly condemned by many hon. Members this evening.

However, to pick up a point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden, I have a major concern about fair trade, which should operate in two directions. There should be fair trade to developing countries and for our own businesses, which raises two distinct issues in food and farming.

The first is the safety of imported food products for human, plant and animal health. If we impose controls on our own producers, it is self-evident that the same controls should apply to any imported food. Those controls are provided, at least in theory, by Codex Alimentarius, the international plant protection convention, the Office of International Epizootics and the sanitary and phyto-sanitary agreement in the Uruguay round, but they should not be used as an excuse to adopt high levels of protection as a barrier against trade. In practice, there are grave doubts as to whether those controls are rigorously enforced.

The second issue is production systems. Should we expect our own producers to compete with food produced using systems that are not allowed here? I am not referring, as my right hon. Friend did, to matters such as pay levels, on which we cannot pretend to compete, nor to climatic issues or other things that we cannot do anything about in this country. If we impose constraints—I am talking about agriculture, but this applies more widely—on animal welfare, it is not fair to expect our producers to compete with countries that do not have the same level of regulation. I used to advocate preventing those food products from coming in. I was wrong. The way forward—this is part of the reform of the CAP that I want—is translating production support, which is wrong, into direct support to compensate for the controls that we impose on our own producers and do not apply to the overseas producers who are entering our markets.

It is no comfort to a battery hen to know that she will no longer have to stay in a battery cage in Britain if far more hens are kept in battery cages somewhere in the third world in far worse conditions. That is not in the interests of animal welfare nor of this country or the developing world. Our reforms should be directed at the public good and compensate for the controls that we impose on our own producers. That proposal was submitted to the WTO in 2000 and would have put payments in the green box, and thus outside the issue of production subsidies. I commend that strongly to Her Majesty's Government as part of the liberalising of trade that we support.

6.19 pm

Mr. John Lyons (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): Today has been unique, as people from all over the United Kingdom have come to the Commons to lobby Members. They are from various backgrounds and different age groups but every Member who has met them must have been struck by the number of young people who feel strongly about the issue.

In the past, we have heard in debates in the House about young people's apathy and lack of involvement. Today, that argument was demolished, as those young people care deeply about this issue and want us to do something about it collectively. We must recognise that they do not want extensive speeches, articles and soundbites but progress and a proper response to their calls for action. In today's heat, the lobby was a breath of fresh air. People spoke with a passion that is sometimes missing in political debate. That was not a one-off just for today, but something for every day for a long time. We must try to ensure that we take on board the points that they are making.

People have an almost absolute distrust of politicians in this respect. Those in today's lobby do not think that we will be serious about delivering on their objectives, but that we will listen to them on the day and, once they have gone, completely forget about their campaign. We need to find a way of saying collectively, across the House, that that is not what we are about. We are all concerned not only to listen to the points that were made to us, but to take them on board and, hopefully, to end up with a political objective with which people will feel confident and comfortable. That is a major challenge to us all, irrespective of political background.

Last week, I had the opportunity to listen to the Chancellor talk about globalisation, trade and poverty. As a Labour Member, of course I was going to be happy with what he said, but it was interesting that people of no political persuasion were delighted by the progress that is being made. However, they did not think that that was the end of the story—they wanted more progress. They wanted the Government to push even further and more strongly at every international level. The lobby is important and timely, given that the Seville European council and the G8 summit in Canada are coming up. Those conferences will be major platforms for the agenda of the people who lobbied us today. We need to find ways of ensuring that something concrete comes out of those conferences—not just a lot of talk, but developments that will enable people to say that, for a change, politicians have made genuine advances and improvements, or at least that they have an agenda that will build on the objectives of today's lobby.

I find a common thread as I speak to people from various parts of the country, including my constituency. They call out for a new and different approach to replace the patched-up arrangements of the past—something more radical. They want an approach to food and farming that protects poor farmers. They want a reconsideration of plans to liberalise vital services such as water. That point was made strongly today. For third-world countries, water is an issue that can be dealt with very simply. I say that as an engineer. Desalination plants can be built in almost any European country and used to convert salt water into fresh drinking water for the third world. It is not a major problem, but we do not confront it and deal with it, and people will die as a result.

We need to make progress on these issues as a House, not only as a Government, because broad support is required. We want to go to the conferences to argue for a position that will take matters forward, but we cannot avoid the fact that we need other countries—in Europe and in other parts of the world, such as Canada and America—to say and do the same thing, giving proper constructive support to our objectives. We do not want to be seen as having a different, broader agenda that will move forward faster—that would be a waste of time, because it will not move forward at all if we do not have a collective approach that takes people with us.

It would also be a waste of time to have a debate about what went wrong in the past. We need to move on to talk about where we are now. People want us to continue to do what we are doing, but they want more of it—more aid and more practical support. The issue will not go away. The people who lobbied us today are nothing more than a representative group of the millions of people who feel the same. We feel that in our constituencies. I particularly salute the work of the Churches, which have played an outstanding role. Not long ago, a local church asked me to get involved in a sponsored day of famine. I said, "No problem: I can do that for 24 hours." The wonderful thing was the number of schoolkids who were prepared to do the same because they felt so strongly about poverty and starvation.

All across the country—age group and political background do not matter—millions of people want us to do something constructive. We need to do that across party lines by agreeing on the agenda and saying, "This is what we are after." It is not a matter of the UK acting alone, but of the UK leading the world and bringing in other countries to support our cause. If we do that, people will at last feel less distrust. They will be happier with politicians who are on board walking the walk and talking the talk, and will give us the proper recognition that is important to us.

6.27 pm

Mr. Russell Brown (Dumfries): I appreciate the opportunity to take part in the debate. Like many hon. Members, I have been attending the lobby and listening to people. I agree wholeheartedly with what my hon. Friend the Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Lyons) said about that. Those people turned up from every corner of the country, and each and every one of them deserves thanks for what they have done. That said, no one from my constituency came. Whether that is because they trust me to act on their behalf or because they think I am a lost cause is up to them to determine.

Two or three years ago, my hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) came to my constituency, and we held an excellent meeting with local churches. It was attended not only by church members, but by young people from secondary schools, to whom this issue means a great deal. This afternoon, I spent a considerable time—perhaps more than they would have liked—talking to young students who wanted to do a question and answer session that they could take back to university with them. One of their questions was, "How much of an impact do you think all this will have?" As my hon. Friend the Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden said, everyone is saying the same thing, but—let's not kid ourselves—they are sceptical about how politicians respond. The students also wondered how much impact the lobby would have on the news. I had to say to them—and I hope I am wrong—that regrettably they will not get much coverage.

Mr. Stephen Pound (Ealing, North): My hon. Friend referred to the young people who lobbied many hon. Members this afternoon. Does he agree that, at a time when we are told that the young are disillusioned with politics, it is extraordinarily cheering that they care so deeply that they come from every part of the kingdom to speak to us? Does he also agree that we must repay that fervour and commitment, otherwise we shall never be worthy of their support or their engagement in politics?

Mr. Brown: I could not have put that better; I admire my hon. Friend's way with words. He is right that we need to repay that trust. Perhaps young people mistrust politicians rather than politics. However, they will not get news coverage. They tried to compare their actions today with the anti-globalisation demonstrations, but those got coverage because of the violence that occurred—anarchists were loose on the streets in different parts of the world—whereas today there was a structured and positive lobby, which bodes well.

[Mr. Brown]

Poverty and sustainable development must be the highest priority in the changes to world trade rules. We must carefully consider plans to liberalise vital services. On the simple matter—if I dare call it that—of water, the difference that it can make to some of the poorest countries is beyond belief. We must be careful about the way in which we manage that vital commodity.

The Seville European Council this week and the G8 summit in Canada later this month present every nation with excellent opportunities to move the agenda forward. Our Government have promised to support fair trade rules, although, for some reason, others question our commitment to fair trade.

Mr. Bill Tynan (Hamilton, South): Does my hon. Friend agree that in the 10 years since the Rio conference, the international community has not moved substantially? Does he accept that that is one of the reasons for the dissatisfaction among young people? Does he agree that it is important to take the opportunity at the next conference to do something constructive and positive?

Mr. Brown: My hon. Friend is right. Our actions must be positive, constructive and tangible. We must take action that people can clearly perceive as making a difference.

We want free and fair trade. We are committed to making globalisation work for the poorest countries. Hon. Members have said that rich nations' use of agricultural subsidies can harm the livelihoods of farmers in developing countries. Agricultural export subsidies must reduce rapidly, and dumping must end. As hon. Members know, at Doha, WTO members agreed to negotiate a new draft agreement on agriculture by March next year. The Government will work towards ensuring that it contains significant commitments.

It is not right to insulate developing countries from global trade because that would undoubtedly limit their opportunities of achieving economic growth. Improved market access is a key component of ensuring that the agreement at Doha is a true development round. It is imperative that WTO members demonstrate a genuine commitment to opening markets that are important to developing countries, not least in agriculture. The EU already grants duty-free access to the least-developed countries under the everything but arms initiative.

I am conscious of time and I simply want to end on the new global laws that may be needed to regulate the activities of international corporations. I believe that the Government support adopting a sensible combination of regulatory and voluntary approaches, which will harness the benefits of corporate social responsibility for all sections of society. We are leading efforts to legislate on this matter. For example, a recent amendment to pensions legislation requires trustees to disclose the extent to which they take ethical, social and environmental issues into account in their investment decisions. The OECD convention on bribery has also been incorporated into UK law.

However, to avoid stifling innovation, caution must be exercised when imposing binding rules. The Government encourage companies to follow voluntary corporate social responsibility strategies, which will allow them to respond flexibly to their circumstances and those of the country in which they invest. Such investment is needed.

We all need to begin to deliver not only for young people but for everyone who has taken the time and made the effort to come here today. If we begin to deliver more substantially, people will realise that politicians can assist in tackling a major world issue.

6.35 pm

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): A rare event has taken place today—a debate that has been largely free of acrimony and a debate about ideas. I have been a Member of Parliament for more than 19 years, and I can say that views in both major parties have changed. I have no doubt that the way in which the Labour party has embraced the market constitutes a revolution, which I welcome. In 1983, some Conservative Members would have resented the fact that we were debating overseas aid, development and trade. I concede that changes have occurred on both sides.

People outside the House will wonder why we are arguing about whether to have a vote. It will seem a little like debating the number of angels who can dance on the head of a pin. The usual channels display an amour propre on such occasions: it is our half-day debate and we have tabled a motion. We will, of course, support our motion. The Government's actions remain to be seen. Whatever happens, people will recognise that the debate has been remarkable.

I was impressed by the way in which the Secretary of State abandoned her speech and spoke from the heart. It did not surprise me, but it impressed me and I liked some of the new phrases that she used. For example, she said that we should all globalise our minds and she spoke about the "globaphobes" who attack the consensus. She has provided some new ideas. She is right that we cannot be for or against globalisation; it is a fact of life and we must determine the way in which we manage it.

I was grateful for the approach of my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) and his deep knowledge of the subject. He spoke about the painstaking work of reforming the CAP and the Doha process, which will occupy us for at least two years. He also made a strong point when he said that we must support the reformers in the developing countries and that for every monster, there is someone who is trying to reform and bring a country into the international community.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Portillo) was right that no one has a monopoly on compassion and to stress the importance of the growing lack of accountability in some non-governmental organisations. He also emphasised the need to promote accountability and transparency throughout development thinking.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) knows more than most of us about this subject. I was struck by his comments on the need to make it clear that liberalisation benefits developing countries as much as us.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) spoke about the hypocrisy of the developed world and the shameful attitude of our European Union in not accepting our responsibilities.

My hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) drew on his personal experience in Sudan, a country that I feel strongly is one of the great forgotten conflicts and disasters of Africa. He also drew attention to the plight of the people of Zimbabwe who are starving while their own army loots diamonds elsewhere.

My hon. Friend the Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) spoke from great practical experience about the need to examine the issue of food safety, and to take on board the issues of animal welfare and of what is fair for British farmers as well as those in developing countries.

I was struck by the common sense of the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Lyons), who spoke of the breath of fresh air that today's debate represents, and of how hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber have had to face up to the problem of distrust of politicians. The hon. Gentleman said that today's events must not be a one-day wonder, and that we must respect the wishes of the thousands of people from across the country who expect us to do our duty in the coming years, and to live up to the words that we have spoken.

We have listened to some serious speeches in the House today, but we have also listened to and witnessed the mass lobby of Parliament that has taken place outside. The thousands of people who have come to London, including those from my own constituency and diocese of Salisbury, represent countless other citizens of all ages who mind very deeply about the state of the world and the plight of so many of its people.

I share their anger that 800 million people do not have enough food to meet their basic nutritional needs. In a shrinking world of high technology and expanding opportunities, it is just not credible to ordinary people in the rich countries of the developed world that we cannot break the cycle of poverty, sickness and death from starvation that we witness every day. Most of us agree that we have a moral duty to seek ways of managing these humanitarian crises better. We may sometimes disagree on how to do that, although there has been precious little disagreement in this debate.

Those who control the levers of economic and foreign policy—the Governments of the world and the international institutions—are staffed by professional advisers with laudable motives. But to the hungry world, it looks as if there are too many international arrangements, too many bodies with overlapping mandates, and too many duplicated responsibilities—not only in respect of food security but in the whole international apparatus for supporting human needs and development.

That issue is underlined by the partners in the Trade Justice Movement. That remarkable coalition of organisations has organised today's lobby, and we must listen to it. All the organisations have grass-roots, everyday, personal experience of the poverty, sickness and death that are a reality for hundreds of millions of people. Those people are not prosperous, not educated, not secure and not safe. They are certainly not rich enough, nor relaxed enough, to watch the World cup on television and go to the pub to celebrate.

We have listened to the messages of each of those 43 organisations—I think it is 43; the number has been going up in the last week or two—that make up the Trade Justice Movement. Last weekend, I visited every one of their websites. It was a moving and enriching experience. Websites not only allow us to get the message direct, without the need for any press or media; they also reduce the spin. What we get is direct and unvarnished. The internet is a valuable and powerful tool, and we should harness that power, because power is what it is all about. The Trade Justice Movement is about empowering the worst-off in the world. The best-off must realise that it is in everyone's interest to move more quickly than we have done, to alleviate poverty and to combat hunger and starvation among the poorest and most vulnerable people on earth.

Way back in 1996, under the Conservative Government, we agreed at the world food summit that it was intolerable that 800 million people did not have enough food to meet their basic needs. The world community concluded then that this was caused by poverty, conflict, and a lack of water, drains, roads and health care. We agreed to work to halve that number by 2015. It seems now that there is precious little prospect of achieving that goal. What has gone wrong?

International trade has been the great driver of prosperity for 50 years, rising at double the rate of growth of the world economy. International investment is the force pushing forward global investment. Freer trade and foreign investment have enabled parts of south-east Asia to move from developing to developed status in a generation. Poor countries are generally more dependent on trade than rich countries; they receive eight times more each year from trade than they receive in aid. The UN conference on trade and development estimates that, by 2005, developing countries could earn $700 billion more each year from exports if tariff barriers were reduced.

There is no simple way of promoting global economic development. We need to understand why investment flows to some developing countries and not to others. We must identify comparative advantage, create conditions for sustaining investment flows, and condemn corruption, as the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Tony Worthington) said. We must also build markets and support democratic political frameworks that lead to stability and prosperity.

We agree with the Trade Justice Movement that current international trade rules hold back development in poor countries. Those countries cannot compete in the global market while the European Union and the United States subsidise our exports and impose tariffs on our imports. The market is distorted and reform is imperative.

We hope, however, that the partners in the Trade Justice Movement will also listen to some of the gentle messages that we are offering them about accountability and openness. I believe that they are wrong to condemn the general agreement on trade in services. In many countries, water and sewerage infrastructure is sadly a low national spending priority. If private companies can provide or manage a service, where public infrastructure has collapsed or none exists, and if they are willing to invest—perhaps sharing the risk with the Export Credits Guarantee Department, which is currently having yet another review—then it is better that the GATS rules exist.

I believe that the Trade Justice Movement should also be cautious in condemning the activities of international companies. It is demanding

"new global rules to regulate and re-direct the activities of international business".

[Mr. Robert Key]

However, it has no idea who would write the rules or who would police them. The fact is that the multinational companies are already regulated by the national laws of every country in which they operate, and are subject to internationally agreed codes of practice. The evidence is that multinationals operate to a higher standard than most national businesses. They cannot afford to take chances or cut corners. Too much is at stake in their home country, from the Government and from their shareholders alike.

We have had the world food summit of 1996, the Uruguay round, the Monterrey consensus and the Doha development agenda. Earlier, we even had the Torquay round. In Bali, we had the fourth preparatory committee for the world summit on sustainable development, which will take place in Johannesburg from 26 August to 4 September. Next weekend sees the EU Heads of Government summit in Spain. On 26 June, the G8 Summit will take place in Canada, where the member states will discuss the New Partnership for Africa's Development—NEPAD—focusing on conflict, trade, education, health, development assistance and debt, where G8 policies affect Africa.

In this dizzy round of jet set wheeling and dealing, we ask the Government, on behalf of the most vulnerable in the world, and on behalf of all those the length and breadth of the UK who support the motives of the Trade Justice Movement, for action as well as words. We must remember daily so many people in Africa, especially in Zimbabwe and in Sudan, where my brave friend Archbishop Joseph Morona recently risked crossing the military front line in the Nuba mountains in the search for peace and food for his desperate people.

We look forward to the response to this debate by the Under-Secretary of State for International Development. We know that she spent some years as a journalist in South Africa in the 1970s. She will have seen for herself real poverty and desperation in the eyes of children, just as I have in Mozambique, west Africa, Nicaragua and elsewhere.

For goodness sake, the Department of Trade and Industry has eight Ministers. One of them should have been present at this debate, although I concede that they might not know as much about the subject as the Under-Secretary. On Sunday morning last, I listened to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry being interviewed. She was robust on the need for the EU to phase out export subsidies and to remove import tariffs from the poorest countries. She was firm in her call for African countries to dismantle the trade barriers that they erect between themselves. However, she was hesitant about the time scale, and admitted that the Doha talks would go on for two years. That is too long for millions of the 800 million starving people in the world, for many of whom two more years is a death sentence. Two years and counting: in June 2004, we will expect this Government to give us answers, not epitaphs.

6.50 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Ms Sally Keeble): It is a privilege to reply to this debate, which has focused on a major issue of our time that is absolutely crucial to world justice and stability—a fact that is surely reflected in the massive support for world trade reform from the voluntary sector and Church-based groups throughout the country. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said at the outset, such support from a mass movement—including large numbers of young people, as many hon. Friends have said—working with Government constitutes a real watershed.

One in five of the world's population—some 1.2 billion people—live in abject poverty, and we recognise that current levels of sheer deprivation and inequality constitute one of the biggest challenges that we face. The Government have put the eradication of world poverty high on their list of priorities, and we recognise the key role that trade has to play in combating it. Indeed, we have not only recognised, but taken action on, several of the issues that hon. Members have raised, and I shall explain what we have done in due course. However, it will be virtually impossible to deal with all the points that were raised, and I shall of course write to those hon. Members whom I miss out.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State set out the history of the thinking on trade and development. Our second White Paper on development makes two key policy commitments: to work with others to reduce poverty systematically, and to promote economic growth that is equitable and environmentally sustainable. This Government have steadily increased our overseas aid budget from the very low levels inherited from the previous Conservative Government, and we are committed to continue increasing it. This Government did not just talk about debt relief—we led the world on it.

Mr. Robathan: Will the Minister give way?

Ms Keeble: No, I have only a few minutes. In addition to debt relief, we have also provided opportunities for trade development for the poorest countries. This Government are also leading the world in seeking to change the rules, so that markets to developing countries will be opened up. In trade as in other areas, the paths of the poorest countries and the rest of the world have diverged in economic terms. For those countries that have seized the opportunity presented by increasingly open world markets to increase exports and attract inward investment, there has been real progress in reducing poverty. However, the poorest have become more marginalised, as my hon. Friend the Member for City of York (Hugh Bayley) rightly pointed out. That is why reducing tariffs, reducing trade barriers between developing and developed countries, and reducing barriers between developing countries themselves, is so important.

A fairer, rules-based system will ensure that developing countries have access to our markets, and that they are not consistently trapped at the low-value, impoverished end of a supply chain that culminates in some of the wealthiest consumer markets in the developed world. The hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) and several other hon. Members raised that issue in relation to commodities, and it is one reason why the change in tariffs is so important. More processing must be introduced in developing countries, so that their produce can be moved higher up the value chain.

This Government have led Europe in pushing for the CAP reform to which the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) referred. It was an argument that we had to win, and we did so with some difficulty. I accept that progress might seem glacial, but it must be made through consensus, and the everything but arms agreement and Doha do indeed constitute progress. As the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) said, it is a question not simply of caring, but of taking action. We must care enough to work through the systems, change the rules and produce the improvements that developing countries and the world's poor so greatly need. This Government have consistently done just that by working with Europe, and with world opinion.

My hon. Friend the Member for City of York highlighted the need to embed trade in development policy, and, like several other hon. Members, he underlined some of the issues relating to governance. We need to ensure that financial, justice and land tenure systems are in place to provide the framework for trade, and to help developing countries attract investment. Such systems will ensure that the benefits of trade are recycled into building up the economies of developing countries, and do not simply disappear into foreign bank accounts, or into the back pockets of the elite. That is why my Department does so much work with developing countries on issues of governance, including justice.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) was right to pay tribute to the real change in the climate of public opinion here and abroad, and to the role of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in achieving that change. She was also right to say that wisdom does not rest entirely on one side of the argument; sometimes, we need to listen a little more to developing countries, and lecture a little less.

My hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Tony Worthington) and the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) mentioned retaining profits for investment in developing countries, and generating new funds for investment. My Department is working on those issues. For example, the emerging Africa enterprise fund has produced investment funds for major infrastructure projects. Several hon. Members rightly highlighted the change in UK legislation to ensure that companies that bribe people can be prosecuted, even when such offences are committed abroad—a point that deals with some of the issues of governance raised by the hon. Member for Salisbury.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (John Barrett) and the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) mentioned trade reform. The Government welcomed the lobby on trade reform, and we worked with the non-governmental organisations and countries involved. The hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire highlighted some of the problems associated with agriculture, and I have already dealt with commodities and the process involved, and with land ownership systems. Of course, we recognise that 70 per cent. of the world's poor live in rural areas, and that agricultural issues are therefore central to dealing with world poverty and other millennium development goals.

My hon. Friend the Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Lyons) said that we must ensure that we do not just talk and then forget, and I can assure him that this Government certainly will not forget about the world's poor. We are working with the NGOs that are leading this campaign, and we will continue to do so. We are working with the American Government, European Governments and—importantly—developing countries to secure the necessary changes. Developing countries need not just handouts today to feed the poor, but a hand up to ensure sustainable development that will produce lasting changes.

The linkages between trade, development and poverty reduction are important to us all, but they are absolutely crucial to the poorest countries—a point recognised by the trade lobby and by the Government. There are three key factors to achieving our goals.

The first factor is a clear commitment across Government to the eradication of world poverty. The whole Government have signed up to that.

The second factor is a clear commitment across the international community to make sure that developing countries are able to participate in world trade. As so many have recognised, we have a long way to go with that, but this country is leading the world. The third factor is massive public support.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House proceeded to a Division.

Mr. Lilley: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Can you explain how it is possible under our rules for a vote to be taken against a motion of which virtually everyone who spoke in the debate approved?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. That is not a matter on which the Chair can rule. I would say only that the longer one stays here, the more it appears that anything is possible.

The House having divided: Ayes 180, Noes 319.

Division No. 276] [7 pm

AYES

Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Cameron, David
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
(NE Fife)
Carmichael, Alistair
Chapman, Sir Sydney
(Chipping Barnet)
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric

Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell–Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger–Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Laurence Robertson
and
Mr. David Wilshire.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Ewing, Annabelle
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca–Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David

Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Price, Adam
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr Howard
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Weir, Michael
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wishart, Pete
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Joan Ryan and
Mr. John Heppell.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House welcomes the lobby of Parliament by the Trade Justice Movement and increased recognition of trade as a key component to reducing global poverty; welcomes also efforts made to draw public attention to these important issues; recognises trade has an important role to play in helping countries achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); is aware that to achieve this a multilateral trading system is needed giving developing countries a fair deal; recognises that the Government is committed to working with developing country partners, and other bilateral donors and multilateral organisations to achieve this; believes that the development challenges faced in Africa require the international community, working together with African countries, to make additional efforts to secure progress towards the MDGs; welcomes the Government's commitment to turning the agreement reached at Doha in November last year into a meaningful 'Development Round' and to achieving real progress on market access and in areas of importance to developing countries; will continue to support efforts to reform the Common Agricultural Policy and reduce trade-distorting subsidies; will support preferential access to developing countries through the Generalised System of Preferences aid to least developed countries through the Everything But Arms initiative; recognises developing countries themselves must undertake effective policy measures to integrate into the global trading system; supports these efforts and engagement in a broad range of activities to help countries participate more effectively in the multilateral trading system; and further welcomes the Government's commitment to doubling support for trade-related capacity building from £15 million in 1998–2001 to £30 million in 2001–04.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 119(9) (European Standing Committees),

BROAD ECONOMIC GUIDELINES

That this House takes note of European Union Document No 8389/02, Commission Recommendation for the 2002 Broad Guidelines of the Economic Policies of the Member States and the Community; and supports the Government's welcome for the publication of the Commission's Recommendation for the Guidelines, as giving operational content to the conclusions of the Lisbon and Stockholm summits, reflecting the importance of structural reform in tackling successfully the challenges of globalisation and competitiveness, and promoting employment and social inclusion; also takes note of European Union Documents Nos SN 1107/02, 1108/02, 1109/02, 1111/02, 1112/02, 1113/02, 1319/1/02 REV1, 1320/1/02 REV1, 1321/02, 1322/02, 1323/02, 1324/1/02 REV1, 1325/1/02 REV1, 1361/02, 1382/1/02 REV1, 1383/1/02 REV1 and 2002/C 51/06, Council Opinions and

Statements on the 2001 Stability and Convergence Programmes; and welcomes these Opinions and Statements as promoting the objective of sound government finances as a means of strengthening the conditions for price stability and for strong sustainable growth conducive to employment creation.—*(Fraser Kemp.)*

Question agreed to.

House of Lords Reform (Joint Committee)

7.14 pm

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): I beg to move,

That the Lords Message [10th June] relating to House of Lords Reform be now considered.

That this House concurs with the Lords in the said Resolution.

That a Select Committee of twelve Members be appointed to join with a Committee appointed by the Lords as the Joint Committee on House of Lords Reform

(1) to consider issues relating to House of Lords reform, including the composition and powers of the Second Chamber and its role and authority within the context of Parliament as a whole, having regard in particular to the impact which any proposed changes would have on the existing pre-eminence of the House of Commons, such consideration to include the implications of a House composed of more than one 'category' of member and the experience and expertise which the House of Lords in its present form brings to its function as the revising Chamber; and

(2) having regard to paragraph (1) above, to report on options for the composition and powers of the House of Lords and to define and present to both Houses options for composition, including a fully nominated and fully elected House, and intermediate options; and to consider and report on—

(a) any changes to the relationship between the two Houses which may be necessary to ensure the proper functioning of Parliament as a whole in the context of a reformed Second Chamber, and in particular, any new procedures for resolving conflict between the two Houses; and

(b) the most appropriate and effective legal and constitutional means to give effect to any new Parliamentary settlement;

and in all the foregoing considerations, to have regard to—

(i) the Report of the Royal Commission on House of Lords Reform (Cm.4534);

(ii) the White Paper *The House of Lords—Completing the Reform* (Cm.5291), and the responses received thereto;

(iii) debates and votes in both Houses of Parliament on House of Lords reform; and

(iv) the House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee Report *The Second Chamber: Continuing the Reform*, including its consultation of the House of Commons, and any other relevant select committee reports.

That the Committee shall have power—

(i) to send for persons, papers and records;

(ii) to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House;

(iii) to report from time to time;

(iv) to appoint specialist advisers;

(v) to adjourn from place to place within the United Kingdom; and

That Janet Anderson, Mr. James Arbuthnot, Mr. Chris Bryant, Mr. Kenneth Clarke, Dr. Jack Cunningham, Mr. William Hague, Mr. Stephen McCabe, Joyce Quin, Mr. Terry Rooney, Mr. Clive Soley, Mr. Paul Stinchcombe and Mr. Paul Tyler be members of the Committee.

This motion fulfils the commitment that I gave the House before the recess that we would establish a Joint Committee to take forward the next step in reform of the House of Lords and that we would put its proposals to a free vote in both Houses of Parliament. That commitment was broadly welcomed in this Chamber and in the wider media beyond Westminster, where a broad welcome these days is unusual. It puts Parliament itself in the driving seat on how we approach reform of Parliament's second Chamber.

Tonight's debate is on the narrow point of how we set up the Joint Committee. I am painfully aware that progress on reform of the House of Lords can be measured in centuries, but even in the context of House of Lords reform, three hours should be sufficient time in which to set up a Committee. I have no doubt that some Members will wish to use the debate to rehearse some of the wider questions on the future composition of the House of Lords, and I make no objection to that. Practice makes perfect, and the future debate, on a free vote, will be all the better the more that Members try out their arguments on us tonight. I simply remind Members that the debate to decide what we do with the House of Lords will be taken after we receive the report of the Joint Committee and not before we even appoint it.

The House is fortunate that Members of great standing on both sides of the House have been willing to serve on the Joint Committee and to prepare its report.

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Cook: I will happily give way to any distinguished Member.

Pete Wishart: I am grateful to the Leader of the House for giving way. The Joint Committee of 24 people will consist of 12 members of the Government, seven Members from the Conservative party, three Liberal Democrat Members and two Cross Benchers of the House of Lords. The Cross Benchers represent no particular constituency and have no democratic mandate; the minority parties represent some 1.5 million people, yet we have no place on the Committee considering this vital constitutional reform. How can that be fair?

Mr. Cook: May I gently correct the hon. Gentleman on one point? There are no members of the Government on the Committee, although it is perfectly true that there are 12 members of the Labour party. On the arithmetic, of course I understand the hon. Gentleman's point. He and his party have been through this matter with me on a number of occasions and, as he knows, I do not have a closed mind. However, it remains the fact that 95 per cent. of the membership of this House belong to parties that are represented among the 12 members whom we are appointing from the House of Commons. As the minority parties represent, in total, 5 per cent. of the membership of the House of Commons, a pro rata division would entitle them to membership of a Committee of 20, not of 12. Traditionally, the minority parties were always dealt with using the same arithmetic and on the same basis as the Liberal Democrat party. The Liberal Democrats have one place on the Committee; it is up to the minority parties, if they so wish, to try to press the Liberal Democrats to give them that place.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): For someone who is making a reputation for himself as a defender of the interests of all parts of the House of Commons, does the Leader of the House not appreciate that, given that arithmetical logic, there will be no minority party representative on any Joint Committee that is set up in this Parliament? If 5 per cent. of the House of Commons with a democratic mandate are represented by the minority parties, should not there be at least one member on a Committee of 24 to consider a matter of such vital interest? Can the right hon. Gentleman not find it within himself to agree and do something about it?

Mr. Cook: I am not responsible for the 24 members of the Committee. I am responsible, and my motion is responsible, for the 12 members from the House of Commons, and 5 per cent. of 12 does not really add up to a place. However, I am not unsympathetic to the hon. Gentleman's point. Indeed, it is precisely so that we can get the broadest possible coverage across the House that the Committee is so large, with 24 members. Over the totality of a Parliament, I think that it would be entirely reasonable for minority parties to look for representation on a Joint Committee, but they cannot, on the basis of the arithmetic, demand a place on any one Joint Committee when that Committee has only 12 members.

I should like to make progress. The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) is right that it is my role to defend all interests in the House, and I have defended the place of 95 per cent. of the membership of the House of Commons who are represented on the Committee. From the Opposition Benches, we have the nomination of a former Conservative Leader and a former candidate for Conservative Leader. I am gratified that the Liberal Democrats regard the Joint Committee as so important that they have proposed my shadow to the Committee. On the Labour side, our nominations are headed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), who has the double distinction of having been a Cabinet Minister in this Government and of being one of only half a dozen serving Members who served as Ministers in the Callaghan Government.

The Labour members also include a number of those who have followed our debates on the House of Lords closely over the past year, such as my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant), who has come close to being the shop steward for those who favour reform. I am pleased that the list includes my right hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West (Joyce Quin), who was my number two on foreign affairs for a number of years in opposition and in government. The House can have full confidence that that distinguished membership will discharge the duty that we are placing on it with care and commitment.

Before I turn to the task that we are asking of Committee members, I will deal with the issues raised in the amendment in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase (Tony Wright), which would impose a timetable on the proceedings of the Joint Committee. At the time of my statement to the House last month, I said in response to the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) that it would be wrong for us to predetermine a specified date by which the Committee had to respond. It is for the eminent members of that Committee to determine the speed at which they can make progress on the remit. For that reason, the motion does not impose an external limit on their proceedings.

Moreover, even if it were thought acceptable in principle to impose a deadline, the timetable set out in the amendment would be tough—it would require a report by 17 July, which might not be realistic given that the Joint Committee will not even meet until July. Having said that, the Government would welcome the Committee tackling its task with expedition. Members of the Public Administration Committee, nearly all of whom have

[Mr. Cook]

signed the amendment, provided a sterling example of such expedition. They commenced their study of the Government's proposals in mid-November and published a report in mid-February. They demonstrated that it is not necessary for a Committee, to borrow the phrase of Harold Wilson, to take minutes and to last years, even on this topic.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): I almost entirely follow the reasoning of the Leader of the House, but will he say whether there is any length of time that might expire during the deliberations of the Committee that he might eventually regard as unacceptable? Would he be prepared to keep an eye on its deliberations and perhaps come back to the House at some point if he feels that it is dragging on for too long?

Mr. Cook: I am happy to assure the right hon. Gentleman that I will keep both eyes firmly on the Committee's proceedings. I have no doubt that if hon. Members felt that the process was continuing for an unreasonable period of time, they would bring the matter before the House even if I did not.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Cook: I seem to be inundated with demands to intervene. I will give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase.

Tony Wright (Cannock Chase): The Public Administration Committee decided to take evidence only in December and it reported in February, so it was even quicker than my right hon. Friend suggested.

I refer my right hon. Friend to the statements that he made to the House on 13 May, when he said that

> "the best thing that we can all do in the next two months is to ensure that we find a way forward that establishes a centre of gravity that can be supported in both Chambers."

Later in the debate, he said

> "A vote before the summer recess is certainly possible if the Joint Committee gets down to work quickly, and presents us with the options in good time."—*[Official Report*, 13 May 2002; Vol. 385, c. 525–28.]

Surely the amendment tabled in my name and that of other members of the Public Administration Committee is merely trying to give effect to his own words.

Mr. Cook: I very much apologise if I understated the expedition with which my hon. Friend's Committee tackled its task. I am glad that we got on the record the speed with which it is possible to reach a consensus.

On whether a report could be produced by the end of the summer, I do not resile from anything that I said at that time. It certainly remains possible. However, my hon. Friend's deadline would make it mandatory, which is a different kettle of fish altogether. I am aware that a number of the hon. Members who will serve on the Joint Committee are present in the Chamber and I welcome the fact that they will understand from our proceedings the urgency with which hon. Members wish them to approach the task. Indeed, it is for that reason that the motion gives the Committee the remit to sit during the recess, should it choose to do so.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Does the Leader of the House accept that if the Joint Committee is to have any chance of carrying the House with it, which is necessary if we are to move forward, it is important that it is not operating under too many time constraints? Does he also accept that just as the Public Administration Committee, chaired by the hon. Member for Cannock Chase (Tony Wright), thought it proper to take evidence, we hope that the Joint Committee will feel that it has the time to take evidence and to consider it.

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman expresses the view that I have put to the Chamber—that it would not be right for us to impose an external deadline. However, we are entitled to invite members of the Joint Committee to have regard to the House's view that we should proceed with all expedition. The Committee will, of course, have the power to take evidence—that is provided for in the motion. Whether it does so and how much it wishes to call is a matter for the Committee.

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): Does my right hon. Friend accept that the expedition with which the Public Administration Committee delivered its verdict may not necessarily be a virtue, given that some of us think that it came to the wrong conclusion?

Mr. Cook: The report was never put to the House and my hon. Friend is right to point out that it would not necessarily have commanded the unanimity in the House that it commanded in the Committee. Having said that, I remind him that the first task of the Select Committee is not to recommend a preferred option but to put before the House the options on which the House can vote. Certainly, in the first stage, that will be a simpler task than that undertaken by the Select Committee.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): My right hon. Friend anticipated the point that I was about to make, but I will say it again. Had I been appointed to the Joint Committee—*[Interruption.]* I would have been prepared to sit throughout August and September. Does he expect this important Committee, full of distinguished Members of Parliament, to sit during the summer so that we can have the options as soon as we come back?

Mr. Cook: We did not require a signed undertaking from those named in the motion that they would sit during August, but we have provided them with the option that they can meet during the recess. I anticipate that they will want to have a break and a holiday. Indeed, I am sure that their deliberations will gain from any holiday or time for reflection that they have. However, it is open to them to meet during the recess; they do not need to wait until the House returns.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): My right hon. Friend has been extremely generous in giving way. Given his remarks, will he say whether he still stands by his statement on 13 May, in which he made two comments? The first was that he agreed that he could have had the options ready by about 7 pm that evening if he had been charged with the task and locked in a room; and the second was that there was nothing new to say about the composition options for the House of Lords.

Mr. Cook: I was not inviting the House to lock me in a room and throw away the key. Any one of us could probably write down what those options might be. I am not sure whether it is possible for 24 people to reach agreement with the same speed as I could achieve in an empty room. It is worth putting one matter on the record, however. The Joint Committee will, of course, have the immense advantage, in making good speed, that it is not starting with a blank sheet of paper. On the contrary, as the motion spells out, it is starting out with a small library of previous publications: the report of the Wakeham commission, the recent White Paper and the report of the Public Administration Committee.

Brian White (Milton Keynes, North-East): The Leader of the House has just answered my question, which was whether he would ensure that the Committee did not reinvent the wheels of the evidence of that commission and the Public Administration Committee.

Mr. Cook: I apologise if have already taken the lines of hon. Members, but I am glad that there is so much agreement among us. Honourable Members who have been appointed to the Committee will be aware of the need for a business-like approach. It is worth putting on the record that we will be able to legislate in the next Session only if we receive a final report by the turn of the year. The longer into spring that the Joint Committee deliberates, the more difficult it will be for us to produce a Bill in the next Session. I am sure that that will help concentrate the minds of the Joint Committee on the need to approach the task with care and deliberation, but also with expedition.

I referred to previous reports on the question. It is worth reminding ourselves that there is a lot of common ground in all those reports.

Mr. Andrew Tyrie (Chichester): The Leader of the House said that if the Joint Committee does not reach agreement by the end of the year, we will not get legislation in the next Session. Is not that a huge sting in the tail and an opportunity for delay and prevarication by those on the Committee who would prefer not to have any legislation? Does not that argue strongly in favour of establishing a timetable?

Mr. Cook: I said that the longer it takes to produce a report, the more difficult it will be to introduce a Bill. That is self-evident. We can all work that out for ourselves, so it will not come as a blindingly new piece of information to anyone who has contemplated the matter. I am not in favour of an external limit. We propose to trust the 24 members of the Committee, from this House and the other place, to apply themselves with expedition and commitment. As I said earlier, members of the Committee are very distinguished, and I have full confidence that they will wish to apply themselves diligently and, having heard these exchanges, with expedition.

The three reports that I cited contain much common ground. They have established a broad consensus on most aspects of the future of the second Chamber, with which the great majority of Members of this Chamber would agree. First, there is broad agreement on the role of the second Chamber. It should be a deliberative assembly with the role of revising legislation and supporting the Commons in the scrutiny of the Executive. Secondly, it is common ground that the Commons should continue to be the pre-eminent Chamber. The test of legitimacy of the Government for Britain shall continue to be whether they can command a majority in the Commons. Thirdly, all three documents are agreed on the powers of the new second Chamber. It should have the power to delay legislation and to prompt second thoughts, but it should not have the power to frustrate the will of the majority in the Commons, nor to oppose the mandate of the elected Government.

It is right that the Joint Committee should be invited by the motion to consider the powers of the second Chamber, but it would be surprising and contentious if it came up with an answer different from all its predecessors. Its first task will be to define the options for the composition of the new second Chamber, particularly the balance between elected and appointed Members. It will be difficult to make progress on other questions of reform of the second Chamber until the issue of composition is resolved. It is for that reason that the remit will not require the Joint Committee to present one comprehensive report, but to report from time to time. That will enable the Joint Committee to present an interim report on the options for composition in advance of its considered report on other aspects of reform. It would assist with the debate on reform if the Joint Committee could establish a consensus on composition, but it will not be required to do so by the terms of the remit. It is required to recommend the options on which both Houses can decide on a free vote. It is set out in the remit that these options should include a fully nominated House, a fully elected House and at least one intermediate option.

Thereafter, there are a number of further issues on which there is no established consensus and on which the advice of the Joint Committee would be of value in the light of the decisions of both Houses on composition. For example, what will be the precise electoral system used for any elected element? How do we ensure that it is clear that those elected have no specific constituency role that would compete with the representative function of this Chamber? Should any such elections take place on the same day as the general election or any other established polling day?

Most of those who expressed a view in the consultation period on the size of the new second Chamber were concerned that it would be too large. We would welcome the views of the Joint Committee on what might be the optimum size of a reformed second Chamber. We would be grateful if it could also explore the transitional arrangements that would take us to a reformed, smaller membership of the second Chamber.

There have also been some new developments since the White Paper. For example, the recent White Paper on regional government has proposed elected assemblies in those regions of England that want them. It is open to the Joint Committee to revisit the regional dimension to a reformed second Chamber in the light of that development.

Reform of the House of Lords has been long in gestation. It is more than 90 years since the preamble to the Parliament Act called for the House of Lords to be

[Mr. Cook]

placed on a more popular, representative basis. Those years include 18 years in which the Conservative party was in power and never once proposed a single elected peer. They also include a further four years when the Conservative party resisted every suggestion we made to break the block vote of the hereditary peers. However, I come to this debate as a member of a generous and fair-minded party. We are willing to overlook that dismal record of recalcitrance, and make common cause with the Conservatives in a Joint Committee to find the way forward. We invite them now to join us in the search for a broad parliamentary consensus for reform. I put this motion before the House, not as the basis for any delay, but in order that we can make the fastest possible progress to the broadest possible consensus. It is in that spirit that I hope that the Members nominated in the motion will accept their mandate and it is also in that spirit that I commend it to the House.

7.36 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): I happily pick up the challenge that the Leader of the House has laid down. The official Opposition welcome the motion, not least because it is something that we have urged on the Government for some time. Although I understand the courteous but firm reprimand that the Leader of the House has just offered us, I could reciprocate and say that I welcome the Government's late conversion to the idea of a Joint Committee as the way forward. It is sad that it has taken the Government so long to realise that, but I welcome their late conversion to something for which we have long argued.

I also welcome the terms of reference, which are appropriate. They are appropriately broad, and at the same time they are appropriately focused. That is the right approach. I would differ from them only in one small but important regard—and this is a personal point, rather than on behalf of my party. I make my point as a self-confessed anorak and lifelong devotee of the House of Commons. I have devoted the past 19 years of my life to the House of Commons and, indeed, many of those present may feel that I have spent too much time here. The Leader of the House mentioned the pre-eminence of the House of Commons and said that most Members of this House accept that almost without argument. However, I regret to say that I believe that even that principle should now be considered. To the extent that the role of the Commons has been diminished—and I believe that it has been—and its primary role is now the provision of, and support for, the Government of the day, there is at least an argument for an enhanced role for a reformed upper House, with stronger powers to offset the diminution of the role of this House in the scrutiny of the Government. I put the point no more strongly than that, but I wished to add that footnote to the debate and leave it to the members of the Joint Committee whether they want to pursue that issue.

In that respect and in others, it will be interesting to see whether the joint membership of the Committee will bring a different perspective to its considerations than the single-dimensional focus of Members of this House, who readily accept the idea that the House of Commons should be pre-eminent in all legislative matters.

It is with some slight regret that I say that I cannot recommend to my colleagues that they should support the amendment tabled in the name of the Chairman and members of the Public Administration Committee. As the Leader of the House said, we should at this stage be prepared to allow the Joint Committee to perform its task in the way it sees fit. An arbitrary time limit on its deliberations would therefore not be appropriate at this stage. However, we should also make it clear that the House will feel free to return to the issue if the Committee appears to be delaying unnecessarily or unduly in its deliberations. We are giving the Committee an important remit and responsibility and it is right to respect its freedom of action at this stage. As the Leader of the House has said, however, and as I would wish to endorse, it is not unreasonable, given the amount of work that has already been done, not least by Committees of the House, and the amount of deliberation in both Houses, to expect their work to proceed with proper expedition.

On membership, I hope that the House will accept that the Members of the House and of another place that the official Opposition have put forward reflect the seriousness with which we take this Committee's work and deliberations. The Leader of the House has been kind enough to pay respect to those Opposition Members and I would like to reciprocate, as the Labour Members and the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) are of sufficient seniority and seriousness—with a leavening of freshness, if I may say so, with regard to the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant)—that we can expect proper weight to be given to the Committee's work.

I was intrigued that the press contained speculation about who might be the Chairman of the Committee. Does the Leader of the House know something that the rest of us do not? I presume that the Committee is free to establish its own chairmanship. I have noticed that the name of the right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) has been mentioned in this regard. I would imagine that his qualifications for being Chairman are many. I looked up his entry in "Who's Who", and, first, I saw that he has a PhD in chemistry, which, in a peculiar way, might suit him well to guiding the Committee in its deliberations. Furthermore, the right hon. Gentleman was shadow Leader of the House in a previous existence, which surely must give him the qualifications to add to the lustre of the Committee and its proceedings.

Most intriguingly, however, the last recreation that the right hon. Member for Copeland lists in "Who's Who", after fell walking, fly fishing, gardening, classical and folk music and reading—which must keep him very busy, although not too busy, I hope, to spend a lot of time on the work of the Committee—is listening to other people's opinions. I shall leave the House and, more appropriately, the Committee to decide whether that is a qualification for chairmanship. It will, at least, give members of the Committee something to work on if the right hon. Gentleman should emerge as their choice for Chairman. I am sure, however, that the right hon. Gentleman would be the first to concede that there are other Members on the Committee with almost equal seniority and experience in parliamentary matters.

Having said all that, I am sure that we all wish the Committee, its members and whoever becomes its Chairman well. We are placing a great responsibility on the members of the Committee. They will be in no doubt—and they will still be in no doubt, I suspect, by the end of the debate—about the seriousness of the task that faces them and the expectations that we lay on them. I hope that they will be able to discharge their responsibilities fully but reasonably quickly. I hope that we will see the first products of their deliberations—it will be a multi-phase process, as has been laid down—in the very near future.

The Leader of the House has given an interesting hint—if I may so describe it—about the possible constraints on the timing of the Committee's deliberations. I cannot and would not want to add to that. We should all listen carefully, however, to what the Leader of the House has said and consider what is in his mind.

Having said that, I thoroughly commend the resolution to the House. As this is a free vote, being on a House of Commons matter, I hope that my hon. Friends will support the resolution. Sadly, however, I would recommend that, if it is put to the vote, they do not support the amendment that has been selected.

7.44 pm

Tony Wright (Cannock Chase): This is not a moment to explore the substance of the issues in relation to the House of Lords. It is the moment, however, to say a few words about process.

I commend the final section of the report of the Public Administration Committee, which I have the honour of chairing, which is simply called, "Getting from here to there". Historically, getting from here to there has been the most difficult thing of all. There has been no difficulty in coming forward with schemes for House of Lords reform; indeed, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House referred to Harold Wilson and the 1960s. The lesson of all that is that one can easily not achieve reform. The task and challenge for the House is whether we can devise a process that will get us to where we would like to be from where we are now, given the diversity of opinions.

Without intending to seem churlish, I want to express a note of regret that it has not been thought possible to include a member from the Public Administration Committee on the Joint Committee. I can think of Members from all parties who were represented on the Committee who have developed a good deal of expertise in this area. That expertise would have been well put to the service of the House.

I also want to offer the experience of the Public Administration Committee's deliberations to the Joint Committee. When we began our work, we felt a sense of urgency, as one of the paradoxes is that we were told from the beginning that reform of the second Chamber was very urgent. Hon. Members will remember that the Wakeham commission was told that it had to proceed with enormous urgency. Indeed, it was told that it had to report within a year—by the end of 1999—because reform of the second Chamber was so urgent. It has all gone funny since then.

We must reclaim that spirit of urgency now. The Public Administration Committee felt an obligation to be urgent in our deliberations and to come to a conclusion that would be helpful to the House so that the process of reform could continue. We also felt an obligation not simply to repeat previous positions. There we were, representing the three major parties, all with different views. Some people wanted to abolish the second Chamber; some wanted a wholly elected second Chamber; some wanted a wholly appointed second Chamber; and some wanted a variety of intermediate positions. The question was: would we simply repeat our previous views, or would we seek to reach a position that would enable the process of reform to continue? I say "process" deliberately, because, if one thinks that one is concluding the process of reform, one will not be successful. So much is changing in the wider landscape that all that one can hope for is to achieve a reasonably secure next phase of second Chamber reform.

My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House referred to the fact that we may be moving to an era of seriously devolved government inside England as well as in the wider United Kingdom. If that is the case, different kinds of options will become available in the longer term as to how we might compose a second Chamber, and there will be different reasons for doing so.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): The hon. Gentleman has just outlined how devolution might properly impact on what the second Chamber might do. Does he therefore have faith in the membership of the Committee, given that the Government in Northern Ireland are not represented on it, the Opposition in Wales are not represented on it, and the Opposition in Scotland are not represented on it? How can the Committee consider the impact of devolution in the nation states of the United Kingdom if there is no way for the minority parties in those constituent parts of the UK to feed in their views?

Tony Wright: The hon. Gentleman makes the point that he wants to make. I do not believe that the Committee will avoid the obligation to think widely. I entered my note of regret, and he must enter his own.

My point, however, is that, despite a wide spectrum of views, it was possible, nevertheless, to seek to ascertain in a reasonably serious way what Members of the House felt was their preferred direction of reform and to take that into account in framing our position. It was also possible, in seeking to reconcile such initially different positions, to produce a position that might provide a basis for the House to move forward to a next stage of second Chamber reform. If that is the spirit in which the Joint Committee engages with the work, we have a prospect of success.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): The hon. Gentleman has spoken of the next stage of second Chamber reform and, earlier, he suggested that there would not be a finishing point. Is not one of the most important objectives to settle the status of the other place, so that it is not an issue for party political bickering and perhaps one in which parties move around—I hope that they will not—for party political advantage?

Tony Wright: The hon. Gentleman runs two points together. There is no need to bicker about these things. It is perfectly possible to have sensible discussion while acknowledging that we may not have the final answer. That is a sensible way to approach the matter.

We know very much what the key principles are, and we do not need to explore them now. We do not want a second Chamber that is a rival to or a replica of the first Chamber, but we want a Chamber that has enough legitimacy to be taken seriously and enough independence to secure expertise and a different kind of input. That led me and the Select Committee eventually to think that a mixture would be the right way to achieve our aims. The question is what sort of mixture should that be.

[Tony Wright]

I offer the Joint Committee one piece of evidence only. It does not come from our report, but from evidence that was submitted in response to the Government's consultation document. Sir Michael Wheeler-Booth was not only a member of the Wakeham commission, but the official most centrally involved in making the proposed reforms of the 1960s work. In his response to the consultation, he says:

> "In the previous Lords reform attempt, in 1968–9, the reformers were unwilling to reconsider their plans in the light of criticisms, notably after the collapse of the Inter-Party talks, and again after the debates in the two Houses on the White Paper. In retrospect I think this was a mistake (although I must take a share of the blame)."

I give credit to the Government on that point. They have understood the deluge of criticism that their proposals have received and that has enabled them to move forward or to give the House the opportunity to more forward in a slightly different direction.

Sir Michael's second point is absolutely central. He says:

> "A second failure was not to recognise that it was essential to have the wholehearted support of government backbenchers in the Commons. Inter-Party consensus was thought to be the key to a constitutional reform of the kind intended while in fact what mattered was the support of the party in the Commons. Historically most constitutional reforms have been carried on a party vote . . . and then accepted by all".

That is an important observation from someone who was engaged in the last abortive attempt to reform the second Chamber. The conclusion to be drawn is that we must know what the will of the House of Commons is. We must know the direction of advance that it would like to take place. Around that, the House of Lords will have a chance to respond, and we can construct reasonably durable proposals.

It is significant that, when we took evidence on the views of Members of Parliament, we found that 75 per cent. of them across the parties wanted a composition that was 50 per cent. elected or more. We therefore have to be clear about that before we begin to do what we have to do on the other issues. That is why it is crucial to have an initial vote on composition as soon as possible. Unless we have that vote as soon as possible, it is unreasonable to expect the Joint Committee to carry out the second stage of reform. That would simply not be possible, because so much of the reform package hangs together. We must know what the key buildings blocks are before we can begin to erect the larger architecture.

That is not a pedantic point, but one that is designed to get the process under way. I shall not explore the remarks of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House about being able to do things by 7 o'clock in the evening, but the fact is that we know what the options are. We know that some favour the option of a wholly elected second Chamber, that others favour the option of a wholly appointed one and that there are several intermediate options. It is not difficult to bring to the House an initial menu of options for Members to vote on. I simply do not understand how the Joint Committee can begin to do its work seriously until the choice about the fundamental options has been resolved. I have not heard anyone explain to me how it will be possible to proceed without having done that.

Someone seeing our amendment and seeing the date on it rather unkindly pointed out that no year was attached to it. Some people have suggested that that is all part of the picture whereby we do not hear much about the issue again. When some people saw how the Joint Committee was being constructed, they were given encouragement in thinking that that we might not hear much more about the issue. I do not share that view. At one time I probably did, but I now believe that the Government want to make progress to bring the issue to a conclusion. I know that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House wants to do that, and he could not have made that point clearer.

This is the moment when we have to stop talking about reforming the second Chamber and have to start doing it. A crucial part of doing it is making sure that we have a timetable under which some form of reform can take place.

7.56 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Cannock Chase (Tony Wright). I accept precisely what he has said about process and timing. Although I cannot speak for all my colleagues because it will be a free vote, I think that they will be minded to support the amendment that he and his colleagues have tabled. We believe that we should make progress as fast as possible.

Although I would be happy for the Joint Committee to meet in August or September—as long as it came to Cornwall—that should not be necessary. We should be able to complete the first phase of the process and come back with clear options to the House by the date that has been suggested.

Before I come to the issue of process, I wish to refer briefly to some of the misapprehensions about the choices before the Joint Committee and that will eventually be before the House. The Lord Chancellor said in the other place:

> "It would be wrong and dangerous to put the pre-eminence of the House of Commons at risk by having this House wholly or substantially directly elected so that it could maintain that it had the same, or substantially similar, political legitimacy as the House of Commons."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 9 January 2002; Vol. 630, c. 564.]

That view is misguided—it ain't necessarily so. The link suggested between the proportion of Members elected and any challenge to this House is entirely wrongly thought through. In setting up the Joint Committee, we must clear out of the way some of the misunderstandings that have grown up.

I pay tribute not just to the Select Committee chaired by the hon. Member for Cannock Chase but to the Government. The consultation exercise was as thorough and as effective as that on any public issue that I can recall in my time in the House. In particular, the report on the consultation will be extremely helpful to the Joint Committee. We do not start from scratch; it is not a blank piece of paper. It does not even mean looking at the history books because we can look at the position here and now. Public opinion as well as Members' opinions have been reflected.

The response makes it clear that 89 per cent. of the respondents thought that the other House should be at least 50 per cent. elected. There should be a degree of majority rule in that sense. That is extremely important but, equally, it should not be seen as a challenge to this House or as a problem. It should be an opportunity that provides a new strength in Parliament's relationship with the Executive. That is why the type of election, to which the Leader of the House referred, and the cycle of elections are so important.

Significantly, the second largest response rate on any of the issues in the consultation process was on the method of election. Some 56 per cent. said that the single transferable vote was their preferred method. A further 10 per cent. stated that they preferred an unspecified form of proportional representation. Those are big figures. Some 6 per cent. preferred an open-list system. That type of system was clearly in people's minds, as it was in the mind of the Select Committee. Incidentally, only 2 per cent. of respondents favoured the first-past-the-post system, and for good reasons.

STV has huge advantages in the context of the second Chamber. I am not arguing that it is right for any other type of assembly or in any other election. It maximises voter choice and minimises the power of the parties because they do not prioritise who should be at the top of the list. The voter does that and the parties cannot pre-empt that choice. STV enables voters to cast their votes so that they can ensure that there is a truly representative second Chamber, especially in terms of area, gender and ethnic background. It is the best system that can be devised for that purpose for that assembly. Most important of all, STV encourages independence of mind in the Members who are elected.

By contrast, the House of Commons Library established that were first past the post used at the same time as the 2001 election for this House, the Labour party would have had a majority of 60 per cent. in the other place on a 41 per cent. poll. I am surprised that the Conservative party is in favour of that outcome and hope that it will think again.

The most important issue to consider is that first past the post would inevitably replicate the constituency representation that we have in this House. Those Members who represent Scottish and Welsh constituencies will be aware that duplication and overlap can be embarrassing. That is a problem not just when Members who are elected by different means come from different parties, but when they are elected from the same party. It is extremely important that the second Chamber of this Parliament does not replicate the constituency responsibilities of Members of this House. That is the inevitable result if first past the post is used.

Mr. Forth: Is the hon. Gentleman prepared to accept that the American experience demonstrates that it is possible that voters can take a sufficiently discriminating attitude to elections? One state in the United States can have one balance of representation in the House of Representatives, a different or mixed representation in the Senate, which has a different electoral cycle and different voters, and yet another in the governorships. Those are all elected on the first-past-the-post system. What he is saying is not necessarily true. The one template we have suggests that it need not be the case.

Mr. Tyler: I understand that and I will look with interest at what evidence is put before the Committee. However, if we elect on the same day to both Houses on the same system, we are likely to end up with the same results. That would challenge not just this House as a whole but each and every Member of the House because someone else at the other end of the building could claim the same mandate. That would be extremely dangerous and I hope that the Committee will look hard at the problem. The issue is important and is mentioned in all the documents that will come before the Committee.

Kevin Brennan: While I may have some sympathy with the hon. Gentleman's comments, does he agree that although the issue is important, it is certainly not the first one that needs to be tackled? If his first contributions to the Committee reflect his obsession with a minutiae of the electoral system, the process will turn out to be as long as the trial of Warren Hastings and we will never get a result.

Mr. Tyler: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says, but I am trying to remove a major misunderstanding. It is not just the number of people who are elected to the other House that could challenge the pre-eminence of this House. The challenge also comes from the way in which they are elected and the time when they are elected. Problems will arise if they are elected on the same day as the general election. Incidentally, I was first elected to the House in February 1974. There was another election in October, when I am afraid I was unelected. Is it being suggested that every time this House has an election the other House has to have an election too? Surely that does not make sense.

I am in favour of an electoral cycle that is not directly related to the election to this House and the election of a Government. That is important. I would prefer the election to take place on the same day as the elections for the devolved Assemblies, every four years. In due course, we will no doubt have English regional elections every four years, too. We could elect one third of the other place every four years and also have a 12-year one-term election. However, it is for the Committee to consider that idea. The false analysis by the Lord Chancellor is dangerous and I hope that it will gather no currency.

Both the timing of the election and the way in which Members are elected are important. However, we may decide that we want to hold back on the issue of indirect elections until the devolved regional assemblies are up and running. It would be absurd if Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and London could elect indirectly to the second Chamber, but other parts of the country could not because regional devolution has not rolled out in England. If a number of Members of the second House are not going to be directly elected, we may need to reconsider indirect elections in due course by the devolved Assemblies, not from them. The principle of a dual mandate has become discredited in this country and there may be a good case for looking at that suggestion.

As I intimated, I am sympathetic to the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Cannock Chase and his colleagues on the Committee. There is a great deal of material on the subject and we should be able give the House clear options before the summer recess. I cannot anticipate what the Joint Committee will decide, but there will have to be options. I cannot believe that we need to wait for months to get those. Surely we can clear away some of the debris from previous considerations and produce the options.

[Mr. Tyler]

This is a defining moment. I know that politicians and the media always say that, but if we get it right both ends of the building will do their job together more effectively. That is the challenge. It is not a challenge between the two Houses, but of the two Houses together, with complementary powers and responsibilities. The challenge that we face is not among ourselves, but with the Executive.

If we can get that right, the Government, this House and the other House will have taken a great opportunity to demonstrate that in the 21st century we can develop and evolve a more effective pluralist parliamentary democracy. If the process gets bogged down, however, members of the Executive—not us—will go home laughing because we will have failed to create a genuinely effective scrutinising Parliament to ensure that they do their job properly.

I hope that tonight and in the next few weeks we will complete the work that the Leader of the House put his hand to in 1997 in the discussions that led up to the agreement between our two parties on constitutional reform. We have a great opportunity. We can ensure that we not only guarantee better scrutiny of legislation and Executive action but, by so doing, improve the governance of this country.

8.9 pm

Mr. Clive Soley (Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush): I am very pleased to speak in this debate, and I am delighted that the Joint Committee is being set up. Many months ago, I wrote to the Prime Minister, among others, suggesting this approach. I also asked to be a member of the Committee. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah."] Yes, although I did not ask that of the Prime Minister. As my name is among the suggested members on the Order Paper, it will come as no great shock to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to hear that if the matter is forced to a Division, I will be voting with him.

I feel very strongly about this issue because, as I have said many times in the House, even way back in the 1980s, Britain has a remarkable history of reforming its constitution. We did so year after year, decade after decade, and in that way we managed to preserve our freedoms very well. Suddenly, at the beginning of the 20th century, we stopped, and that is tragic. Throughout the 20th century, there was no significant change to the constitution after the pre-first world war Liberal Government, until the special exception of the Single European Act, introduced by Margaret Thatcher. That was an enormous constitutional measure, but I do not think that she saw it as such at the time. The Conservatives have changed their view since then.

While we were not reforming our constitution in the way that we had in previous centuries, we were writing constitutions for other countries, and some of them were incredibly successful. One of the points that I shall go on to make about process concerns one such successful constitution, that of West Germany after 1945.

Mr. Tyrie: The hon. Gentleman said that there were no major constitutional changes after the last Liberal Government. I suppose those who saw the creation of Northern Ireland and the independence of Eire might take a different view, as might those who benefited from the extension of universal suffrage to women in 1918 and 1928, and all the life peers along the Corridor, whose position was created in 1958.

Mr. Soley: The example of women's suffrage is powerful, but frankly I think that the other changes are more decorative than real. The life peers changed the system, but they are an example of the problem that we got into, and particularly of the problem that the Labour party got into. The failure to reform was primarily a Conservative failure because the Conservatives were the party in government throughout most of the 20th century, but our failure was to promise to get rid of the hereditary peers but not to do it until a few years ago.

The present Government took a big step forward by avoiding the trap that Michael Foot and others, with enormously good intentions, had fallen into by arguing all the time about the details of the change but not making the first, vital change of getting rid of the hereditary peers. By smashing up the shop, the Government have created a situation in which we must reform the second Chamber. I have never shared the anxieties of some of my colleagues that we will not go on to reform. We will have to go on reforming the second Chamber, whether under this Government or a future one, because it will not stay as it is for much longer, and most of us know that. Sooner or later, it would run into a crisis.

The argument for reform is won. The problem is getting there. I say to the Leader of the House that I have every interest in seeing this done quickly. I do not want delays and I will not be working for them. If it is any help to my hon. Friends on the Back Benches, I am prepared to sit during the recess, although I exclude August, which would be vetoed by my children because they are anticipating a holiday. August is out but anything else is in.

Having said that, I also want to get this right because it is no good saying that we must simply come back here with a set of options. Any one of those options could box us in on a particular reform. If we get that wrong, we will be sad and sorry that we rushed the process. I shall be pushing to get through the business effectively and efficiently, but I also want to return to this place with a number of options, any one of which, with any refinements that we wanted to make, would work.

On a point that fits with what I was saying about the history of reform, my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase (Tony Wright) said that reform cannot stop here, and I agree that it must go on. I do not want to lay out a blueprint for any one of the options or for a group of options. If I end up being a member of the Committee, as I hope, I ought to go in with an open mind to discuss the various proposals that are made.

Turning back to the West German constitution, however, which we wrote so effectively, I point out that we inserted in that document representation of local government, the Länder. We did so with good reason—to prevent authoritarian Government arising again. For the past 15 years, I have argued in the Chamber and at Labour party conferences that the second Chamber ought to include representation of local government, and now also regional and devolved Government. Indeed, I would argue the case for considering European representation too. As my hon. Friend said, the changing constitutional situation means that it will be even more difficult for us to stand still in future. The House needs to have methods by which we can continue to examine and evolve our constitution.

Kevin Brennan: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Soley: In a moment. I want first to finish this point, because it is linked to my earlier remarks.

I sat on the Modernisation Committee in the last Parliament because I felt that the other thing that we had failed to reform in the 20th century was the procedures in this place. Consequently, in several ways, we allowed this place to become devalued and, at some stages, a laughing stock. We failed to get through any of the reforms that we wanted. There is an awful lot of devil in the detail in this matter, and one approaches what one thinks is the obvious question, but it turns out not to be.

As the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler), who was very helpful on this matter, will be aware, the Modernisation Committee in the last Parliament spent a lot of time, probably too much, trying to work out how we could deal with the ridiculous problem of voting, speaking and passing legislation in the early hours of the morning. After a number of those meetings, I came to the conclusion that we were asking ourselves the wrong question. We needed to ask ourselves how we could get some of this Chamber's business out of the Chamber. I then wrote a paper on what I called, rather inelegantly, the "Primary Committee", which the clerks, in their infinite wisdom and subtlety, finally called Westminster Hall. That is where the idea came from, as the hon. Gentleman will know, and it came about for reasons of time.

When considering reform of the Lords, we must ask ourselves whether it is simply a revising Chamber. I have no doubt that it ought to be, in part, a revising Chamber, but I also believe strongly that part of its activities must focus on protecting and enhancing aspects of our constitution. That is why I highlight the importance of having representation of organisations such as local government. We cannot rush through such consideration, which is why I think that 17 July is nonsense, but that does not mean that we should drag our feet. I am sorry, I have moved on a bit since the point at which my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Kevin Brennan) tried to intervene.

Kevin Brennan: My hon. Friend is making very thoughtful points, but does not he accept that many of the issues that he is raising have been covered in great detail by the Wakeham commission? A big difference in West Germany, whose constitution we helped to write, is that it was a Federal Republic, with a federal constitution that included a lower Chamber elected by proportional representation.

Mr. Soley: My hon. Friend is right on the latter point, but he ought to bear it in mind that some aspects of our actions, on devolution in Scotland and Wales, make this country federal. *[Interruption.]* I agree that it is not federal, and I did not say that it was, but it has federal aspects.

Because we do not have a written constitution, the British have been very good at making things up as we go along. That is messy but it works quite well, which is why I return to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase that we should not leave things there but continue to move forward. We should not do what we did in the 20th century—stand still and tell ourselves that we have a wonderful Parliament, the best in the world, while everybody else is overtaking in the fast lane.

I acknowledge that a lot of the legwork has been done, although I am not such a fan of the Wakeham commission's report as my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Kevin Brennan) seems to be. I am not knocking its work: some of it was good, although I am less keen on other parts. However, some of the other things that have been written and said do offer us a way forward. What I am trying to say is, yes, I want the work to be done as fast as possible, but I also want workable solutions that recognise the complexity of the issues.

The unspoken argument—of which we as party politicians are all aware but do not talk about much—is that as much as we want Parliament to be a good Parliament that holds Governments to account and all the rest, we know that if we win an election on a party manifesto, we expect to be able to carry out that manifesto without the second Chamber constantly blocking us, which is what happened to Labour Governments throughout the 20th century. We had better come up with a system that recognises that; to do otherwise would be to put the parliamentary aspects wholly above the party aspects, whereas the reality that we have to take on board, whether we like it or not, is that no modern democracy works without political parties.

We want it to be possible to govern effectively and we want the second Chamber—and, I might add, the first—to be able to hold the Government to account, but we also want the second Chamber to be able to protect and enhance aspects of the constitution. The aspect about which I feel strongly is local government, because—unlike some of my hon. Friends, although people outside certainly saw it—throughout the 1980s I watched Governments smash up local government, abolish local government, and impose the poll tax.

I learned a lesson when I entertained a group of West Germans who were fascinated about docklands. Having heard how Michael Heseltine, then Secretary of State for the Environment, had overruled all the local authorities to build docklands, even though the local authorities were all saying no, they asked me how he had the power to do that, saying, "Under West Germany's constitution, he would not have been allowed to do that—yet you wrote our constitution for us." I did not say it at the time, but I thought of the magic saying that the British occasionally utter, "Don't do as we do, do as we tell you."

The issues are complex. That is an argument not for delay, but for very clear and hard thinking. That thinking should focus on matters such as the role of the second Chamber—what it exists to do. I think that it should not only act as a revising Chamber, but serve to protect and enhance parts of the constitution. We might need to take a more radical approach from time to time if we are to avoid falling into the trap that claimed the Modernisation Committee when it spent several meetings considering how we could change the times that this House sat, not focusing on the central issue which was how to get some of the time-consuming business out of this Chamber and into what is now Westminster Hall.

[Mr. Soley]

I am very proud of Westminster Hall. The right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) thinks that we devalued Parliament in creating Westminster Hall, but I think that it has done wonderful things for Back Benchers. In the long term, it will enable us to enhance the role of this Chamber—but that will only happen when other parts of the constitution are reformed.

I have spoken for longer than I intended. I do not want to lay down blueprints, but I ask hon. Members to recognise the importance of the steps that we are taking and to understand the need for an ongoing process of constitutional reform. We must not get stuck as we did in the 20th century. However much the hon. Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie) thinks I underestimate some of the reforms that occurred then, historians looking back at the past four centuries would regard the 20th century as the one of least movement.

8.24 pm

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): I am grateful for being called and pleased to follow the hon. Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush (Mr. Soley)—I almost said for Hammersmith. I shall not follow him down the corridor of his views on our changing constitution and what the role of the second Chamber should be. Instead, I shall concentrate on the terms of the motion, which is to do with setting up a Joint Committee.

I recently joined the Select Committee on Public Administration. I wish that I could take credit for having been a member of the Committee when it published its original report, but I was not. On a personal note, I greatly regret that the Chairman of that Committee, the hon. Member for Cannock Chase (Tony Wright), is not to be a member of the Joint Committee, but I realise that not everybody can be.

I support the amendment, but I hope that members of the Public Administration Committee will allow me to point out that I support it to make a consensus. I strongly believe that there should be a limited time scale for the deliberations of the Joint Committee, but I should have preferred a requirement that it report by the end of the current Session, or, for want of a better description, by the end of October. None the less, I agree with the hon. Gentleman that we really should be able to get a decision on the composition of the second Chamber and the element of election to it, if that is to be the case, first and then we can sort out the other matters. I hope that the members of the Joint Committee will bear that in mind.

I started the debate believing that a timetable was preferable. Having heard the Leader of the House, I believe that a timetable is essential. As he put it, it will be necessary for the Committee to report and this House—and, presumably, the other House—to make a decision if legislation is to be presented in the 2002–03 Session. I hope that that might encourage the Joint Committee to act faster rather than slower.

I have one or two, perhaps over-simplified, observations to make. We are all modernists now—

Mr. Forth: No we are not.

Sir Sydney Chapman: Well, almost all of us are, although I include myself in the minority.

I understand that from next Session the House is to sit in September as a matter of course. I think it would be an extraordinarily good thing to have a dry run by inviting the Joint Committee to sit in September.

I apologise in advance for the fact that my next point is slightly party political in nature. The Government, rightly or wrongly, have adopted a procedure whereby before every Bill goes into Committee, its Committee stage is timetabled, as are remaining stages. I should have thought that that made more powerful the case for setting a timetable for the Joint Committee.

There is also something injudicious in the fact that while we in the Commons can see the point of reaching conclusions sooner rather than later, I imagine that Members of the other place—on the principle that turkeys do not vote for an early Christmas—might think that they need to take a long time to determine all the options that they should present to the Commons and the Government.

In trying to adopt an all-party approach, if that is possible, let me refer to the point made by the Scottish National party Members. I might be wrong, but looking at the 12 Members of the House of Commons who have been proposed as members of the Joint Committee, it seems to me that all the regions are covered, with the exception of Scotland. I am more concerned that there is not a Scottish MP on the Committee than that a particular party is not represented.

I am sure that the hon. Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush would join me in reminding the House that, in population if not in size, London is considerably larger than Scotland. From a party political viewpoint, I feel strongly that the second party in London should have a representative on the Joint Committee, but I realise that its size makes it impossible to achieve the balance needed to satisfy all the interests.

As the Leader of the House said, there is general consensus on the need for a second Chamber and on its having the sort of powers that the other place currently has. Essentially, the argument centres on composition and what degree of election or appointment there should be to that revised second Chamber.

If it was the responsibility of the Joint Committee to draw up the blueprint for the second Chamber, it would need longer to deliberate. But as it is required to put options, whether there are two or a range—my experience is that there are as many views as there are Members of the House about exactly what the second Chamber should be—the Joint Committee can and should come to its conclusions sooner, rather than later. In short, we all know the arguments. We have rehearsed them for years, particularly over the past year or two. Now it is time to reach decisions.

8.30 pm

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): The terms of the motion are very narrow indeed—to agree or reject the membership and to consider an amendment concerning the timetable. I supported the establishment of the Joint Committee and the Government's decision to leave the matter to Parliament. I did so because the Government's track record on the issue is particularly poor.

The Wakeham commission was a disaster. Anyone who read the responses to the Wakeham report realised that Wakeham got it completely wrong. We all know that the

Lord Chancellor was living on another planet when he presented his preferred options. He was not speaking for the parliamentary Labour party or the Labour party but for a very few Members of the House of Lords.

We had the disaster of the people's peers, proposed by my own Government, to huge ridicule. The House of Lords Appointments Commission was ridiculed. The whole episode has been a disaster, so I welcome the decision by the Prime Minister to leave the matter to Parliament.

We have picked over the issue endlessly, and I shall not follow my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush (Mr. Soley) and others by rehearsing the options. We know broadly what they are, but I enter a caveat. My heart sank when my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase (Tony Wright), I think, mentioned new developments: the regional dimension. Goodness me! We are still consulting on the regions. The regional Green Paper is out to consultation until August. The Government's proposals for the regions are opaque.

It is a characteristic of the Government that on certain difficult issues—this is a difficult issue—there never comes a point where matters crystallise and we are asked to decide. There is always more consultation, more navel-gazing. It is depressing and debilitating. What people out there want, and what I want from my own Government, is clarity of vision and purpose.

I attached my name to the amendment because it concerns me—less so now than before the debate started—that no time frame is mentioned in the motion. As my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase mentioned, when we tabled the amendment we made the mistake of not specifying the year. The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler), speaking for the Liberals, and my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush both told the House that they believe, as we believe, that it is possible to bring forward options by 17 July. We are not asking people to go back to the drawing board and produce a blueprint—

Mr. Soley: With respect to my hon. Friend, I said that 17 July was a nonsense date.

Mr. Prentice: Forgive me, I am confusing my hon. Friend with another hon. Member—I shall call him my hon. Friend on the Public Administration Committee—the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir Sydney Chapman). He said, I think, that it should be possible to bring forward options at an early date.

Sir Sydney Chapman: I said that I went along with the consensus of the Committee in specifying the date of 17 July, but I personally would have preferred to submit a report by the end of the Session—say, by the end of October.

Mr. Prentice: I have got it all seriously wrong. Clearly, I am speaking of what I want to happen. This is a kind of Vulcan mind meld. I do not know whether we are all Trekkies, but some of us are.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. May I suggest to the hon. Gentleman that he would help himself by talking about what he wants, rather than recapitulating what other hon. Members have been saying?

Mr. Prentice: It should be possible to bring forward proposals by the end of July. I have no doubt about that. Anyone who reads the Public Administration Committee report would be convinced that it is possible to find a consensus where, perhaps, it was thought previously that none existed.

That is the case in the report from the Select Committee. My hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase reminded the House that we started to take evidence in December and I think that we produced our report on 14 February. No doubt I will be corrected if I am wrong. The Select Committee encompassed a range of views, but we settled on a recommendation of 60 per cent. directly elected. We thought in our wisdom that that would find favour with the Government, although we state in the report:

> "Had we started with a clean slate . . . the majority preference on the Committee would have been for a wholly elected and much smaller second chamber",

which is my preference.

I have no problems with the membership of the Joint Committee. I agree with my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House that its members are all distinguished and of great standing. However, we need to consider how the members of Joint Committees are selected in future. I had not realised, until my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush told the House, that he had applied. I made a very public application last Thursday to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, and I thought that he was seriously considering it, but there we are.

Finally, I return to the matter that I touched on earlier—the centre of gravity. I do not want people from the other end inventing their own centre of gravity. I want them to look at the evidence. The Conservative party's position is that 80 per cent. should be elected and 20 per cent. indirectly elected or nominated. The Liberal party's position is that 80 per cent. should be elected, and 20 per cent. nominated. The Public Administration Committee recommended that 60 per cent. should be elected.

Perhaps I was expecting too much of the Joint Committee in hoping that it could meet during the summer. Having listened to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, I believe that a realistic deadline for a final report would be the turn of the year, so that legislation can be introduced. I hope that the House will endorse that approach.

8.38 pm

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): The only issue that I agree with so far is that we are discussing a key constitutional matter that needs to be settled. As the hon. Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush (Mr. Soley) said, reform of the House of Lords is essential because the present situation is untenable. The Government have interfered with processes in the other place and they now have to finish the job. That should be a matter for Members of this place rather than for the Government. The Government have failed miserably to take Back-Bench Labour Members with them, let alone the rest of the House.

[Mr. Simon Thomas]

Unless one is a member of one of the three largest parties in the House, the motion is entirely unacceptable. It contains no recognition of the minority parties in the House. The Leader of the House danced on the end of a pin to justify the motion in terms of logistics and statistics. He ignored the fact that there will be a Committee of 24, a number that would legitimately require a minority party member to be on it. He said that 12 members will be nominated by the House, and only the 12 will count. By that logic, no Joint Committee will ever have a minority party Member on it. We will never count in those terms. That is unacceptable for Members of minority parties, and I suggest that it should be unacceptable for anyone who takes the Chamber seriously and for the process of democracy.

The Leader of the House has suggested that these Joint Committees should become a more obvious feature of our constitutional arrangements in the House, and that we should be doing more jointly with the other place. When we arrive at a reformed House of Lords that will contain at least a majority of elected Members, I expect that we will work much more closely with it. As a member of the Catering Committee, which is my highest standing in this place at present, I know that we cannot agree with the House of Lords about co-ordinating the opening and shutting of our catering facilities. There is much to do to improve relations between this place and the other place. Future Joint Committees have had a worrying precedent set this evening.

Mr. Stephen McCabe (Birmingham, Hall Green): There are already differences between this place and the other place, as there are between parties in this place. What special or unique bearing would a minority party bring to the debate? Surely the purpose of a Joint Committee is the recognition that there are differences within parties in this place, and that we are seeking consensus.

Mr. Thomas: That was a disappointing intervention. It suggests that minority parties never bring anything to this place. If the hon Gentleman's logic is taken to a reasonable conclusion, representation does not count. Yet we represent 1.5 million voters. In opposing the motion, I am arguing that representation of the different constituent parts of the United Kingdom should be reflected in the Committee. I do not mind whether it is a member of my party, the Scottish National party, the two Unionist parties or the Social Democratic and Labour party. I want the House to recognise that there is a representational role in respect of the individual nations that form the United Kingdom that has not been reflected in the proposed Committee.

It has been pointed out that there will no representative of a Scottish constituency on the Committee. I have a slightly more sophisticated argument than that because there will be a Welsh Member. I may not want him to be on the Committee, but at least he is there. I know that his views will be different from those that I would like to be explored. I shall explain why I take that view.

There has been an underlying debate about the House of Lords interacting in some way with regional devolution in England and national devolution in Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland. That argument has been advanced by two senior Members who will be members of the Committee if the motion is agreed to: the hon. Members for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush and for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler). That means that there is a crucial role for the minority parties in this place because we stand for election in only one country in the United Kingdom.

We are minority parties not because of the votes that we receive but because we concentrate on only one area of the United Kingdom. I do not represent a minority party in Wales because my party is the official Opposition in the National Assembly for Wales. We got within a whisker of the Labour party's vote in the European elections.

The SNP is not a minority party in Scotland because it is the official Opposition in the Scottish Parliament. The Ulster Unionists and the SDLP are not minority parties in Northern Ireland but parties of government that are essential to the process there.

Ms Meg Munn (Sheffield, Heeley): Surely the hon. Gentleman is missing the point. It is not the purpose of the Committee to produce a solution. It is a mechanism that will enable all Members of this place, from whatever party, to express their views on composition. The motion may be regrettable from the hon. Gentleman's point of view, but his view will be able to be expressed as will mine or that of any Member who is not on the Committee.

Mr. Thomas: I think that the hon. Lady has missed the point. I regret that the view that I have tried to get across has gone over her head. The clear message from the motion is that there is no place for any minority party on a Joint Committee. That is the message and the dangerous precedent that is being set. She may be right in terms of the Committee's report, as we will all have a chance to debate it. However, I shall say a little more in a moment about why I think that she is incorrect even on the narrow point that she made.

The logic of the dangerous precedent that is being set is that of excluding the minority parties from constitutional debates, and we can see the same thing in another area. We were told recently that the Prime Minister will soon grace the Liaison Committee with his presence. The Committee, which I think has 34 members, will therefore cross-examine and question the Prime Minister about his work, but no member of any minority party will be present, as we have no Chairmen. We have never had a Select Committee Chairman in this place, so we have had no role on the Liaison Committee. Therefore, a Committee of 34 members, which should have at least one, if not about 1.6, minority party members, does not have any minority party representation. I ask the hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Ms Munn) whether that is an acceptable situation. The Liaison Committee is being promulgated by the Government as a huge, modernising step forward—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I can understand an allusion to that matter, but it is outside the terms of the motion that we are discussing. May I urge the hon. Gentleman back to the confines of the motion on the Order Paper?

Mr. Thomas: I shall certainly return to the motion, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I was trying to deal with the dangerous precedent that is being set. Until then, I had confined my remarks to the establishment of the Joint Committee. I shall not even touch on what the recommendations should be, as that is another matter that we will come to in future.

Kevin Brennan: I understand why the hon. Gentleman and his party might feel left out of the process, because they are not represented, but is he really saying that his commonality of interest is so powerful that he would be happy to be represented by the Democratic Unionist party on the Committee that is dealing with such an important constitutional matter?

Mr. Thomas: I am arguing for inclusion on the Committee and other Joint Committees—and, indeed, the Liaison Committee—of a member of a minority party. Once the principle is accepted that Joint Committees of more than 20 members should include a minority party member, I am sure that as more Joint Committees are established, the time for Plaid Cymru will come, just as for the Scottish National party and the SDLP. I am not concerned about which party takes the one place in question now, because I am arguing about the principle and not individual membership.

I do not blame the Leader of the House or the Opposition for the current situation, as I think that it is a result of the abject failure of the reform process and the way in which we go about our business in the House and select Select Committee members. We all recall the stitch-up of a few weeks ago, when proposals made by the Leader of the House, which I fully supported, were scuppered by the underhand actions of the Whips Office. The stitch-up was cooked in the Whips Office and served up by compliant Back Benchers.

Mr. Robin Cook: It was not cooked up.

Mr. Thomas: It was undercooked, but served up by compliant Back Benchers who were anxious to be seen to be doing the Whips' bidding in a so-called free vote. I am not surprised that we have not got the arrangements right for the House properly to select members of Select Committees, Joint Committees, the Liaison Committee and whatever other Committees. I am very concerned, as are hon. Members from all the minority parties of this House—

Kevin Brennan: Where are they?

Mr. Thomas: The hon. Gentleman will see them when we vote.

I am very concerned about the precedent that we are establishing. I thought that even the narrow point made by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley was incorrect because we know already what the options are. One option is a fully elected House and another is a fully nominated House. It is the third option that we are charging the Committee to propose, and that is the crucial option, because whatever side of this spectrum we are on—I am on the fully elected side—we know that it will somehow carry the day, as it will be the only one that can muddle through the processes that we have established to decide these matters. We will use it to make the final decision on the proportion of elected Members in the House of Lords and it will be produced by the Joint Committee. We have heard protestations all along that the Joint Committee will not come up with a blueprint, but it will. Once it does, the pragmatic reality is that the third option is the only one likely to go through.

Mr. Tyler: The hon. Gentleman may have misread the motion before the House which talks about a number of intermediate options. There will not necessarily be just a third option, but a fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth option if the Joint Committee recommended that.

Mr. Thomas: I did not misread the motion. The reality is that a preferred option will sneak its way through, so the point made by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley falls. Whether we have just one option or the number of options to which the hon. Member for North Cornwall referred, the Joint Committee will produce the blueprint. The lack of any representation of any minority party on that Committee is a backward step in the modernisation the House. It fails both devolution and our representational and territorial role as minority parties in these debates.

8.51 pm

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): I congratulate the Government on ditching the White Paper, with its scandalous accusations that elections would be a bad thing for the second Chamber. They have accepted the weight of public and parliamentary opinion that that solution would not be acceptable and would stick in our throats. In revising the constitution, the Government need to bring Parliament and the public with them.

I urge swift progress towards a vote for options on the composition of the second Chamber. Some people suggest that deciding composition is a secondary matter deriving from the powers of the second Chamber. At present, we are going about that in the right way. There is a broadly settled view about powers. The proposals and reports produced every decade since the beginning of the last century on reform of the second Chamber overwhelmingly endorse a second Chamber which is a deliberative, revising Chamber that contributes to scrutiny of the Executive. There are marginal variations at different periods, but that is the continuing theme of reports and proposals from Governments of all parties for reform, most of which have not got anywhere.

Mr. McCabe: I want to agree with my hon. Friend, but the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) has a different view on the powers of the second Chamber. If his view commanded a broader majority in the Conservative party, would that not mean that the consensus on which my hon. Friend is relying would not exist? In those circumstances, to argue about composition before we have agreed on functions, role and powers would be an error.

Fiona Mactaggart: My hon. Friend is jumping into a trap created by the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst. That is something that the right hon. Gentleman frequently does with great charm and aplomb. He takes one position one day and another the next day to wind us up, and at the moment he is succeeding. That makes him very happy. I suggest that we should not fall into his trap and should not be wound up. It is interesting to watch the right hon. Gentleman's journey on this

[Fiona Mactaggart]

subject. It has consistently reflected his commitment to this Chamber—which is deeply held—and to Parliament, but it is also about how he can do the best thing for his party. That is not an unrespectable position to take, and it is not one that he has always taken, but it is the role that he plays as shadow Leader of the House. We should enjoy watching it, but not fall into his heffalump trap.

History shows that although the function is broadly a settled question, the issue that has caused controversy in every decade, especially recently, is that of where the second Chamber derives its authority from. That is the underlying issue in respect of composition. There needs to be a clear decision about the source of that authority. Does it come from the people, through voting; from other institutions of civic society—as my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush (Mr. Soley) suggested in terms of the involvement of local government—or from the appointment of the great and the good, following on from life peerages and people's peers?

That seems to be a chronically unsettled question, yet in practice it is settled both in public opinion and in the opinion of the House. Every time the public are consulted, it is clear that they think that the people should give permission and authority to legislators in the second, as well as the primary, Chamber of the House. The view of this House has been made clear by the breadth and depth of support for early-day motion 226, tabled by me and some of my hon. Friends, which has gained more than 300 signatures—a clear majority of the 571 Members of Parliament who are neither Ministers nor Government Whips.

Mr. Andrew Turner: The hon. Lady talks about public opinion. Does it surprise her to learn that of the 60 million or so people in this kingdom, fewer responded to this consultation than to a consultation by Isle of Wight council on the pedestrianisation of Newport high street?

Fiona Mactaggart: Not at all. That is not because people are not interested in how they are governed, but, I am afraid, because the White Paper was rightly treated with derision by the public as it was such a flawed piece of work. The grown-up aspect of what the Government are doing—it is unusual for a Government, and worthy of praise—is to say, "We were wrong; we are prepared to look again and think again on this matter." Public opinion is not often expressed in specific responses to a consultation on a deeply flawed White Paper. It is expressed in other ways, and every time that it has been measured on this subject it has been clear.

Let me urge the Committee, in giving us the opportunity speedily to achieve what my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House called a centre of gravity in relation to the composition of the second Chamber and the source of its Members' authority, to take a leaf from the book of those of us who tabled early-day motion 226—that is, to concentrate on finding what we agree on rather than what divides us. If we consider the history of the debate, we realise that the search for perfection has been the enemy of progress.

We are parliamentarians and we therefore hold opinions. I urge members of the Joint Committee, who will all approach their deliberations with a view of the perfect solution, to submerge perfection and build consensus, which can be the platform for progress. Unless we do that, we shall simply be this decade's example of failure to make progress on an important constitutional question.

The debate about the irrelevance of politics and about politicians being self-serving, boring and more interested in whether they can outflank the royal family will be fuelled by our failure to take responsibility and say that we can improve the way in which the country is governed. We have a duty and an opportunity to do that now. I wish the Joint Committee well, but warn it not to delay. We must act now.

9.1 pm

Mr. Andrew Tyrie (Chichester): I have been an Opposition Member since 1997 and it is therefore refreshing to listen to speeches from all parties with which I can largely agree. I hope that that happens more often in future.

I congratulate the Government on introducing the proposal. The Leader of the House has done a marvellous job in getting the motion on the Order Paper today. I support the motion, for which I shall vote if there is a Division. I have been pressing my party and arguing in the House for such an approach for more than five years. I am delighted that we have got this far.

That leaves the question of whether to support the amendment if it is pressed to a Division. I do not instinctively support restrictive timetabling for measures of constitutional reform; I sympathise with the views of the shadow Leader of the House on that. However, I have listened carefully to the arguments tonight and I believe that I am persuaded of the case for the amendment, for three reasons.

First, it deals only with the need for clarity on the narrow issue of composition, which is the basic building block for subsequent reform. Without that, we cannot proceed far. Secondly, composition has been aired and debated fully. There is no need for extensive further consultation and hearings by the Committee. It already has the requisite information to draft a proposal to put before the House. Thirdly, and most important, some Committee members—their names are on the Order Paper—will be determined to prevent meaningful progress. Indeed, several members have said on the record that they do not support any change and will be obstructive. Lord Weatherill said that keeping the status quo was,

"a consummation devoutly to be wished."

I have no reason to believe that he has changed his view.

Mr. Forth: Given our current position and that the measure has to go back to another place for final resolution before the Committee is formally established, is it reasonable to expect the Committee to meet for the first time, elect its Chairman, settle its procedures, survey the progress made today and determine sensible options for the House by the date that the amendment specifies? Does my hon. Friend, with his customary thoughtfulness, truly believe that?

Mr. Tyrie: I thank my right hon. Friend for his final remark. I believe that a month is a reasonable time for determining the basic point. However, if hon. Members agree with my right hon. Friend, perhaps the time could be extended until the end of the Session. I should certainly support that, too. We have, however, reached the point at which we must push this matter forward. There has been interminable delay on every aspect of this reform, as other hon. Members have pointed out.

I would like clarification on one point, and I would be grateful if the hon. Member for Cannock Chase would nod his head if I am correct in assuming that I am supporting an amendment that refers to direct elections rather than just elections.

Tony Wright *indicated assent.*

Mr. Tyrie: I am getting the affirmation that I was looking for, and I can therefore wholeheartedly—or, at least, reasonably heartedly—support the amendment.

I have one other brief point to make to the hon. Gentleman, which comes under the heading of "Getting from here to there". Whether or not his amendment is passed, I hope that, in an effort to speed things up, the Public Administration Committee would consider submitting a draft proposal to the Lords Committee, setting out how the proposal for voting could be implemented by both Houses of Parliament. I suggest that his Committee do some of the work right away—in a sense to disprove the point that my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) has just made—to show that this work can be done expeditiously and that it is relatively simple to draft the motion on composition.

I recommend that the hon. Gentleman and his Committee draft that motion and submit it as a proposal of a Select Committee of the House to the Committee on House of Lords reform. That would concentrate the minds of the Lords Committee on the need to get on with this, even if we do not get the hon. Gentleman's amendment. I hope that he will give consideration to that proposal. I realise that he and his Committee might have other investigations under way, but it is not asking a great deal of the Committee to consider such a draft.

I have one last point, which I want to communicate to the members of the Committee as they think about what to do. In this attempt at Lords reform, we are in new territory in the crucial area of composition. There is a very high degree of agreement among people in many parts of the country about what to do. In all previous reform attempts, that has not been so. In the 1960s, people were all over the place. Indeed, the current Prime Minister would have been right to say of that time that there were as many proposals as there were Members of the House. However, that is not true this time.

I am sure that far more members of the Labour party support election than ever before. There has been a sharp decline in the Labour party of support for unicameralism—for abolishing the Lords altogether. Many might still hanker after that, but a very high proportion now seem in favour of election. In the Conservative party, there has been a transformation. In 1997, it was certainly against election. It is not now. I would say that three quarters of the present parliamentary party support majority election for the House of Lords.

I have tabled an early-day motion on this matter, as has the hon. Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart). As she points out, the combined effect of all this work on early-day motions is to show that more than half of all Back Benchers are even prepared to put their head above the parapet and sign on the dotted line for majority election. In so doing, they are, of course, in line with public opinion. More than three quarters of the public support election. They have done so in opinion polls, which have been phrased in different ways at different times to different groups, using different samples, but which broadly speaking have consistently come up with the same answer. The polls have always shown that between three quarters and 85 per cent.—occasionally 90 per cent.—of those questioned were in favour of at least a majority elected second Chamber of Parliament.

If the Lords reform Committee fails to permit Parliament to express its opinion on this crucial issue of composition—if it lets us down—it will also be letting the wider public down, and, in the long run, the growing number of us who want constitutional reform on this issue will not forgive it.

9.10 pm

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): Time is brief and I shall try not delay the House so that other Members can speak before the winding-up speech. I welcome the motion before us, and I hope that the Joint Committee will indeed be established. However, on reading the motion carefully, it seems that, despite tonight's debate, the ordering of paragraphs has put the cart before the horse—or perhaps I should say the Lord before the cook. Paragraph (1) states that the Joint Committee should

> "consider issues relating to House of Lords reform, including the composition and powers of the Second Chamber and its role and authority within the context of Parliament as a whole".

Not until paragraph (2) is it stated that the Joint Committee's first task—a task that need not delay us for months or years—is

> "to define and present to both Houses options for composition, including a fully nominated and fully elected House, and intermediate options".

I agree with the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) that we could have more than one intermediate option, but I hope that he was not serious in talking about six, seven, eight or nine options. To go down that road would, along with his detailed exegesis of proportional representation, ensure delay in the introduction of composition options.

Mr. Robin Cook: I raise not a point of disagreement but a technical footnote on which it is important to reflect. If the Joint Committee recommended just one intermediate option, involving certain percentages of the elected and the appointed, it would of course be amendable. Any Member of the House could suggest different percentages, and table an amendment to that effect. In practical terms, the offer of one intermediate solution therefore opens the way to others. That is why I share my hon. Friend's view that it would be helpful if the Joint Committee were under no pressure to produce six different alternatives.

Kevin Brennan: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that intervention, and having heard it I now understand why he said that he could spend two minutes in a room and come up with the three options being presented to the House. Of course, any option could be amended to take

[Kevin Brennan]

account of the proposal put forward unanimously by the Public Administration Committee, which includes Labour and Opposition Members. I should add that we on the Committee were not in agreement in approaching this issue. We came from many different perspectives, but we did agree that progress must be made and that we must take this opportunity to bring about reform.

I do not care what positions prospective members of the Joint Committee held on this issue, but I hope that they adopt the same attitude as we did, and approach it in the same spirit—that of bringing about reform. If the House does not want reform, it can vote accordingly, but it must be given an early opportunity to vote. Perhaps the House does not agree with the date suggested in our amendment, but, as was pointed out, we should not set a date of July 2003 or 2004. We know what would happen if such a date were set.

I reiterate that the first job is to produce composition options, but I should also point out that it is possible to proceed quickly. You will undoubtedly know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that when my home county, Glamorgan, played Surrey today in a one-day match on the other side of the river, at the Oval, more than 850 runs were scored in 50 overs. That shows that, with the right attitude, it is possible to dispatch the ball to the boundary and make quick progress. However, if many players on this particular team are determined to present a straight bat to every proposal, we will make no progress, perish, and end up with a boring draw.

I turn briefly to the membership of the Joint Committee. I agree that the proposed names represent a distinguished group of hon. Members; among them is my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant), who is new to the House. However, 303 hon. Members signed the early-day motion in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart). I congratulate the person who, according to the House's mysterious processes, was responsible for selecting the membership of the Committee, as that person was able to find 11 hon. Members who did not sign that early-day motion.

That is extraordinary. I checked the 303 signatories, and I apologise if I have missed someone. I am willing to stand corrected, but as far as I can tell the only member of the Committee who signed the early-day motion proposing that we should have a second Chamber that is wholly or substantially elected was my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: What about my right hon. Friend the Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers)?

Kevin Brennan: His name does not appear on my list.

Fiona Mactaggart: My right hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West (Joyce Quin) is also a signatory.

Mr. Tyler: As am I.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): The hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Kevin Brennan) should provide a number of options.

Kevin Brennan: I am providing a number of options, as the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) suggests. The shadow Leader of the House, the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), is clearly right not to trust the modern technology that provided me with the print-out.

I hope that members of the Joint Committee will read tonight's debate. If the amendment is not pressed, I hope that that will not be taken as an excuse for delay, because delay means no change. If the tactic is to delay, there will be no change. We must be clear and honest about that.

If reform is prevented by delaying tactics and the deliberate use of the straight bat, Parliament will lose its credibility as an institution, because we will not be doing what we claim to be doing. We will not be being straight and honest with the public. The issue may not be of great importance for people in high streets around the country, but when they lose faith that politicians will do what they say that they will do, we will all perish.

9.17 pm

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): The question of how we rule ourselves is probably the second most important of all those that could come before the House, the most important being whether we rule ourselves. The composition of the upper House and its functions, powers and legitimacy are of course of great importance in the matter of how we rule ourselves.

I must, however, immediately dispute the assertion made by the hon. Members for Cardiff, West (Kevin Brennan) and for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush (Mr. Soley) that we have to move on. The hon. Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush made what I thought was both an astonishing admission and an astonishing attack on his Government, although I am sure that it was not intended as such. He applauded the way in which the Government had waded in and—I think that these were his words—"smashed up the shop". He said that it was therefore necessary that something be done to put the shop back together again.

The Government have certainly made changes to the upper House that I and many others regret, but their action could not be described as "smashing up the shop". We still have a perfectly effective, functioning and legitimate House of Lords. It is certainly as legitimate as anything that may be cobbled together as a result of this motion.

The House of Lords presents no threat to the Government's business. It scrutinises legislation and holds the Government to account perhaps a little more effectively than this House.

Mr. Forth: A lot more effectively.

Mr. Turner: From a sedentary position, my right hon. Friend says that it does so a lot more effectively, and I concur with him. However, the House of Lords does not obstruct the Government's legislation unnecessarily—indeed, it improves it, as I am sure that the Home Secretary, for one, would admit, in retrospect.

Mr. Tyrie: Is my hon. Friend aware that more than three quarters of so-called improving amendments are tabled by the Government to patch up shoddy legislation brought in here and then bunged up there for subsequent improvement?

Mr. Turner: My hon. Friend is right. The House of Lords debates and accepts those amendments, and a further quarter of their own devising, in many cases improving the quality of legislation.

The only serious problem with the House of Lords is its size and the capacity that the Prime Minister of the day has to pack it if he wishes, although heaven forfend that I suggest he does. I should not criticise the unrepresentative nature of some recent appointments to the peerage because the peerage is not meant to be representative. However, it is noticeable that a huge proportion of recent appointees to the peerage live in the south-east of England and a tiny proportion live in other regions of England.

May I say to the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Kevin Brennan) that there are worse things in life than a boring draw, as I am sure members of the England team would have agreed after their boring draw with Sweden in the early rounds of the World cup? Worse than a boring draw would be a worse upper House. It might be more representative and present more of a challenge to this House and its members but it might obstruct the Government's business for no good reason and exclude many of the able and intelligent people, represented largely by life peers at present, who would not dream in a month of Sundays of putting themselves forward for election.

The fact that so few people responded to the consultation contained in the document—1,113 out of a population of 60 million—may be, as the hon. Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) said, because the White Paper was treated with derision. Or it could simply be that there is no overwhelming demand across the country for a wholesale reform of the House of Lords. There certainly is not in the pubs and clubs or on the beaches of the Isle of Wight. The consultation is wholly unrepresentative. It is not even as representative as the Isle of Wight council's consultation on the pedestrianisation of Newport high street, to which 1,135 people out of 130,000 responded.

The hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) suggested that we should not consult any more. The Government appear to have a strategy of consulting to death, until the people in the final consultation are such a tiny distillation of the political classes that the Government can, if they wish, ignore the result. However, on this occasion, the Government and the Joint Committee, if it is established, should ignore the result.

We need proper consultation on the powers of the House of Lords or its replacement, its functions and its composition. That consultation should be undertaken by the Joint Committee in the regions, involving real people, not just the political classes, so that they have a genuine say, an accessible opportunity to give their views on this important element in our constitution. *[Interruption.]* Labour Members seem to treat with derision the idea of people in the regions having a genuine say.

Fiona Mactaggart: I was not laughing at the proposal to consult people in the regions, as the Wakeham commission did. That consultation has continued, and I fear that the hon. Gentleman is arguing for consultation because he is not eager to make progress.

Mr. Turner: The hon. Lady is right—[HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"]—I am not willing to make progress in the wrong direction. My hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie) said that one quarter of the parliamentary Conservative party was not in favour. As one of the four hon. Members to have spoken from the Conservative Benches, I probably am that one quarter. However, we must understand the profound conservatism of the British people, who do not want their constitutional arrangements to be upended for no good reason. I am not sure that that has come through in the consultations so far.

On the functions of the House of Lords, of course, it is important that it should scrutinise legislation and hold the Government to account. It is still more important that it should protect and enhance our constitution and provide a constitutional longstop to the Government's ability to get constitutional changes through this House on a whipped vote. It is also important that the House of Lords should represent those people who would not dream of standing for election. I believe that the established Church should also be represented in that House.

I take my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) seriously when he says that the House of Lords might take on a greater role in holding the Government to account. That is certainly the only justification that I can think of for a larger elected element, accountable to the people.

The other issue is the range of options that the Committee is asked to produce. I am unsure that it is right that it should start, as hon. Members on both sides of the House seem to have accepted, by determining the composition of the other place. It has to start by determining the powers; then it must consider the different elements of the composition. That is not a one-dimensional question. It is not simply a question of 100 per cent. nominated at one end and 100 per cent. elected at the other. The nominated category encompasses an infinite variety, ranging from the retention of existing life peers to a big bang nomination of 100 per cent. by the Government of the day, the political parties, regional assemblies where those exist, Uncle Tom Cobleigh and all—the corporate institutions, the Confederation of British Industry and the trade unions.

The question of composition is not one-dimensional at the nominated end of the spectrum, nor is it one-dimensional at the elected end. Does elected mean directly or indirectly elected? Although we have the nod from the hon. Member for Cannock Chase (Tony Wright), I am not sure that we have the nod from anyone on the Treasury Bench as to whether "elected" in the motion refers only to directly elected.

It is a widely held view that there are too many politicians in this country already—*[Interruption.]* That is, politicians of all parties. A 100 per cent. elected House of Lords would simply be a job creation scheme for second-rate politicians. Although I do not wish to go into the details of voting systems, the single transferable vote proposed by the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) would be the worst possible form of election because the only way in which one could be elected if one did not have a constituency interest would be by publicity seeking or representing more and more extreme views of one type or another.

I hope that the Joint Committee will consider not only the type of elected individual, if it is considering elections, but also the means of election. We cannot make these decisions separately; we must make them together. If it takes longer to take a better decision, it is right that the Committee should take longer.

9.29 pm

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): I am delighted to speak in this debate as the last Back Bencher to be called. This is the second time that I have achieved that honour in debates on Lords reform. I am also delighted, if the motion is approved tonight, to achieve the honour of providing some freshness on the Committee—in the words of the shadow Leader of the House—and to act, in the words of the Leader of the House, as a shop steward or convenor for the forces of progress.

I had been delighted with the whole thrust of the debate until the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) spoke. He took us down several avenues that are not likely to help the Committee. Indeed, they might have been specifically designed to hinder the Committee in the progress that it might make. It is worth remembering that the major reason for the Committee—and why I welcome the Government's decision to set it up—is that the House of Lords still seems to the vast majority of people more like something out of a Shakespearean play, rather than a legislative body. It still contains the Bishop of Chester and the Bishop of Carlisle—characters from "Richard II", "Richard III", "Henry IV", parts 1 and 2, and "Henry VI", parts 1, 2 and 3, who are all still forming legislation for this country.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): They must be pretty old by now.

Mr. Bryant: The personnel change, but they retain the titles. It is as if Bushy, Bagot and Green will come in at any moment and offer their allegiance to the king.

The House of Lords still feels wholly unrepresentative. One might expect the second Chamber to look more like the country from which it is drawn.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): It does.

Mr. Bryant: It does not look anything like it. It may look like the planet from which the hon. Gentleman has come, but it does not look like the country from which the rest of us have come. The second Chamber, as presently constituted, still has significant powers but without authority, accountability or legitimacy. That must be a fundamental problem for the British constitution.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush (Mr. Soley) made the point well that Britain has taken great pride in its constitution by virtue of its ability to adapt, reform and change. We now need to make additional change. In the words of the Leader of the House in the first debate held on the issue since I was elected, a centre of gravity already exists, certainly in this Chamber. It is intriguing that those who argue for no change often do so on the basis that they want to retain the primacy of this Chamber. However, they are often prepared to pray in aid the views of the second Chamber as if it should hold primacy on this sole issue.

The centre of gravity on the issue has been evident in many of the debates that we have already had on this subject. It includes the belief that we should have a second Chamber that is a secondary and revising House, without significant additional powers of any kind. I believe that the majority of Members of this House think that any additional powers that it has should be exercised with legitimacy. There is also a centre of gravity around the belief that the second Chamber should be smaller, with transitional arrangements to take us from the present situation to a better one.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): The hon. Gentleman seems to be arguing that the only form of political legitimacy is democratic legitimacy. Surely he is far too intelligent to believe that. If he did, he would have to argue that the monarchy, and our head of state, were not politically legitimate.

Mr. Bryant: The monarchy and our head of state as currently constituted attract the support of the vast majority of the people in this country, as was demonstrated when Her Majesty visited the Rhondda last week. However, I personally believe that the best form of legitimacy for any country is democracy, and we should push arguments for democracy more strongly, especially when democracy is having a difficult time.

As one who, I hope, will be put on the Committee by the end of this evening, I want to issue a couple of warnings. First, the Committee has been referred to by many in the press and the media, including the BBC website, as the "long-grass Committee". I am something of an expert on long-grass, as I have not cut the grass in my garden for some time. I bought a strimmer last week, however, and, in recognition of how strong the grass is in my garden, a bush cutter. Perhaps it would be a good idea if all members of the Committee were issued with strimmers to make sure that it does not stay long in the long grass and that we can get it right back in the middle of the lawn.

My second warning is that there is no point in the Committee repeating the work of previous Committees. There has been a royal commission and endless different Committees of the House and of the other place. Various different organisations and think tanks have been round these bushes so often that it is time that we cut through the Gordian knot. That will not best be done by trying to repeat the work by calling a vast array of witnesses who have already given evidence to Select Committees. It is most important that we move forward.

On the best way to move forward—perhaps the Minister will reply to this later—there still seems to be uncertainty about what stage 1 and 2 are. My understanding is that stage 1 puts a simple series of questions—not fully worked out options—about the composition of a new second Chamber. For instance, will the composition be 0 per cent., 60 per cent., or 100 per cent.? We shall vote on those and any amendments but not on a wholly worked-out system. That is the building block for the second stage. Once the Committee knows whether the composition is to be 0 per cent., 60 per cent., or 100 per cent., it can put forward a whole set of proposals with recommendations about the electoral system, length of service, transitional arrangements and other issues that will need to be addressed.

If the Committee spends a large amount of time in its first months deliberating about all those other issues, it will never manage to achieve the most important first step of establishing the building blocks of what the composition should look like. Above all, the final outcome—this must be a kind of lodestar for the Committee—is a historic opportunity to create a settled constitution. A parliamentary system that commands authority, respect and legitimacy, not just in one part but in its entirety, can only bring greater respect and legitimacy to the whole of the political endeavour, which can only be good for democracy and for Britain. I also believe that it cannot be beyond the wit of the men and women on the Committee, and of the whole political system of this country, to devise a parliamentary stem that is complementary, in which the two Chambers work together, not in competition, but have separate roles.

Many members of the Labour party might say that these constitutional issues are largely irrelevant compared with the bread-and-butter issues of law and order, health, education and transport. In many ways, I agree. The Labour Government will stand or fall on those issues far more than on this one. The question of how we choose to run the country, however, is about the way in which we use power. I shall make no apologies, as the Member of Parliament for the Rhondda, for spending what I estimate will be a considerable part of the summer and other parts of the year ahead working on this matter, if only because the first Member of Parliament for the Rhondda, William Abrahams—who was known by all as Mabon—spent all of his maiden speech, and much of his parliamentary career, trying to seek the disestablishment of the Church of Wales, as it then was, and, subsequently, of the Church in Wales, and trying to make sure that the bishops of the Church of England were removed from the House of Lords.

I hope that we can finish the job on behalf of Mabon. I note that there is no bishop on the Committee, and that is a significant first step. It is the first time that there has not been a bishop on any Committee that has been set up to try to reform the House of Lords. I hope that we follow through in that style.

9.39 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office (Mr. Ben Bradshaw): It is with pleasure that I close what all Members will agree has been an extremely valuable and constructive debate on setting up the Joint Committee.

In establishing the Joint Committee, the Government have taken an historic step—to put the decision on Parliament's future into the hands of Parliament itself. We believe that the membership of the Joint Committee broadly reflects the range of views in this House and the other place, as have been expressed in this and earlier debates and in the response to the Government's consultation. The initial phase of the Committee's work will be followed by detailed consideration of the implementation of reform. After that, it is the Government's intention to legislate.

We also believe that it is right for both Chambers to have an opportunity to express their collective view on the issue, and that is why the first task for the Joint Committee is to devise a set of options for the composition of the second Chamber. They will be put to the House in free votes.

We have heard many contributions to the debate urging speed on the Joint Committee. They have been given focus by the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase (Tony Wright) and his fellow members of the Public Administration Committee. We have heard many voices in the Chamber calling particularly for speed in putting forward the options for the free votes. I am sure that members of the Committee, many of whom have spoken in the debate, have heard those exhortations.

The Government did not want to set a deadline for the Joint Committee to report, because we felt that it should be a matter for the Committee itself to set a timetable. However, I am sure that it will take into account what has been said in the debate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase made a number of specific recommendations about timing and I hope that he was reassured by what my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House said when he made it clear that we will have to have the options on which to vote by the autumn if we are to keep to a timetable of introducing legislation in the next Session. As my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) requested, there will have to be a final report by the end of the year. We are with my hon. Friends on timing. As my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase acknowledged, the Government want to make progress and bring the matter to a conclusion. I hope that what I and my right hon. Friend have said this evening will be enough to persuade my hon. Friend not to press his amendment to the vote.

Tony Wright: In the spirit of compromise that we have urged on the House so as to make progress, let me give my hon. Friend the assurance that he requires In view of the assurances that he is giving now and that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House gave earlier, I confirm that we will not press our amendment to the vote.

Mr. Bradshaw: I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend.

My hon. Friend also made several points about the important role that his Select Committee's report played in contributing to the debate. I agree with him on that. He commended to the House and to those watching and listening outside that part of the report entitled "Getting from here to there", and I recommend the whole report to those Members who have not yet read it. It is excellent, and we share his sense of urgency.

My hon. Friend also expressed regret that none of the members of the Joint Committee were drawn from his Select Committee. I hear what he says but, if it is any consolation, the whole House would expect him and other members of the Select Committee to be among the first to be called upon to give evidence. We hope that the Select Committee will mount a critical and constructive critique of the Joint Committee's work. There may be advantages in doing that if there is no overlap in membership.

Mr. Robert Marshall-Andrews (Medway): What criteria were applied for selecting members of the Joint Committee?

Mr. Bradshaw: The ability of members to reach a conclusion while approaching the problem with fresh minds and retaining a balance. My hon. and learned Friend has only just arrived in the Chamber—

Mr. Marshall-Andrews: No I have not. I was here before. [HON. MEMBERS: "When?"] When the Minister was not here.

Mr. Bradshaw: That is amazing because I only popped out to the loo for about 30 seconds. Had my hon. and learned Friend listened to the whole debate, which I am sure he did even if he was not present, he would have

[Mr. Bradshaw]

heard every hon. Member, with the exception of the nationalists, commend the membership of the Committee and its qualities.

The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) made important references to the report by the Public Administration Select Committee. He spent some time advocating the benefits of certain electoral systems and the timing of elections. Although the White Paper, the report and the Wakeham commission might not explicitly support what he said about electoral systems, they at least tilt towards his view.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush (Mr. Soley) made an excellent contribution. He welcomed the establishment of the Committee and I welcome the fact that he will be a member of it. He also had interesting things to say about the West German model, which I have studied and it has much to recommend it. Like all the details raised by right hon. and hon. Members, those matters will be for the Joint Committee. As a member of the Committee, I am sure that he will be able to make those points to it.

My hon. Friend was right to remind the House that the reform needs to be seen in the context of this Government as the first Government radically to reform the United Kingdom constitution for many years. I thank him for that. He also expressed a desire for a speedy process. Like other hon. Members, he volunteered to sit through parts of the summer, although hopefully only when it would not upset his family too much. My hon. Friend rightly expressed the near consensus that exists on the importance of maintaining the pre-eminence of the Commons. He stressed how vital it is that its Members are elected on a manifesto and given a mandate to carry through those commitments.

The hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir Sydney Chapman) startled many in the House with his declaration that we are all modernists now, for which he earned a rebuke from his right hon. Friend the shadow Leader of the House. As a new member of the Public Administration Select Committee, he also spoke warmly of its report and in favour of the amendment. I hope that he accepts the reassurances that my right hon. Friend and I have given on timing and is happy that the amendment will not be pressed to a vote.

My hon. Friend the Member for Pendle, another member of the Public Administration Select Committee, accused the Government of having a poor track record on constitutional reform. I do not accept that. Indeed, the Committee's report went out of its way to praise the Government's record on such reform and, as I said, my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush thinks that the Government will go down as one of the great radical reforming Governments of all time. However, having said that we have a poor track record, my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle welcomed the fact that we are leaving the matter to Parliament. I am glad that he is at least pleased about that.

My hon. Friend was concerned that any debate about regions or regionalism would slow down the process. Those hon. Members who want to make progress are unanimous that wherever the regional debate goes, it should not slow down reform of the House of Lords. I hope that that reassures him. As I said, his request that the final report should be ready by the turn of the year is one to which we can all agree.

The hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) raised the concern expressed in an intervention about the lack of representation of nationalist parties on the Joint Committee. As my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House made clear in his opening speech, we have some sympathy with the hon. Gentleman's points. However, as my right hon. Friend said, if there were to be proportionality in the representation on the Committee, it would have to be more than twice its planned size, and that, we fear, would slow down its work. My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Ms Munn) made the good point that, in the end, we will have a free vote on the options in which all our votes will count equally.

My hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart), in another very good contribution, welcomed the steps that we are taking this evening and called for swift progress. She rightly drew attention to the importance of this debate as part of the wider debate in the country about the need for politicians to reconnect with people who feel that politics has nothing to do with them. My hon. Friend was right to point out that that is a crucial part of the constitutional right of reform. We share the belief and hope that it will help to revitalise our political life and re-engage people.

The hon. Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie), in another very positive contribution, warmly welcomed the motion, and I am sure that my right hon. Friend will not mind if I accept the hon. Gentleman's congratulations on his behalf. The hon. Gentleman called for speed and rightly pointed out that some members of the Committee may well seek to delay the process. I hope that those Members who are present and others who read the report of the debate take on board the almost unanimous view that the Committee should get a move on. The hon. Gentleman accused the Government of interminable delay, and I do not recognise that description, but I am glad that he is generally on the side of the angels in this matter.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Kevin Brennan) was right to say that the Committee's first task will be to present options, and he expressed the hope that there will not be too many. I hope that he was reassured by the intervention of my right hon. Friend, who expressed his own hope that that will be the case. My hon. Friend expressed regret that only one Member of this House who had signed the early-day motion tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Slough had been selected for the Committee. We have done a little research in the meantime, and the latest count is five and rising, so I hope that my hon. Friend feels reassured.

I think that it would be fair to say that the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) was a lone voice this evening in arguing that we should not move on. He talked about many details, such as the role of the established Church and whether any faiths should be represented. He made the point that there are too many politicians, and I suggest that this is a good opportunity for us to decrease that number. People have talked about consensus, and I think that one point on which there is consensus is that the second Chamber could be a good deal smaller than it is.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant), in an excellent speech, showed that he will be an excellent member of the Committee. He reminded us why Lords reform must be brought to its conclusion. He also, rightly, spoke of a centre of gravity. In recent months, too many people have got away with suggesting that there are as many views on the matter as there are Members of Parliament, and that argument is very dangerous.

Mr. Tyrie: The man who has argued most forcefully that there are as many views as there are Members is the Prime Minister.

Mr. Bradshaw: That is as it may be, but in recent weeks and months, the realisation has been growing that it is possible to bring people around to a consensus, and I think that the report of the Public Administration Committee achieved that. Although the House contains many views on the way forward, consensus is coalescing around a number of issues, although strong differences remain on composition and the proportions of elected and appointed Members, which is one of the reasons why the Joint Committee is to make settling on recommendations and presenting us with options a priority.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda expressed the hope that the Joint Committee would not be a "long-grass Committee". I think that most hon. Members share that hope. He also stressed the importance of the Committee not repeating work that had already been done, and he was absolutely right to do so. He was also absolutely right in his definition of stage 1: it needs to be quick and to serve as a building block so that we can get on with the nitty-gritty and the detail. He generously offered to emulate his distinguished predecessor by spending much of the summer dealing with constitutional reform.

Several hon. Members have made specific proposals on the direction of reform, and although I do not want to duck those issues, I have to say that such matters are now for the Joint Committee, which has been established to consider the way forward in a way that reflects the views of this House and the other place. I think that those proposals were directed more at the members of the Joint Committee in this House and people outside than at my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House or me. I am sure that those members of the Joint Committee who have been present for the debate have noted the points made and will consider them during their deliberations.

I join with other hon. Members in wishing the Joint Committee well in its deliberations. There should be no doubt that it is a Committee of very high calibre, whose members will bring to it a large amount of collective wisdom and a healthy mix of opinions. I am certain that they are up to the task.

The matter with which the Joint Committee will deal is not a small one, and it is to the Government's credit that we have put Parliament in the driving seat of reform of the House of Lords. Parliament now stands on the brink of an unparalleled opportunity to shape itself for the future. It is considering one of the most important constitutional decisions of the past 100 years, and the effect of its deliberations will be felt for decades to come. I know that it will rise to the challenge. I trust that the House agrees that the motion is for the convenience of all parties and that it will support it.

Mr. Speaker: I understand that the hon. Member for Cannock Chase (Tony Wright) does not want to pursue his amendment.

Mr. Simon Thomas: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In view of the fact the hon. Member for Cannock Chase has decided not to press his amendment, is it possible for you to reconsider accepting ours?

Mr. Speaker: That was a decision made at 12 o'clock today.

Question, put:—

The House divided: Ayes 320, Noes 14.

Division No. 277] [9.58 pm

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Boswell, Tim
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burnham, Andy
Cable, Dr Vincent
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Forth, Rt Hon Eric

Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Fox, Dr Liam
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Hayes, John
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laws, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Olner, Bill
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prisk, Mark
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr John
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swayne, Desmond
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Tyrie, Andrew
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Angela Smith and
Mr. Jim Murphy.

NOES

Beggs, Roy
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Ewing, Annabelle
Fallon, Michael
Hermon, Lady
Llwyd, Elfyn
Price, Adam
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spink, Bob
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Weir, Michael
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Simon Thomas and
Pete Wishart.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Lords Message [10th June] relating to House of Lords Reform be now considered.

That this House concurs with the Lords in the said Resolution.

That a Select Committee of twelve Members be appointed to join with a Committee appointed by the Lords as the Joint Committee on House of Lords Reform

(1) to consider issues relating to House of Lords reform, including the composition and powers of the Second Chamber and its role and authority within the context of Parliament as a whole, having regard in particular to the impact which any proposed changes would have on the existing pre-eminence of the House of Commons, such consideration to include the implications of a House composed of more than one 'category' of member and the experience and expertise which the House of Lords in its present form brings to its function as the revising Chamber; and

(2) having regard to paragraph (1) above, to report on options for the composition and powers of the House of Lords and to define and present to both Houses options for composition, including a fully nominated and fully elected House, and intermediate options; and to consider and report on—

(a) any changes to the relationship between the two Houses which may be necessary to ensure the proper functioning of Parliament as a whole in the context of a reformed Second Chamber, and in particular, any new procedures for resolving conflict between the two Houses; and

(b) the most appropriate and effective legal and constitutional means to give effect to any new Parliamentary settlement;

and in all the foregoing considerations, to have regard to—

(i) the Report of the Royal Commission on House of Lords Reform (Cm. 4534);

(ii) the White Paper *The House of Lords—Completing the Reform* (Cm. 5291), and the responses received thereto;

(iii) debates and votes in both Houses of Parliament on House of Lords reform; and

(iv) the House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee Report *The Second Chamber: Continuing the Reform*, including its consultation of the House of Commons, and any other relevant select committee reports.

That the Committee shall have power—

(i) to send for persons, papers and records;

(ii) to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House;

(iii) to report from time to time;

(iv) to appoint specialist advisers;

(v) to adjourn from place to place within the United Kingdom; and

That Janet Anderson, Mr. James Arbuthnot, Mr. Chris Bryant, Mr. Kenneth Clarke, Dr. Jack Cunningham, Mr. William Hague, Mr. Stephen McCabe, Joyce Quin, Mr. Terry Rooney, Mr. Clive Soley, Mr. Paul Stinchcombe and Mr. Paul Tyler be members of the Committee.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Ordered,

HOUSING

That the Housing (Right to Acquire) (Discount) Order 2002 (S.I., 2002, No. 1091) be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.—*[Mr. Jim Murphy.]*

NHS Pensions

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Jim Murphy.]*

10.11 pm

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston): I think that all hon. Members share one common experience: we often get asked why we ever got involved in politics. Whenever I am asked that question, I either blame Lucas Industries or pension provision, especially for women. On this occasion, it was my interest in pensions for women that drew me to a particular problem, which also happened to relate to the health service.

I had the great honour of serving as a Minister in the Department of Health and I want to put it on record that the NHS is an exemplary employer. In many ways, it has driven forward the agenda on fair employment practices, so I am by no means criticising the NHS as an employer. However, I want to criticise an especially quirky provision in the pension system that has historic roots. The best way of describing it is to use the words of one of my constituents.

Dr. Susan Collier, who works in a neighbouring health authority, said:

> "My husband and I both qualified from Birmingham Medical School in 1978 and our medical careers have been similar to date. We both work in general practice. We have no children and I have therefore taken no time out for maternity leave etc.
>
> However, under the current law any pension payments made by a female GP before 1988 cannot be included in calculations of payments to be made to the GP's husband if he survives her. However, the pension scheme does allow widows of GPs to receive payments based on all pension contributions made by their husbands. This means that if I pre-decease my husband he will get less merely because I happen to be female."

Dr. Collier describes the problem succinctly. It is not clear how many GPs will be affected, but I think that the figure is estimated at about 5,000. The potential cost of remedying the problem is also unclear, as calculations often tend to ignore the fact that women still tend to live longer than men. In a sense, there would be a practical effect on the Treasury only if the woman predeceased her husband.

I think that I have a fairly good idea of what the Minister might be tempted to say in her response. Indeed, I know what I would probably have been tempted to say in her shoes. In all fairness, the Department of Health has been very consistent in its response. A written answer given as long ago as 1999 stated that, to put the problem right,

> "these costs would have to be paid in full by the whole membership and there is no indication that they would be willing to do so."—[*Official Report*, 13 January 1999; Vol. 323, c. 212W.]

I think that that is a very rational and logical response, but I am afraid that that does not make it right. I put it to the Minister that it is unacceptable in this day and age that a pound paid into a pension fund by a woman should be worth less than a pound paid in by a man. There should not be any differences between widows and widowers. The days of systems designed with the man as breadwinner were, I hoped, well and truly over. Surely that sends out the wrong message, as the NHS wants to recruit and retain more GPs, especially women. I urge the Minister not just to give me the usual answer but to justify the gender difference.

However, I am a realist and I know that I am asking the Minister to right an historic wrong from the period 1972 to 1988. She may tell me that that is not the best

[Ms Gisela Stuart]

use of money and may well have a point. If she resists the temptation to right a past wrong, may I urge her not to create a wrong for the future? In 2001, after lengthy negotiations with the Department of Health, agreement was reached on whether GP locums would be able to join the NHS superannuation scheme. It was thought that all locum income would be superannuable from 1 April 2001.

Alas, on closer inspection, that does not appear to be the case. Repeated pressure on the NHS Pensions Agency and the Department of Health did not produce the necessary draft regulations to ensure that arrangements were made for the 2001–02 financial year. Draft regulations finally saw the light of day in January 2001, but locum income was excluded in cases where the doctor also worked as an assistant or principal practitioner. Bizarrely, any locum who also had a hospital post was included.

To avoid delay in full-time locum doctors receiving entitlements, the NHS Pension Scheme Amendment Regulations 2002 were laid, but provisions for part-time GPs have yet to be introduced. The new GP contract includes an undertaking that in future all net NHS income earned by GPs will be pensionable, including locum earnings by assistant and principal practitioners. When the regulations were laid, assurances were given that they in no way marked the end of discussions. I hope that is the case.

Even if the Minister cannot remedy a past wrong on this occasion, and even if only a small group of doctors are affected, two long-term issues must be addressed. First, women will be disproportionately affected, so I hope that we move to a system that does not discriminate against women. Secondly, we want to recruit more doctors and keep more GPs. We do not want women GPs to be lost to the health service when they have families, so the flexibility to work part-time at certain times of their lives without losing the chance to build up pension rights is in all our interests.

Given the time of night I shall be brief. I should be grateful if the Minister addressed past wrongs, but I accept that I shall probably have to accept whatever she says. However, will she assure me that the draft regulations will be amended so that we do not create another generation of women GPs who will experience discrimination on retirement?

10.18 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Jacqui Smith): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart) on securing a debate on the important issue of national health service pensions and women doctors. I also acknowledge her expertise and experience on pensions and the NHS.

I am glad that my hon. Friend recognised that the NHS has an excellent final salary pension scheme, with benefits on average worth about 20 per cent. of pay, which is open to all NHS employees, regardless of hours worked, including general medical and dental practitioners. It has more than 1 million members and currently pays benefits to nearly 475,000 NHS pensioners. The NHS scheme operates under the principles of mutual assurance, allowing employers and members to join together to share the risks and spread the costs. There is no individual pot of money for each member, which means that the scheme can offer a defined package of benefits for a standard contribution.

Like many public service schemes, the NHS pension scheme is unfunded. There is no pension fund, and contributions are not invested to provide for future pension payments. My hon. Friend will be aware that NHS employers pay a 7 per cent. contribution, with the Exchequer guaranteeing scheme benefits and underwriting the cost of inflation-proofing pensions in retirement. The NHS scheme has introduced many changes over the past 50 years, sometimes adding extra pension benefits, at other times withdrawing outdated provisions. New rights accrue prospectively and withdrawn rights are protected for existing members. Employers, the Government and, ultimately, taxpayers take the financial risk of underwriting future benefits. That means that we must ensure that the NHS scheme operates with a fair degree of financial certainty. The future may be unpredictable, but at least past liabilities can be assessed and accounted for.

My hon. Friend rightly raised concerns expressed by women doctors about the restrictions on past service rights. We recognise those concerns—indeed, as a member of another public service scheme, I recognise them personally and acutely. However, sharing risks and costs means that a feature of defined benefit schemes is that proportionately some members may do better than others. For example, it generally costs more to provide pensions for doctors than it does for administrative and clerical staff, but each pays the same 6 per cent. contribution. Female members will generally outlive their male counterparts and so may take a greater share of personal benefits from the scheme. Moreover, some members may not be interested in a particular aspect of the package. For example, single members may not want and may never benefit from dependants' cover, but the cost of providing those benefits is spread across the whole membership under the mutual assurance principle. Members cannot opt out of parts of the basic benefit package.

Before April 1988, the NHS scheme did not include a general widowers' provision. Widowers' benefits were not part of the package that members were buying and on which the NHS scheme was costed. When widowers' benefits were introduced for membership after 6 April 1988, the new benefit was included in the future costing arrangements, but only on the basis of the prospective cover. Backdating widowers' cover to 1972, when half-rate widows' pensions were introduced, would have created unfunded liabilities.

The Government want all workers to be treated fairly. In that respect, we ensure that the NHS pension scheme complies with all existing domestic legislation and European Community directives and law. I understand that saying that the scheme complies with the law offers little reassurance to those who want equality for the past as well. However, given that there is an equal treatment rule that has applied for the past 14 years, it is difficult to see the justification for back-dating the provision to an even earlier date. It would seem unreasonable to expect the general membership and current health budgets to address such issues now, especially as there are more contemporary and relevant improvement candidates. My hon. Friend emphasised that when she talked about how we respond in future to recruiting and retaining more NHS staff. The Government sometimes have to make hard decisions about matters such as pension rights. We want and need to be fair to scheme members, but equally we have a duty to be fair to the taxpayer and to users of health services. It is a question of balance.

Although widowers' cover was not backdated in 1988, a special scheme was available until 30 June 1989 that allowed existing female members to purchase widowers' cover for their earlier service. The costs were shared with NHS employers. There are provisions in the NHS pension scheme for the unrestricted payment of widowers' benefits when the member's husband is permanently incapable of earning a living because of ill health and is wholly or mainly dependent on his wife.

We understand the strong feelings of women doctors and the view that they subsidised their male colleagues over the provision of half-rate widows' pension cover from March 1972. We have considered whether retrospective cover should be made available but the costs are significant. Of course, there would be wider implications because the policy on widowers' benefits applies across the public service. Even at 1999 salary levels, the Government Actuary has calculated the capital cost of backdating NHS widowers' cover for those who were members in 1988 at approximately £500 million. I understand that the costs are little different today, and we are not prepared to pick them up. It is not reasonable to expect us to do that, and we would not realistically expect the general membership to want to pay.

On a more positive note, I hope that I can answer my hon. Friend's second question on locum GPs. We opened the NHS pension scheme to freelance locum GPs from 1 April 2001. That was a major step forward and means that all doctors practising in the NHS have access to sponsored pension arrangements.

Our commitment was to allow scheme access to freelance locums when the health authority supplementary lists were in place. The link was to improve the protection for patients by ensuring that all GPs who work in the NHS have access to training and regular appraisal by their host health authority.

Consultations with the profession about the shape of the new lists were greatly protracted and we were not able to introduce the legislation until December last year. The changes to the NHS scheme depended on the arrangements agreed for supplementary lists and, in that context, we can claim some credit for having scheme amendments in place by the end of the tax year.

I agree with my hon. Friend that the new opportunity will be especially important to the increasing number of women GP qualified doctors, who now have the option of working in the NHS and joining the NHS pension scheme without having to join a main health authority list as a GP principal. That will give them access to generous pension arrangements but with the flexibility to balance their work and family commitments. We take that seriously as we develop recruitment and retention in the NHS.

I know that the scope of the regulations did not go as far as doctors wanted. We understood their anxieties, but our priority was to fulfil the commitment to freelance locum GPs. Unlike other GPs, they had no access to the NHS scheme.

However, as my hon. Friend said, the Department has given an undertaking that the amending regulations do not mark the end of the discussions. We made it clear to doctors' representatives that we would continue to consider the position of principals and assistants.

We recognise that assistants and other GPs want all their NHS earnings to be covered by the NHS pension scheme. I understand my hon. Friend's point about the importance of that form of working. That is understandable because, unlike those of employees, GP pensions are based on total uprated career earnings.

Clearly, there are detailed issues to consider but, as my hon. Friend pointed out, the framework document for the new GP contract says that we would expect all net NHS income earned by GPs to be pensionable, including locum earnings in the hands of assistants and principals.

GP pension issues are complex and we should not overlook the fact that practical difficulties and cost implications need consideration. However, I can confirm to my hon. Friend that the NHS Confederation, with the active support of officials from the Department and the NHS Pensions Agency, is currently engaged in detailed discussions to identify solutions in order to present recommendations to Ministers as soon as possible.

In summary, we have taken steps to ensure that the NHS pension scheme complies fully with equal treatment legislation and provides all members, including doctors, with unrestricted access to an excellent package of pension benefits. The NHS pension scheme continues to provide very good value for money and, in the light of the recent turbulence in private sector final salary schemes, a very attractive inducement to working in the NHS.

We must, however, look forward to the future recruitment and retention needs of the NHS, in line with our NHS plan aspirations. That does not mean that we can forget about the past, but, with competing priorities for resources, it would seem increasingly appropriate to spend tax revenue on things that will significantly help to improve the delivery of patient services rather than redress past inequalities, however deserving those claims may be.

For locum GPs, we have addressed a long-standing grievance over access to the NHS pension scheme. To meet our commitment to provide scheme access from April 2001, we have not been able to resolve some of the outstanding concerns of other GPs, but we have committed to further discussions within the new GP contract negotiations.

In conclusion, may I again thank my hon. Friend for raising this important issue? I assure her that, as we go forward with developments in the NHS pension schemes, we shall bear in mind both the need to ensure equality of treatment and the need to ensure that we recruit—and retain—the very best people into the NHS to provide the very best treatment for those who depend on it.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 20 June 2002

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

LONDON DEVELOPMENT AGENCY BILL (*BY ORDER*)

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Thursday 27 June.

Oral Answers to Questions

TREASURY

The Chancellor of the Exchequer was asked—

World Poverty

1. **Kali Mountford** (Colne Valley): If he will make a statement on the role of the UK in pressing for co-ordinated international action to tackle world poverty. [60335]

13. **Mr. Michael Clapham** (Barnsley, West and Penistone): What assessment he has made of responses to his call for a Marshall plan for the developing world. [60350]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): Last weekend's G7 Finance Ministers meeting in Canada built on the Monterrey commitment of $12 billion a year of additional aid from the United States and Europe by 2006. We endorse the World Bank's fast-tracking initiative to achieve by 2015 primary education for all and the detailed action plan to support full implementation and financing of the heavily indebted poor countries—HIPC—initiative, as well as the new measures for crisis prevention and crisis resolution.

That is part of our commitment to a global new deal or global compact. In return for corruption-free policies of stability and pursuing trade and investment in developing countries, Britain and other countries will make substantial additional commitments to overseas development aid to achieve the 2015 goals.

Kali Mountford: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. I am sure that he and the whole House will agree that not only the House but the international community benefited from the trade justice lobby yesterday. Although I recognise his important role in developing financial governance, transparency of the International Monetary Fund, the millennium development goals and the contingency credit line, those measures all go in one direction—to help countries to help themselves. Is he concerned that some actions of some of the larger member countries of the international community may impose restrictions on trade that would undermine the very measures that he has started?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I know that she has been very active in her constituency in working with non-governmental organisations and Churches in promoting many of the issues. We were all impressed—there is a growing all-party consensus on the matter—by those who came to the House of Commons yesterday and put the case for changes in international as well as domestic policy. She is absolutely right that the $50 billion that is provided in international development aid is in one sense dwarfed by the gain of $150 billion that could come if agricultural subsidies—the matter to which she is referring—were reduced. If we could eliminate the subsidies, we could take 300 million more people out of poverty by those measures alone. I know that there is a recognition of that on both sides of the House.

It is true that many of the countries that my hon. Friend mentioned have taken positions that appear to be protectionist in matters of agricultural policy and in other areas, but it is also true that, when I was at the G7 Finance Ministers meeting, the chairman of the meeting said in his summing up that there had to be more free trade. Equally, in his press conference afterwards, the French Finance Minister called for more open markets for products to help developing countries.

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Clapham is not here, so I call Matthew Taylor.

Matthew Taylor (Truro and St. Austell): The Government's record on debt relief has been very welcome, but as the Chancellor suggests, there is more to it than that. In particular, we must assist developing countries to access overseas markets and trade. Will the Chancellor use his influence to break down the barriers to trade into the European Union, and will he also ensure that, alongside the relief, the Government will work more quickly towards their target of 0.7 per cent. of GDP for overseas aid? On current plans, that would take 100 years to achieve.

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising all those issues. There is a separate question on the specific issue of trade that will be answered later, but I shall deal with his two points about debt relief and funding.

On debt relief, it was agreed last Saturday that we had to complete financing of the HIPC initiative. Some 26 countries have now received debt relief, and perhaps 10 or even more are engaged in conflicts and cannot benefit from debt relief, but could be eligible once they come out of conflict. The total amount of debt relief on offer, therefore, is about $100 billion. We must finance particularly the multilateral institutions' contribution to that debt relief.

We must also ensure that countries that are not performing and that are not giving debt relief at the moment do so, and we propose to name those countries. We also propose to tackle the question of vulture funds, where debt has been transferred to other organisations and companies which then try to charge the full amount of debt. Equally, we must provide additional money from the international community. To make real the promise that we have made to achieve debt relief, additional funds will have to be made available by this Government and other Governments to the World Bank trust fund. It is agreed that we should make those funds available and consider the eventual costs of doing so.

On overseas development aid, the hon. Gentleman will have to be patient and wait for the results of the spending round. We are committed to a substantial increase in development aid. As far as the world community is concerned, the effort to achieve the $50 billion that is necessary every year to finance additional money and to finance the millennium development goals of primary education for all, halving world poverty and a three quarters reduction in infant mortality—they are all achievable by 2015—demands substantial sums of money. We will make our contribution to that. In doing so, we shall call on other countries to make their contribution.

Helen Jones (Warrington, North): My right hon. Friend is well aware of the World Bank's view that to reach the target of halving global poverty by 2015, development aid needs to double. I recognise, as I think the whole House does, the efforts that he has made to achieve that, but what progress has been made on persuading many of our international partners, especially the United States, that they too must increase their aid budgets?

Mr. Brown: My hon. Friend will be interested to know that yesterday the United States Administration said that in addition to the $5 billion additional aid that they were committing from 2006, they were also going to provide an additional $500 million to deal specifically with HIV/AIDS. They announced that in advance of the G8 summit that will take place in Canada in the next few days. In other words, the combined amount of money now pledged by Europe and America is in the order of $12 billion. That is not near the $50 billion that we require, but for the first time in 20 years the amount of money to be provided by the world community for overseas aid is rising, not falling.

We have to address how to convert the commitment to the $12 billion additional money into the far higher sum that is needed. It is absolutely true that the World Bank has pointed out that to achieve the education goals alone will require $10 billion. We fully intend to play our part in making sure that that funding is available.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): May I offer my support to the Chancellor and other Finance Ministers for their work on development issues and welcome the progress made in Canada last weekend, in particular on primary school education? The Chancellor is right to say that there is a cross-party consensus on those issues. The hon. Member for Colne Valley (Kali Mountford) is also right to talk about the restrictions on free trade, which are having an extremely detrimental effect.

What further progress does the Chancellor envisage on trade liberalisation, which offers the greatest hope for alleviating hunger and poverty, as he said? How will he fulfil the Prime Minister's pledge at his party conference to offer Africa access to our markets so that we practise free trade as well as preach it? Will he ensure that the issue is pressed at the European Union meeting in Seville later this week and also at the forthcoming G8 and World Trade Organisation meetings?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to the right hon. and learned Gentleman for raising the issue in that way. We are determined to press, and continue to press, for reform in the treatment of agricultural subsidies. There was an agreement at Doha on the reduction and then eventual elimination of agricultural subsidies. That has to be followed through. A paper on EU agricultural reform is to be produced in July which will deal with cereals, direct payments, modulation and degressivity. All those issues will have to be dealt with and it is essential that the EU does that before enlargement, as the right hon. and learned Gentleman knows.

As far as the general climate on trade is concerned, it is often the case that, in the US, proposals on steel and farm subsidies, for instance, come in advance of the President asking for a fast-track authority to agree substantial concessions and a reduction in subsidies and tariffs. I hope that that is the case. What I can say is that all the members present in Canada were concerned that if the world is to recover economically and if that recovery is to benefit the developing countries, liberalisation of trade is essential, as all the signatories to the communiqué agreed.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is my right hon. Friend aware that his language of hope is in sharp contrast with what happened in 1992, when we could not have given a ha'penny to any third world country because of the 15 per cent. interest rates and the fact that we were skint? We have to have money to be able to hand it out. The same was true in 1976, when we had to borrow from the International Monetary Fund. We are now helping out 22 of the world's poorest countries, so we do not need any lessons from the Tories. The trade lobby yesterday was encouraging because the people in it knew that to resolve the problems we need a Government who will ensure that we have money in the back pocket to help the poorest out there in the third world.

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for bringing the House back to its usual discussion of the differences between party policies, as well as the similarities. I hope that the shadow Chancellor agrees that if hon. Members on both sides of the House commit Britain to the millennium development goals, they will have to be financed by additional resources. The $50 billion has been identified as the figure that has to be met and Britain will have to provide substantial additional development aid to do that. I hope that when Members of the House supported the lobby or its intentions yesterday, they also supported the commitment that their parties will back additional development aid.

Sir Peter Tapsell (Louth and Horncastle): Does the Chancellor feel any guilt about the fact that we would today have £320 million more of wealth to help to tackle world poverty if he had not sold our gold at the bottom of the market and against my expert advice?

Mr. Brown: It is surprising that the hon. Gentleman's expert advice was not listened to by the previous

Conservative Government, because they could have made substantial amounts of money if they had sold at any time between 1979 and 1997.

Manufacturing

2. **Mr. James Gray** (North Wiltshire): What recent representations he has received on the impact of his policies on manufacturing industry; and if he will make a statement. [60337]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Paul Boateng): The Chancellor receives regular representations on a variety of topics, including manufacturing. The Government have embarked on an ambitious programme of economic reform, which, having served as a solid and stable foundation for the economy, now provides the best basis for manufacturing output to recover, through 2002 and into 2003, from the sharp slowdown that has affected the world economy in the past year.

Mr. Gray: The Minister may not yet have had a chance to read the excellent report that arrived on my desk this morning, but perhaps he will find an early opportunity to do so. The report, produced by Great Western Enterprise and entitled "Economic Prospects for Chippenham", says that manufacturing industries in the area are declining, in both relative and absolute terms. It states:

> "Large-scale closures in Chippenham and North Wiltshire, e.g. NHS Logistics, Dyson Ltd and Lucent Technologies are of concern."

It goes on to talk about the levels of taxation and bureaucracy that have caused that large-scale decline. Does the Minister accept any personal responsibility for the fact that manufacturing is, and has been for 12 months, in recession?

Mr. Boateng: We have cut the burden of regulation. *[Laughter.]* Oh yes we have. We make no apology whatsoever for what we have done on the minimum wage. We make no apology for what we have done to promote fairness at work. As for the regulation that has been imposed on industry and business over the year, this Government have done more than any other to put in place the means by which it can be checked, so we rebut that allegation.

I very much look forward to learning more from that report about what is happening in Chippenham. However, I hope that the hon. Gentleman, in the spirit of generosity for which he is well known, will at least acknowledge what has been done by this Government, including the action by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to support regional development agencies. In addition, in the past week, the south-west manufacturing advisory service has opened in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. It will fund a team of five experts, who are already in place, to provide practical advice to manufacturers in the region. That addresses the real issues that face manufacturing and builds on the stability that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has given the economy. This is something that the hon. Gentleman should welcome, instead of criticising as he has done.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his promotion. Does he recognise that in constituencies such as mine manufacturing is extremely important to the local economy and for maintaining employment? Will he confirm that he recognises that the aerospace industry in particular has had difficulties since 11 September, that it remains the Government's policy to ensure that industry can overcome those problems, and that the Government continue to be ready to discuss the problems faced by industry in both the short term and the long term?

Mr. Boateng: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the generosity of his remarks. I know that he takes a particular interest in manufacturing and in the aircraft industry, and we share that interest. In the aftermath of 11 September, we have given the industry specific help on insurance. He will know that it is also benefiting from the tax credits that we have provided for research and development to promote the industry's productivity and build on its high skills. That is the best way to give manufacturing a long-term competitive advantage against our rivals.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): With Welsh manufacturing industry in sharp decline, thousands of jobs have been lost over the past five years. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that objective 1 funding will help provide infrastructure to boost the Welsh gross domestic product? Will he or his right hon. Friend the Chancellor please confirm, therefore, that Wales will receive full public expenditure cover of £170 million from Europe, plus £100 million match-funding from central Government, which we were not given last year because we were sold short? Will the right hon. Gentleman redouble his efforts to ensure that that does not happen this year?

Mr. Boateng: I must resist the temptation, however beguiling, to make public spending announcements at this stage. The hon. Gentleman well knows that we are working closely with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and with the Welsh Executive to do all that we can to support manufacturing in Wales. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept that additional jobs have come on stream since the Government came to power in 1997, and recognise the real gains that have been made as a result of the steps that we have taken in terms of macro-economic reform, and the excellent work that is being done in Wales between the Executive and the Government to promote the Welsh economy.

Mr. Chris Mole (Ipswich): Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the planks of the Government's support for manufacturing industry has been the provision of resources to regional development agencies in order to establish centres for manufacturing excellence? Does he also agree that the Conservatives' proposals to abolish RDAs would undermine the ability of our regions to support their manufacturing sectors?

Mr. Boateng: That is undoubtedly the case. Nothing undermined manufacturing more than the boom and bust that characterised the previous Conservative Administration. We have sought, particularly in respect of small and medium-sized enterprises, to build on the platform of stability that has characterised the first five years of this Administration, and to take SMEs forward by means of the RDAs, the research and development tax credit, and the mechanisms that we are introducing to reduce the tax burden on business. All that is good news for manufacturing and has contributed to the record number of jobs that are now enjoyed by our constituents throughout the country.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): I congratulate the Chief Secretary warmly on his appointment. I relish jousting with him, but I gently remind him that last year there were an extra 4,642 regulations impacting on business.

> "They're incompetent when it comes to governing. They don't care about manufacturing. They don't understand business. The end result is that my members' jobs are going down the plughole and this government isn't lifting a finger to help".

Given that that was the recent verdict in the *Financial Times* of the general secretary of the Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union, the Chancellor's friend, Sir Ken Jackson, what need does the Chancellor have of any enemies?

Mr. Boateng: I only wish that the generosity of the hon. Gentleman's opening remarks had been reflected in the rest of his comments. What he clearly overlooks is the fact that it is this Government who have created a record number of jobs—more than a million new jobs created since 1997. It is this Government who have created, for the first time, the basis of stability that enables us now to tackle the deficit in productivity that existed over so many years when the Opposition had the administration of the economy. As a result, the most recent survey on the subject by Lloyds TSB can say that growth in productivity has accelerated to its fastest pace in more than two and a half years. That is progress. The Opposition would take us back to the past, and that would be a disaster.

World Poverty

3. **Judy Mallaber** (Amber Valley): If he will make a statement on his recent action to encourage international trade with a view to reducing poverty in the world's poorest countries. [60338]

5. **Mr. Andrew Love** (Edmonton): If he will make a statement on his recent action to encourage international trade with a view to reduction of poverty in the poorest countries. [60340]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): Our policy for a successful resolution of the World Trade Organisation development trade round includes negotiated reductions in agricultural export subsidies, with a view to phasing them out, and the granting of duty-free and quota-free access to the least developed countries for all exports except arms, and it will require finance to build the capacity of developing countries so that they can participate fully and effectively in the forthcoming negotiations. In order to discuss those issues after yesterday's justice for trade lobby at Westminster, the Secretaries of State for International Development and for Trade and Industry and I will meet representatives from Churches and NGOs on 25 July.

Judy Mallaber: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. In particular, I welcome the proposals to help those countries to increase their capacity and to engage in the multilateral talks. What is his estimate of the progress that has been made in convincing the international community of the need to make the international trading rules fairer to poorer countries, in the light of the comments made by yesterday's magnificent lobby?

On a different but connected note, will my right hon. Friend also discuss with his colleagues in the Department of Trade and Industry what further help is needed by our textiles and clothing industry, which has suffered massive job losses in the past 20 years as a result of changes in international trading patterns, so that it can reposition itself in the market by developing new high value-added products and areas of work?

Mr. Brown: My hon. Friend will know of the textile and clothing industry forum—a partnership that is considering supply chain relationships in the industry to improve its efficiency and competitiveness. The project is worth £3.8 million and is led by the British Clothing Industry Association. On the problems faced in relation to textiles as a result of the openness of international markets, we as a Government will do what we can to work with British textile producers to see what can be done. She is absolutely right that we also need evidence that there will be progress in meeting the ambitious aims set down at Doha. Thirty years ago, the 49 poorest countries in the world had 3 per cent. of world trade. They now have 0.5 per cent., so there is an enormous challenge to be met. One of the things that we will do is help financially developing countries to play their full part by having the capacity effectively to negotiate in the trade round.

Mr. Love: International trade is growing and I believe that the European Union has a role to play in ensuring that the poorest countries benefit from that. International trade should be happening for poor countries and not to them. In that regard, what action is my right hon. Friend taking to speed up the removal of all the tariff barriers that impede the trade of poor countries?

Mr. Brown: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That issue confronts an existing policy of the European Union—the common agricultural policy. As was said earlier, the talks held this weekend in Seville will be followed by publication by the European Union of a paper on the common agricultural policy. I believe that we can make progress on cereals, direct payments and the modulation changes that have been recommended before. It is very important that we recognise that an agricultural budget that takes up 50 per cent. of European Union resources, keeps prices artificially high in our countries, and makes it difficult for the poorest countries to enter the markets is unfair to everybody and must be reformed. These proposals—and in their more radical form—will be supported by this country in the negotiations.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): Further to that answer, can the Chancellor offer us a personal prediction of when the trade barriers imposed by the EU will finally disappear? As he said in giving his figures on world trade, they have held the developing world in poverty for many years. Does he have any idea when those barriers will disappear?

Mr. Brown: We have many targets, but for me to set a target for what 15 member states of the European Union can agree in a very short time is very difficult indeed. The hon. Gentleman must reflect on the fact that, in 18 years of Conservative government, the amount spent on agricultural subsidies increased dramatically, rather than being reduced. It is in all our interests that we push the matter forward. There must be progress before enlargement and because the Doha talks resume next March. He should be encouraged by the fact that not only the Canadians, who were chairing the G7 meeting, but the French and others who were present, signed up again to the liberalisation of these markets. That is very important indeed.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): Is the Chancellor confident that he can convince his fellow Ministers at the forthcoming G8 meeting that the World Trade Organisation should sign up to the international development targets that are already agreed to by the United Nations and other multilateral agencies?

Mr. Brown: Every international organisation of substance—the IMF, the OECD, the UN and the World Bank—have already signed up to the development goals. That is implicit in the work that is being done to prepare for the next stage of the world trade round.

I think that the hon. Lady knows that unlike many other international organisations, the WTO is in a sense a one member, one vote organisation. The role of developing countries in setting the terms of negotiation and the final outcome can be extremely important. I do not think, therefore, that it will be difficult to persuade members of the WTO that the world development goals are important and should be signed up to. I think that the hon. Lady knows also of the challenges to persuade these countries to take the action that is necessary and—I put this to all right hon. and hon. Members—and to provide the necessary resources.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): My right hon. Friend may be aware that Horst Köhler, the managing director of the IMF, has kindly agreed to appear before the Treasury Committee in the next two weeks. In advance of that appearance, will my right hon. Friend support the proposals of Mr. Köhler's deputy, Ann Kruger, for a bankruptcy court for defaulting countries, so that they do not slide further into poverty and ruin their international trade? Is that not the proper approach for crisis prevention rather than merely crisis resolution?

Mr. Brown: I hope that Mr. Köhler will enjoy his appearances before the Treasury Committee as much as I do. I look forward to hearing what he has to say. It may interest the House to know that there was agreement at the G7 meeting in Halifax, Canada last weekend—for the first time in all the meetings I have attended—on the measures that must be taken for crisis prevention and crisis resolution. That will include international bankruptcy proceedings.

These things are far more relevant to emerging market economies than they are to developing countries. However, a far greater role is included for surveillance, so that we are aware of what the problems are in individual countries before crises hit us. There is a far greater role for publicising what is really happening so that we do not get Argentina-type crises hitting us without prior warning, and for prior work to avoid them. There will be a far better resolution of crises once this happens. By improving crises prevention mechanisms, we will help not only emerging market countries such as Argentina, but the poorest countries in Africa.

Climate Change Levy

6. **Mr. Laurence Robertson** (Tewkesbury): What recent representations he has had from manufacturing industry on the impact of the climate change levy. [60342]

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Healey): As part of the normal process of contact with business, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Treasury ministerial team have met a variety of businesses and business organisations and have heard a range of representations, including those on the climate change levy.

Mr. Robertson: I am grateful for that reply. I suppose that the Minister will have met the Engineering Employers Federation, among other organisations. The federation has said that the climate change levy impedes manufacturing initiative and enterprise. Given the problems caused by the weakness of the euro and the decline that has continued in the manufacturing industry, do not the Government rather regret introducing the climate change levy, which is yet another problem that manufacturing industry has had to face?

John Healey: On the contrary, all sectors have a part to play in reducing carbon emissions, which are a major part of climate change challenges. All revenues to the Treasury have been recycled as a result of the climate change levy. There have been national insurance contribution cuts and a significant boost to energy efficiency support. It is important, as the Engineering Employers Federation will recognise, not to look at one tax alone. The level of business taxation means that, with corporation tax cuts, we have the lowest rates ever in the UK.

The federation will know also that research and development tax credits mean that large companies and small companies, especially in manufacturing, are benefiting. That has been welcomed. The OECD recognises that business tax rates in the UK are lower than those of 12 of our EU competitor countries.

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): Along with my other north Staffordshire colleagues, I have been having close talks with the ceramic industry across the region. Contrary to the Luddite approach that we have heard from Opposition Members, that industry in the potteries is saying that it is at the forefront of helping this country to meet its international obligations.

Will my hon. Friend recognise that where we have carbon trading and a September end of year, as in the pottery industry, it is essential that as well as informal guidance we also have precise rules, so that the companies that will need to buy carbon credits know exactly how they can meet their targets and how, more importantly, they can benefit from the rebate? When can we have these rules?

John Healey: I am glad to hear that businesses in my hon. Friend's constituency are keen to play a part in reducing carbon emissions to help to address the climate change challenges. The climate change levy has been operational only since 1 April last year. It needs longer to bed down, but, in keeping with all other taxation, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor keeps the detailed operation and the impact of the levy under constant review as part of the normal budget process.

Manufacturing

7. **Mr. Jonathan Djanogly** (Huntingdon): What recent bilateral discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry regarding how his policies are affecting manufacturing industry. [60343]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): I meet the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry regularly to discuss a wide range of issues, such as the future of manufacturing industry and the measures that we took in the Budget, including the research and development tax credit.

Mr. Djanogly: The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that manufacturing productivity in this country is suffering. The Government's own manufacturing strategy document states:

> "It is now 55 per cent. higher in the United States than in the UK, 32 per cent. higher in France and 29 per cent. higher in Germany."

My understanding is that the position is getting worse all the time. When I speak to businesses in my constituency, they complain about the increase in taxes and regulations, yet this document does not even mention either of those issues. Will the right hon. Gentleman tell me what conversations he has had with the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, how they intend to resolve the problems facing businesses, and why those issues are not even mentioned in his own strategy document?

Mr. Brown: In the Budget, we announced the first major simplification of the VAT regime as it affects small businesses. For the first time, instead of having to produce every estimate for every transaction, a percentage figure is being applied to the VAT bills for small businesses. This is a major simplification measure—which we hope to extend to other areas—affecting more than 500,000 companies. We are alert to the need for simplification, and we will continue to pursue that.

I think that the hon. Gentleman will find that, when he talks to businesses in his constituency, what they want most of all is economic stability. The fact that, as a result of making the Bank of England independent and of the new fiscal and monetary regime that we have introduced, we have had greater stability over the last five years than we had in the previous 18 years, shows the value of policies for stability against the old boom and bust.

Mr. Stephen McCabe (Birmingham, Hall Green): Does my right hon. Friend agree that criticisms of Government policy of the kind that we have just heard from the hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Djanogly) and, earlier, from the shadow jouster—or should that be "jester"?—from Buckingham, would have much greater impact, were it not for the fact that manufacturing productivity is actually up 12 per cent. on the figure that we inherited in 1997, and that exports are up almost 20 per cent. over the same period? This contrasts sharply with the 700,000 jobs lost and the 5.3 per cent. drop in output when the present shadow Chancellor was the Minister responsible for these matters.

Mr. Brown: I have to disappoint my hon. Friend: it was a million jobs that were lost under the shadow Chancellor, and he should continue to apologise to the House for his performance as Secretary of State for Employment. So far as manufacturing is concerned, the first thing that we had to do was to create more stability. There has certainly been an increase in employment overall in the economy. Equally, we have created a better environment for investment through reforms in corporation tax and capital gains tax. Yes, there is an all-party interest in boosting productivity growth in the economy, and I hope that the Opposition will support the measures that we have taken in the Budget.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): Does the Chancellor recognise the real concern in the manufacturing organisations that support the oil industry—and in the North sea oil industry as a whole—about the adverse effect that his budgetary tax changes will have on that industry? Will he now reconsider those measures, and will he listen to the cross-party campaign to encourage him, at the very least, to delay them until a full economic impact assessment can be made?

Mr. Brown: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not fall for the propaganda of some organisations in that area. He knows perfectly well, if he has looked at the detail, that the 100 per cent. investment allowance for the development of new oil fields will make it more profitable to develop new oil fields in the future, not less.

As for the resource take from the North sea, our tax regime is more favourable than that of other countries. If the hon. Gentleman does not want us to go ahead with that tax proposal, he will have to explain to the House how he would raise the £500 million that is going into our public services.

Charlotte Atkins (Staffordshire, Moorlands): What success has my right hon. Friend had in encouraging manufacturing to take up information and communications technology much more effectively? Is he aware of such initiatives as the e-bus in my constituency, which is promoted by Leek college and Advantage West Midlands, and provides a mobile facility for micro and small businesses? It has 10 ICT terminals, and aims to encourage training, especially among micro-businesses, which to date have been poor at taking up ICT challenges.

Mr. Brown: I have not yet been on the e-bus, but I am interested that there are so many different initiatives as a result of our computer learning proposals. Council houses have been allocated for computer learning centres, BBC local studios have become computer learning centres and they have been set up in colleges, schools and other public places. With the mobile computer learning centres, we are trying to diffuse computer literacy education throughout the country. That is absolutely crucial for business, which is why there is 100 per cent. tax relief for businesses that adopt new computer and information technology. Although it is costly in lost revenue, I hope that both sides of the House will support expenditure on that.

Financial Mis-selling

8. **Dr. Vincent Cable** (Twickenham): What assessment he has made of the performance of the Financial Services Authority in protecting consumers from financial mis-selling. [60344]

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): The Financial Services Authority has statutory objectives to secure appropriate consumer protection, taking account of the costs and benefits of regulation, and to promote public understanding of the financial system. The FSA reviews its performance in its annual report, which will be laid before Parliament later today.

Dr. Cable: Will the Minister explain the difference between the commission-driven mis-selling of millions of pensions, which led Treasury Ministers to name and shame the worst offenders, and the commission-driven mis-selling of millions of endowments, as a result of which many of our constituents have not been able to repay their mortgages, but the FSA, backed by the Government, is refusing to name the worst offenders?

Dawn Primarolo: In some 80 per cent. of cases in which pensions were mis-sold, it was as a direct result of advisers. There are far fewer such instances in cases of mis-selling of endowment mortgages, and the compensation required is smaller. Of course, the FSA is active in ensuring that people with mortgage endowments know where they stand and how to complain. It is requiring firms to resolve areas of significant consumer detriment, and pockets of mis-selling and mis-pricing of products are being investigated. Some 218,000 policies have already been investigated, and compensation has been made available.

Mr. Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith): My hon. Friend will be aware of the scandals involving split-capital investment trusts. One of my constituents tells me that she has lost 96 per cent. of the value of her investment with the Aberdeen investment trust, which is part of the Aberdeen asset management group. She made that investment believing that it was low risk, and it was intended to pay for her elderly mother's nursing home fees. Will my hon. Friend urge the FSA as soon as possible to complete its investigation into the split-capital investment trusts scandal? Will she also join me in urging the Aberdeen asset management group to compensate my constituent and the many thousands of people up and down the country who have similarly lost as a result of the mis-selling of investments?

Dawn Primarolo: I understand the seriousness of the position that my hon. Friend illustrated with his constituent's experience of split-capital investment trusts. Although the FSA does not directly regulate that area, it has been investigating such trusts since last year. It will look particularly at marketing material, collusion between managers of split funds and mis-selling by advisers. As for my hon. Friend's constituent, of course she must take up her complaint with the firm. When firms cannot resolve complaints themselves, those complaints can be referred to the Financial Ombudsman Service. However, the FSA is pressing ahead with that review as quickly as possible.

Savings

9. **Mr. David Ruffley** (Bury St. Edmunds): What recent representations he has received regarding his policy on savings; and if he will make a statement. [60345]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Ruth Kelly): Treasury Ministers receive representations covering a wide range of issues including savings. The Government recognise the value of saving and asset ownership. Our policy is to create the right environment for savings and incentives for people to save, and ensure that all individuals have the information and skills to make the right savings choices.

Mr. Ruffley: Since Labour came to office, the savings ratio has crashed from just over 10 per cent. to just over 5 per cent. Will the Minister say sorry to British savers?

Ruth Kelly: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is not claiming that a high savings ratio under the previous Government is anything to be proud of. It was driven by households retrenching and building up their savings as boom and bust destroyed confidence. We are determined not to return to that. Of course, we accept that individuals need to save more and we have a comprehensive strategy to raise the rate of savings. We have introduced individual savings accounts, stakeholder policies and across the board we are looking at ways of encouraging individuals to save more. I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not claiming any success for the previous Government in that area.

Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): My hon. Friend will know that for many people the primary source of savings is the value of their home, which is not included in the savings ratio. Does she accept that it is worth the Government looking at the value of people's homes in aggregate savings so that we can measure realistically the move from investment in pensions to investment in new homes?

Ruth Kelly: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point and is right to point out that net wealth has indeed risen under this Government. We must ensure that we have a platform of macro-economic stability, the right savings incentives and a comprehensive strategy to encourage savings, which is precisely what we are doing.

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): Does the Minister agree that the policies that do most to boost long-term savings encourage people to opt out of the unfunded state pension system into genuine savings in occupational and personal pensions, for which they receive national insurance rebates, which now amount to £6 billion per year? Will she contrast the Conservative policy of putting £6 billion into genuine savings for pensions with the £5 billion of tax taken out of pensions by the Robert Maxwell memorial tax—the abolition of advance corporation tax on pension funds, which is Labour's response to our measures?

Ruth Kelly: The right hon. Gentleman must surely realise that when he was Secretary of State for Social Security in the previous Government, hundreds of thousands of pensioners were forced into poverty. To ensure that pensioners share in the country's rising prosperity, we are spending an extra £6 billion every year on them from this April, which is over £3.5 billion more than, for example, if we had merely restored the link between pensions and earnings which, of course, the Opposition broke when they were in power. We are determined to ensure that pensioners do not fall into poverty in their old age and have the right incentives to save in future.

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): I know that my hon. Friend will be as concerned as I was in reading the report from Oliver, Wyman and Co. commissioned by the Association of British Insurers which showed that a £27 billion savings gap is accruing. Does she agree that financial services companies need to provide three things in their products to ensure that that is tackled effectively? I call them the three Cs. The first is clarity of financial product and the second comparability across the financial products range. Will my hon. Friend commend the work—[HON. MEMBERS: "That is only two."] I shall come on to the third one. Will my hon. Friend commend the work of the Pensions Protection Investments Accreditation Board to ensure that the first two Cs are achieved. The third C is suitability—I was always better at numbers than English.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Perhaps the third point can wait until I call the hon. Gentleman again.

Ruth Kelly: My hon. Friend made several interesting points. He is right that clarity, simplicity, transparency and the ability to understand products are at the heart of encouraging and of making it easier for people to save. It is a fact that the selling process can be so complicated and over-burdensome that it effectively disfranchises certain groups from saving. We are committed to tackling that problem and to introducing greater simplicity and clarity to the sales process. We have commissioned Ron Sandler at the Treasury to examine how to empower the consumer and to create greater competition in the market, and the Inland Revenue to examine how the tax system behind pensions, for example, can be simplified, so that greater clarity and simplicity can be introduced.

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): At least in the past, the Government used to stress that an adequate level of savings was crucial to economic stability. The £5 billion pension tax grab has led not just to the pension crisis, but to a reduction in pension savings with the closure of final salary schemes. The savings rate has collapsed to a forecast 3.75 per cent this year. What level of savings do the Government think is consistent with avoiding boom and bust?

Ruth Kelly: It is a bit rich to take lessons from the hon. Gentleman about how to avoid boom and bust. Interest rates are at their lowest level for 40 years. Underlying inflation is at its lowest level for almost 40 years and employment has risen by 1.5 million since 1997.

The hon. Gentleman asks about our policies on tax credits. Tax credits on pension funds were part of a wide package of corporation tax reforms, which removed a distortion in the tax system and which will encourage long-term investment. He asks how we are going to encourage savings. Earlier, I laid out in a reasonable fashion our policies on raising savings. At the same time, we are the party determined to combat pensioner poverty. It is a bit rich for hon. Members to go on about how to avoid boom and bust.

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): I support entirely what my hon. Friend has said, but does she agree that the one thing that should not happen is a rise in interest rates, at least in the short term, because inflation is low, the needs of manufacturing are still acute and there are recessionary trends in the world? Does she agree that we should applaud the Monetary Policy Committee for keeping interest rates down?

Ruth Kelly: I agree with my hon. Friend that we should applaud the Monetary Policy Committee, which was a welcome innovation. It introduced a degree of stability in interest rates and inflation over the longer term. I take his specific points about interest rates as representations that he should probably make directly to Monetary Policy Committee members as they consider the next interest rate move.

Advance Corporation Tax

10. **Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown** (Cotswold): What estimate he has made of the cost of the ACT changes since 1997 on the cost of public sector pension fund contributions. [60347]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Paul Boateng): The abolition of payable tax credits removed a major distortion in the tax system that encouraged companies to pay out their profits as dividends rather than retain them for investment, and were part of a wider package of corporation tax reforms that included tax cuts. No estimate has been made of the impact of the corporate taxation changes since 1997 on public sector pension schemes.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I add my personal congratulations to the Minister, whom I always had satisfactory dealings with in his previous offices, so perhaps he will be able to give me a satisfactory answer to my question. He will be aware that the ACT changes as they reflect public sector pension contributions have put a particular burden on the local authority budget.

Indeed, it has been estimated that the increase in contributions has amounted to a council tax increase of 1.5 per cent. Taken together with the increases in national insurance, that has a considerable impact on every departmental budget. Does he agree that the comprehensive spending review will have to be increased by several billion pounds merely to fund these two taxes alone, or will the Treasury tax the Deputy Prime Minister's Department to pay its own taxes?

Mr. Boateng: The hon. Gentleman is very generous—one tries to give satisfaction—but I am afraid that he will find my answer to his question far from satisfactory. The reality is that, under this Government, local government settlements have been generous, compared with those that were reached when his party had stewardship of the economy. To suggest otherwise flies in the face of all reason. He will understand why I do not intend to anticipate the comprehensive spending review, save to say that I am sure that local government will be satisfied.

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): May I also congratulate my right hon. Friend on his wider responsibilities? He has yet to fail to satisfy me—[HON. MEMBERS: "Ooh."]—although my needs are few. Will he acknowledge, however, that public sector pension schemes are likely to be the last bastion of salary-related schemes? Most public sector schemes are not funded, and are therefore completely unaffected by the tax changes that Opposition Members have drawn attention to. Will he ensure that, as part of the Government's policy, they will defend public sector salary-related pension schemes, funded or otherwise, particularly in areas such as health, education, and—importantly—the fire and police services?

Mr. Boateng: My hon. Friend, who is a distinguished member of the Treasury Committee, is very kind. I always take seriously the representations that he makes, and I shall certainly take that one seriously. He is absolutely right about unfunded schemes: contrary to Opposition Members' frequent suggestions, they are not affected. Would that they realised that, because they are giving a distorted picture of the reality on the ground.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): May I add my congratulations to the Chief Secretary and welcome him to his new position? In retrospect, are he and the Chancellor proud of the £5 billion a year tax hit that was imposed on pension funds, including public sector ones, in 1997?

Mr. Boateng: The right hon. and learned Gentleman is courteous, as always. However, to describe what happened as a tax hit, a stealth tax or a raid on pensions—he has done all those things—is as absurd as it is simplistic. He knows that that is not true, and nor should he forget the cuts in corporation tax. In the longer term, investment performance is likely to improve as a result of these measures, so the situation is far from what he describes.

The key is stability, avoiding the boom and bust that characterised the time when his party were in government, and avoiding the mass unemployment that he presided over as Secretary of State for Employment. He needs to realise that this Government have provided 1.5 million new jobs for the economy, and that his Government took away many more.

Mr. Howard: Yesterday, the Prime Minister said that the stock market was massively up on where it was five years ago, but in fact, it is down by 2 per cent. When he made that statement, was he accurately reflecting what the Chancellor was whispering in his ear, or are the Chief Secretary and the Chancellor now among the 56 per cent. of the electorate who do not regard the Prime Minister as honest or trustworthy?

Mr. Boateng: The Prime Minister is both those things. He was absolutely right: the stock market is £300 billion net up on what we inherited. That is the truth of the situation. Why does the right hon. and learned Gentleman not have the grace to recognise it?

Operations in Afghanistan

12.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the contribution that British forces have made to operations in Afghanistan, and the future disposition of our forces there.

Two groups of British forces have been deployed in Afghanistan, with separate but closely complementary aims—security assistance to the Afghan Interim Administration, and offensive operations against al-Qaeda and the Taliban. The United Kingdom has contributed to the International Security Assistance Force, ISAF, which we have led since its inception, and through Task Force Jacana we have contributed to Operation Enduring Freedom, aimed at al-Qaeda.

I shall address ISAF first. The House will recall that, from the outset, we planned to reduce our contribution to ISAF once we had transferred its leadership to one of our partners. That has taken longer than we originally anticipated, but we had to get it right: ISAF's success has been crucial to the stability of Kabul and, more widely, to Afghanistan, a strategic aim that is profoundly important to the United Kingdom.

I told the House on 16 May that we were working towards achieving the handover of the command of ISAF by the end of June. I am pleased to be able to tell the House that command of ISAF was formally transferred from General McColl to General Zorlu of the Turkish Army a few hours ago, in a ceremony attended by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence and the Chief of the General Staff.

Let me take this opportunity to record our thanks for the considerable efforts that Turkey has made to ensure a successful handover. The United States has also made a significant contribution to the process, not least by providing strategic airlift to move Turkish troops to Kabul. For our part, we have agreed to leave computer and communications equipment and a fire engine in Afghanistan for use by the new ISAF headquarters. Some British troops will remain with ISAF as well; I will say more about that later.

No one who has been involved—and the British and Turkish staffs have been working closely together for some time now—can doubt the great importance that Turkey attaches to a successful tenure in command. We have every confidence in General Zorlu and his troops as they build on and take forward the excellent work that ISAF has already achieved.

ISAF under General McColl has been a great success. It is no exaggeration to say that the force, while limited geographically to the area of Kabul, has had an impact right across Afghanistan. The emergency Loya Jirga and its local and regional groups would have been impossible without the reassurance, stability and sense of normality that ISAF helped the Afghan Interim Administration bring to Kabul; and without a secure place where representatives of all Afghanistan's people could meet to discuss how they want to govern their country, the gains of the past nine months could have been lost. Members of our armed forces who have been involved with ISAF should feel proud of what they have achieved. They have the thanks of the House, and indeed of the British people.

The emergency Loya Jirga, which concluded this morning, offered the Afghan people their first opportunity in decades to play a decisive role in choosing their Government. That demonstrates the great progress that has been made since the collapse of the Taliban. Less than a year ago, the lives of the Afghan people were blighted by that cruel regime. It is a remarkable tribute to the decisive coalition action against the Taliban, to the Afghan people, and to the Interim Administration under Hamid Karzai that within only six months this large and peaceful assembly, representing all the Afghan people, has met in Kabul.

The Loya Jirga has given the Afghan people the chance to build a future based on mutual respect, human rights and democracy. It is a significant step towards the goal of representative, democratic elections, which are due to be held in 2004.

As for the emergency Loya Jirga itself, I warmly welcome its decision to elect Hamid Karzai as Afghanistan's head of state. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has written on behalf of the Government to congratulate him personally. Hamid Karzai risked his life to play a crucial role in the early stages of rebuilding Afghanistan. He deserves, and gets, our full support.

Through a combination of tact, diplomacy, understanding and firm authority, ISAF has made a real difference on the ground. In the six months that it has been in Kabul, it has mounted 2,185 joint patrols with the Afghan police, increasing security on the streets of Kabul. It has destroyed or disposed of nearly 3 million munitions, including guided weapons, fuses, rockets, submunitions, bombs, shells, small arms ammunition, mortar bombs, grenades and both anti-tank and anti-personnel land mines. Indeed, nearly 80 per cent. of all the munitions destroyed were anti-personnel land mines—on its own, a massive contribution towards the safety of the Afghan people.

ISAF has operated an ambulance service across Kabul throughout the night-time curfew. It has begun the process of reforming Afghanistan's security sector through the training of the 1st Battalion of the Afghan National Guard. It has completed some 200 aid projects in co-operation with the local civil authorities and other agencies, repairing roads, utilities, health, education and administrative services.

All this has made a real improvement to the lives of the people of Kabul. There is still more to do, but Kabul is again a bustling city. The vast majority of the people recognise, value and support ISAF's work. The warm welcome that its patrols receive on the streets is proof enough of that, as I have seen for myself.

This is, of course, not simply a British achievement. ISAF is a truly multinational force. Nineteen other countries answered the call to provide forces. The United States has given invaluable assistance and help. Without the efforts of all those nations, ISAF would not have been the success that it has been, but we should certainly take pride in the particular British contribution to the force. General McColl and the British contingent have made a lasting and favourable impression on the Afghan people. Thanks to the efforts of British service men and women, we now have many friends in Afghanistan, from children on the streets of Kabul to the most senior members of the Afghan Administration.

The House will be pleased to know that the 1st Battalion, the Royal Anglian Regiment will come home once it has completed transferring its responsibilities to the Turkish battle group that is replacing it. Together with many of the British forces committed to ISAF, it will have returned to the United Kingdom by the middle of next month, but that is not the end of our involvement with ISAF. It remains vital to the maintenance of security in Kabul and a stable future for Afghanistan.

The United Kingdom will remain a major contributing nation. In total, our contribution will reduce from about 1,300 to about 400 troops, who will be primarily engineers and logistics support troops—high value specialists, who can bring important expertise that will be of specific use to ISAF.

There is now a degree of optimism in Afghanistan that was unthinkable just a few months ago, and ISAF has played a major role in creating a more secure environment, but although Kabul is a safer place and Afghanistan as a whole is more secure, there is still a terrorist threat. The mountainous and inaccessible regions remain an ideal hiding place for the al-Qaeda and Taliban forces that are working to destroy that new found sense of security. That was why we deployed Task Force Jacana—a 1,700 strong battle group formed around 45 Commando Royal Marines—at the request of the United States.

There is no doubt that al-Qaeda has been dealt a shattering blow by the coalition military action, but elements of al-Qaeda remain. Recent arrests in Morocco and the United States have demonstrated that al-Qaeda retains both the ambition and the capacity to threaten, and take, many lives. It is striving every day to find ways to use that capacity, including in Afghanistan.

The future of Afghanistan now looks brighter than it has for some time. A significant milestone has been passed successfully with the conclusion of the Loya Jirga, but al-Qaeda has not gone away; we know that it has been determined to undermine and derail that rebuilding process. The presence of Royal Marines and others on the ground in eastern Afghanistan has helped to prevent al-Qaeda from achieving that. Our forces have denied ground to al-Qaeda remnants and destroyed terrorist infrastructure. They have been crucial in providing a secure environment for the emergency Loya Jirga to take place.

The four operations conducted by Task Force Jacana—Ptarmigan, Snipe, Condor and, most recently, Buzzard—have involved destroying 28 bunkers and caves; flying more than 1,000 helicopter sorties in the Chinooks of 27 Squadron, in an environment so demanding that it required us to operate at the edge of the aircraft's capabilities; and finding and destroying 45,000 rounds of munitions, from machine gun rounds to 155 mm artillery shells. British troops also recovered two mortar systems and 440 107 mm rocket systems. Every round destroyed helps to contain the terrorist threat and safeguard Afghanistan's future.

Our troops conducted significant humanitarian assistance work in their area of operations, winning the hearts and minds of Afghan people in areas previously dominated by the Taliban and by al-Qaeda. For example, more than nine tonnes of wheat and 1,100 blankets have been distributed to those who need them.

I want to make it absolutely clear to the House that Task Force Jacana has been led in exemplary fashion from the very start. Brigadier Roger Lane has done an outstanding job in leading his troops in four demanding operations through rugged, high-altitude terrain that has been as tough as any that British units have had to tackle in recent memory.

We should bear it in mind that those operations carried, and still carry, real risks, and we should be grateful that we have achieved such success without loss of life. Those who carp about the "lack of action" do so from a position of ignorance about the nature of warfare. That is one thing, but it is quite another to wish that our forces had come under fire, which appears to have been the hope of some armchair commentators in recent weeks.

It would have been quite wrong had I come before the House just over three months ago and not warned of the risks that our forces would face. British troops were, and are, keen to engage the enemy. They want to demonstrate their courage and professionalism—the hallmarks of Britain's armed forces. But the enemy is no fool: he has learned from the harsh defeat he suffered during Operation Anaconda and has avoided further direct contact with our forces.

I have previously told the House that the Jacana deployment would last in the order of three months. On the completion of Operation Buzzard, Task Force Jacana will be withdrawn from Afghanistan. The phased drawdown of the force will begin on 4 July and, subject as always to operational demands, should be complete by late next month.

The drawdown will enable us to rest and reconstitute our forces for future contingencies. After consultation with the United States and our other coalition partners about the challenges and likely tasks ahead, I have concluded that there is no need to replace 45 Commando immediately. We will, however, retain stores in Afghanistan to enable an even more rapid deployment than the initial one should that be required.

Taken together, the handover of the ISAF command, the return home of 1st Battalion, the Royal Anglian Regiment and the drawdown of Task Force Jacana means that the number of British forces in the operational theatre—both in Afghanistan and elsewhere in the region supporting the operations—should reduce from more than 4,000 today to about 2,000 by late summer. However, we will still maintain a Tomahawk-armed submarine presence, ships, aircraft and elements of other forces in Afghanistan and the region. That will include forces on the ground—elements of 40 Commando will remain at Bagram, where they have played a vital role in helping to secure and protect the airfield. We shall also have logistics support personnel at Bagram, as part of our capacity rapidly to deploy additional forces if the operational situation demands it.

This reduction in numbers does not mean a reduction in our commitment either to Afghanistan or to the campaign against international terrorism. In fact, it is proof of our willingness to keep up military action for as long as it takes. This is not a conventional campaign; it will vary in tempo and location. The United Kingdom has forces with capabilities that few can match. That is why we must use them where they can do the most good.

Crucial to the long-term future of Afghanistan as a stable and secure state will be the reform of its entire security sector—the army, the police and the structures

[Mr. Geoffrey Hoon]

that guide and control them. That is crucial if Afghanistan is to enjoy the stability that will permit economic and social recovery from decades of conflict. It is essential to ensure that Afghanistan does not slip back to being a failed state that provides a safe haven for terrorists. Together with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development, the Ministry of Defence is making a significant contribution to the international effort to achieve security sector reform.

The United Kingdom is therefore co-ordinating international counter-narcotics efforts in Afghanistan. The new Afghan authorities have taken a tough line on drugs, issuing a decree banning the cultivation, processing and trafficking of heroin. We should applaud their resolve in tackling this problem, given the poppy crop's economic significance to people in parts of Afghanistan. Financial assistance has been offered to farmers who voluntarily eradicate their crops. That has had some success, and we estimate that around a third of this year's crop has been destroyed. But Afghan farmers who currently depend on opium production must have an alternative, and legal, livelihood, and the international community needs to provide carefully targeted assistance to that end. It is obviously a long-term problem, not one that can be solved in a single season.

Our forces have been engaged in invaluable work in Afghanistan, and they have carried out their duties with outstanding professionalism. There is more to do in the rebuilding of the country, and we are determined to play our full part in that. That means ensuring that we maintain a sustainable commitment of forces and preserve a balance between contributing to military operations, training and maintaining skills, as well as, importantly, giving our forces the opportunity to rest and to spend time with their families. The changes in our contributions to operations in Afghanistan do that. I am sure that the House will give them its support.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement and for providing an advance copy earlier today.

The first thing that the House must do is to join him in congratulating Her Majesty's armed forces on a job well done in Afghanistan. General McColl has shown an extraordinarily deft touch in bringing peace and order to the war-torn and devastated city of Kabul and enabling the new Government to establish their authority. Elsewhere, 45 Commando Royal Marines and other elements have been engaged in and prepared for, battle with al-Qaeda in the most arduous and testing conditions. The terrorists who previously ran a state within the state have been militarily neutralised and have fled. I join the Secretary of State in congratulating Brigadier Lane on his leadership of a difficult and often frustrating operation.

The Secretary of State has not announced a complete withdrawal of British troops from Afghanistan, but I welcome this substantial reduction, which I understand will extend to the Balkans in due course. We have long argued that the British armed forces are overstretched, by which we mean that UK forces are engaged on more operations, with fewer resources, than was envisaged in the Government's 1998 strategic defence review.

The scaling back of deployments will not just be a chance for soldiers and Royal Marines to spend time with their families. The events of 11 September underlined the fact that the post-cold war world is dangerous and unpredictable. The UK and our allies must keep our armed forces fully prepared for the unexpected and ready to respond at very short notice—perhaps, as the Secretary of State suggested, for further fighting operations in Afghanistan. The UK does not have sufficient forces to sustain long and protracted peacekeeping operations as well, as General McColl confirmed on Radio 4 this morning.

Overstretch means that time on operations comes out of time for training. Does the Secretary of State accept that inadequate training adds risk to military operations? What assurances can he give that there will be fewer cancelled exercises and better supplies of parts, ammunition and equipment, so that the full programme of Army training can be fully restored? Overstretch drives some of our most experienced people to leave the armed forces. The Army is severely under-recruited—36 of the British Army's 45 regiments are now under strength. Will the right hon. Gentleman now put the necessary resources and willpower behind the Army recruiting campaign that has so far, obviously, been lacking?

There is confusion about the Government's targets for Army manpower. Four years ago, Labour promised an extra 3,300 troops for the Army, raising the fully trained target to 108,500. The Adjutant-General confirmed that to the Select Committee on Defence. Why does the Secretary of State not stand by that target? What are we to make of the regular briefings that the Army is to be cut to 95,000? Does he realise that this will be the smallest standing Army that Britain has had since the days of Wellington? How does the Secretary of State square such cuts with the very real threats that the free world now faces and the plans being laid for the next phase in the war against terrorism, to which he referred?

The former NATO Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, General Wesley Clark said on Radio 4 this morning that the allies will

> "go after states, not shadowy networks of terrorists."

He also said:

> "Inside the American and British Governments, the decision has been made to apply the tools in hand to . . . Saddam Hussein, rather than focusing for a longer, more extended period of time on breaking up the al-Qaeda network itself."

Is that the Government's plan? Has such a decision been made?

One final question remains to be resolved that concerns British forces on operations abroad. I ask the Secretary of State for clarification on the Government's commitment to the International Criminal Court. Given that the Government have consistently argued that the court will be no threat to British forces conducting operations abroad, and that he has criticised the United States for its concern to maintain the immunity of its troops, will he comment on the report in the *Washington Post* this morning that the UK and French Governments have quietly obtained for their troops the very immunity that they would deny to the US? We have consistently warned of the need for such immunity. Has he now accepted our view?

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's initial comments about the contribution made by Britain's armed forces. He and I agree on those matters, but we disagree on his allegations of overstretch, which he makes regularly. When he criticises the number of operations in which British forces are engaged, he has never been prepared to say from which operation the Opposition would recommend withdrawal. At one stage, we heard some reservations about an operation in Macedonia, but as that was concluded successfully within 30 days, he will, no doubt, rewrite history on that point. I agree with him that inadequate training is a risk to operations, but that is a matter on which the chiefs of staff should advise Ministers. I assure the House that if the chiefs believe that training is inadequate, they will say so clearly to Ministers, and Ministers will act on that.

On the subject of numbers, the shadow Defence Secretary should pay a little more attention to the facts and a little less to newspapers. He repeats as fact what he reads in the newspapers, and that is a very dangerous tendency that I would advise him against. I shall give him the facts so that he is not tempted to repeat what he said earlier. The review of the Army's future manpower requirement has recently been concluded. It has been published, so perhaps his researchers would do better to research the material issued by the Ministry of Defence than the pages of certain newspapers. The revised manning target is 106,978. The figure for 1 May 2002 showed that whole Army strength stood at 101,320. Contrary to what he told the House a few moments ago, Army strength has increased by some 1,300 in the past 12 months. That is not by enough or fast enough and we would like recruitment to improve, but it is an increase. His researchers should work a little harder on facts, not suppositions.

As for General Clark's comments, I assure the House that no decision has been taken on military operations in Iraq, other than those military operations that are conducted at great risk to British aircraft and aircrew as they patrol the no-fly zones over that country.

On the ICC, the Government negotiated an effective immunity for British forces. It is contained in the draft treaty and that is why we support it. Obviously, that degree of immunity is available to any country that chooses to sign the treaty.

Mr. Paul Keetch (Hereford): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement on Afghanistan today and for the advance notice that I was given of it through a telephone call from his right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence. May I thank him for the close consultation that he has had with me, the Conservative spokesman and the Chairman of the Select Committee on Defence on the deployments in Afghanistan in the past few months?

Almost every Member of the House will welcome the announcement today. I am especially sure that it will be welcomed by the forces themselves, their families and their friends. It is right to pay special tribute to the families of our forces who will be particularly pleased about the news.

Liberal Democrat Members fully supported the ISAF deployment and the deployment of 45 Commando. It is fair to say that some people's fears that engagements with different roles might lead to tension did not come to pass. I am sure that the Secretary of State will agree that it has been clear for some time that our forces have been operating at the very limit of our commitments. Does he therefore agree that, until the manning problems from which the Army especially suffer are remedied, further operational commitments, whether in the campaign against terrorism or in other cases of national interest, would continue to stretch our forces to the limits?

As always, the forces in Afghanistan have conducted themselves in an exemplary fashion, and have performed the task set them with great vigour and courage. Whatever the criticism that may have been levelled at the mission undertaken by 45 Commando in Afghanistan—that it was over-hyped—it is clear, at least from the Liberal Democrat Benches, that none of that criticism was directed at the brave men and women in Afghanistan or at their commanding officer.

The Secretary of State will agree that the presence of the Marines, as well as the operations that they have undertaken, has served as an active deterrent against the al-Qaeda threat, and has allowed the Loya Jirga to take place successfully and peacefully. Will he tell the House, however, what is the situation along the border with Pakistan, which has often given us cause for concern? Who will patrol that now?

I commend the Royal Anglians, and the Parachute Regiment before them, for the exemplary work that they have done as part of ISAF. Indeed, the success of the Loya Jirga concluded today is a great compliment to them.

Finally, I add a note of caution. Is the Secretary of State concerned that such a visible and large-scale withdrawal of British troops from ISAF, coupled with the withdrawal of the Marines from Bagram, could be considered in some quarters as a sign that we are turning away from the difficult years ahead in Afghanistan, or at least seen as a reduction in the British commitment to the reconstruction of a peaceful future for Afghanistan? If that were the case, does he agree that the considerable success of which he can rightly be proud might be undermined in the future?

Mr. Hoon: I thank the hon. Gentleman especially for his comments about the families of service men and women. They take a considerable amount of trouble on behalf of their husbands, wives and partners, and we recognise the sacrifice that they make, which is often not acknowledged. It is therefore right that the hon. Gentleman should do so.

The hon. Gentleman quotes me entirely accurately in saying that we have been operating at the limits of our commitments. That is something that I have said on previous occasions, which is why I was so determined that there should be a drawdown consistent with the announcement that we made at the time. If he checks what I have said in the past about Task Force Jacana he will see that, within days, we will be reducing numbers entirely consistently with what I outlined to the House. He is right that we need to ensure an active deterrent against al-Qaeda and Taliban remnants, which will continue in border areas, for now at any rate, without the active participation of British Royal Marines. Other forces on both sides of the border will ensure that the passage enjoyed by certain al-Qaeda elements is not as easy as they might have anticipated.

I assure the hon. Gentleman and the House that this announcement involves no lessening of our commitment to Afghanistan. We have taken an enormous amount of trouble to support the rebuilding of that country. As I

[Mr. Hoon]

indicated, there will still be more than 2,000 members of Britain's armed forces in and around Afghanistan assisting in the continued rebuilding of the country. It is not simply military forces, however, that are involved in the rebuilding of the country. This operation is conducted right across Government, and in my statement I paid tribute to other Departments that will also be actively engaged in making sure that Afghanistan does not slip back to where it came from.

Mrs. Ann Cryer (Keighley): Can my right hon. Friend make an assessment of how many anti-personnel land mines remain unexploded in Afghanistan as a result of all the wars in that country? Will the clearance continue and, if so, how long will it take? Does he also feel confident that the Turkish force will appreciate the importance of human rights, particularly as far as women are concerned?

Mr. Hoon: I will not even try to guess how many unexploded land mines there might be in Afghanistan. The country has had 20 years of conflict and each and every organisation engaged in the conflict there has sadly laid anti-personnel land mines. That includes forces on both sides in the conflict involving the Soviet Union, which was followed by a particularly nasty and brutal civil war. It is only in recent times that efforts have been made to deal with the problem. Dealing with unexploded land mines has cost several lives recently and, although I acknowledge the risks involved to the people doing that work, I assure my hon. Friend that the efforts to deal with the problem will continue.

On my hon. Friend's point about human rights, the general in charge of ISAF from now on is an experienced officer who has served under previous United Nations commands. He has an extremely good reputation for the way in which he commands his men.

Mr. Michael Portillo (Kensington and Chelsea): I congratulate the Secretary of State on his having the privilege of being able to make this statement about two successful operations by British forces that did not involve the loss of life. I thank him warmly for making a statement to the House of Commons. I have a feeling that Members of Parliament do not have many uses under this regime, but one thing that we can do is express on behalf of the nation the gratitude and sense of relief at the safety of our forces that we feel as they return. We can also wish them well on behalf of the nation when they go into battle. I therefore ask the Secretary of State to make statements to the House not only when he withdraws forces, but when he announces further deployments, as I feel sure that he will in due course.

May I associate myself strongly with what the Secretary of State said about armchair critics? It is true that our forces have not been involved in headline-grabbing confrontations—thank God. However, the fact that people have been able to operate in peace and security in recent times in a country where there have been 20 years of mayhem and slaughter represents probably the biggest news story to have come out of that country in many years.

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. He had the privilege of occupying the position that I now occupy and he probably brings much greater understanding to the difficulties that people in this position face. I am grateful for his remarks, and I will ensure that they are passed on to the men and women of our armed forces. They will very much appreciate what he has said.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): If, as the Secretary of State unambiguously assures the House, no decision has been made on Iraq, should the Government not ask General Wesley Clark to withdraw or, at least, clarify the statements that he made on the "Today" programme?

Mr. Hoon: I assure my hon. Friend that no decision has been made about military operations in relation to Iraq other than the decisions that are taken and that are necessary day to day to support our aircraft and aircrew patrolling the no-fly zones in Iraq.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield): May I particularly welcome the Secretary of State's remarks about the role of the UK in co-ordinating the international efforts in Afghanistan against the drugs trade? He will know that it is a deadly problem that translates directly from Afghanistan to the streets of our towns and cities. Now that our involvement in Afghanistan is diminishing somewhat, will he use his considerable skills to ensure that this anti-narcotics strategy is pursued in every way with vigour and effectiveness across the British Government?

Mr. Hoon: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his timely observations. We must continue to address the problem. We estimate that 90 per cent. of the heroin sold on the streets of the United Kingdom has its origins in Afghanistan. The trade has a pernicious effect right along the route from Afghanistan to the United Kingdom. The route involves terrorists and criminals and the trade allows many terrorist organisations to purchase their arms. We are absolutely determined to continue the pressure and effort to deal with the origins of the trade in Afghanistan and with the route of heroin back to the United Kingdom.

Linda Gilroy (Plymouth, Sutton): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. It will also be welcomed by the families of service men and women, and those close to them, who will no doubt give them a warm reception when they come home in coming months. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the separation in times of deployment which they have to endure is made infinitely worse by some of the wilder speculation of the armchair commentators, to which a number of hon. Members referred? It has ranged from questioning whether there has been a job for the battle group to do to speculation on whether they have been in wild danger.

Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating my local evening paper, the *Evening Herald*, which has given consistent, strong, positive and informed coverage of what has been happening? Does he agree that James Garnett, the defence correspondent, in quoting Captain—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Perhaps the hon. Lady could show the article to the Secretary of State afterwards.

Linda Gilroy: I certainly will and I would have great pleasure in showing it to any other hon. Member.

Mr. Hoon: My hon. Friend made her point more effectively than I could.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): In warmly endorsing all the points made by the Secretary of State and welcoming with tremendous pleasure the great success of our troops in Afghanistan, may I associate myself wholly with the words of my right hon. Friend the Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Portillo)?

Does the Secretary of State agree that the unique experience that British soldiers bring to such operations, much of it learned on the streets of Belfast over the past 27 years where they served with such distinction, and the calm professionalism with which they deal with extremely dangerous and difficult situations enables our soldiers to win friends wherever they go? No one should be deluded about the dangers that our soldiers have faced in Afghanistan. They have dealt with them magnificently.

Will the Secretary of State assure me that the lessons, in particular those learned by the Commandos from operating in difficult conditions at altitude and at a considerable tempo, will be disseminated throughout the wider Army so that other regiments of the line can be deployed on major operations? He should not be deluded about the tremendous desire of regiments to participate in such operations and the increasing resentment that is felt because they are not called forward. The lessons need to be well learned so that we enable other regiments to take over the mantle that has been so brilliantly borne not only by the Parachute Brigade, but by the Commandos.

Mr. Hoon: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his comments which are treated seriously in the Ministry of Defence, not least because of his considerable experience in that Department. There is always a challenge for any Minister in my position, as he knows. As a result of our involvement in Northern Ireland over a long period, our armed forces have the qualities, experience and commitment needed to conduct operations in Afghanistan and the Balkans, where they still serve.

Although we have that experience, the challenge is to get others to develop it too. The United Kingdom simply cannot commit its forces wherever those requirements arise. The transfer of the leadership role to Turkey means that another country will develop that expertise, which I certainly welcome. There will also be a process of lessons learned, as there always is from such deployments, as the hon. Gentleman knows. I assure him that those lessons will be disseminated across the armed forces. The experience has been unique in recent times and we need to learn from it.

Mr. Doug Henderson (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): May I associate myself with my right hon. Friend in paying tribute to 45 Commando Royal Marines for its involvement in Afghanistan? Does my right hon. Friend recognise that there is now something of a military void there, because if 45 Commando was necessary to act as a deterrent, to root out al-Qaeda and to chase it over the border, as it undoubtedly has done, there is now a problem in making sure that al-Qaeda does not return to Afghanistan and begin to disrupt the peace process established by the council in Kabul this week? Will he give the House further details about how the border is to be patrolled and al-Qaeda kept out?

Mr. Hoon: I do not accept my hon. Friend's observation about there being a military void. In response to an earlier question I indicated that there will be other forces on both sides of the border. Pakistani forces will be present in some numbers on their side, together with coalition forces, still led by the United States but involving new countries and those that are currently in the process of "rouling" their forces in order that they can continue their commitment—so there will be a significant coalition presence in those difficult border areas.

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): I warmly welcome the news that 45 Commando is shortly to return home, which will be a great relief to the families back in Arbroath. I assure the Secretary of State that, whatever the armchair commentators may think, the families of the troops and the whole community in Arbroath are extremely relieved that 45 Commando has carried out its important work without sustaining any casualties.

The Secretary of State mentioned the border areas and the continuing threat from al-Qaeda. Given that he has also said that ISAF is basically confined to Kabul, can he tell us what assessment he has made of the Interim Administration's ability to provide internal security in other parts of Afghanistan to prevent the return of al-Qaeda and the Taliban?

Mr. Hoon: The hon. Gentleman asks a fair question that needs addressing by the Interim Administration. The conclusion of the emergency Loya Jirga and the allocation of portfolios and responsibilities to what are, in effect, Ministers, means that No. 1 on their agenda of responsibility is the establishment of security throughout Afghanistan. We are certainly able to play a part by ensuring that they have the appropriate advice and assistance to develop their own security, but it is the people of Afghanistan and their Government who are ultimately responsible for that.

The reconstruction of an Afghan army, which I referred to near the end of my statement, is the key to that, and we shall certainly continue our support for its training efforts. That army is vital if Afghanistan is to control its own territory.

Hugh Bayley (City of York): Like other Members, I should like to express my congratulations to all our armed forces and, in particular, to the Royal Anglian Regiment, whose cap badge I had the great honour to wear for three years as a cadet.

The best defences against a resurgence of al-Qaeda or Taliban influence are peace and security, particularly food security. To what extent has the security brought to Afghanistan by our forces allowed the replanting of food crops, rather than drug crops, to help to ensure that next winter there will be fewer food shortages than there were last winter?

Mr. Hoon: I had not suspected my hon. Friend of military involvement, and I am delighted to hear of his substantial connection.

On the replanting of food crops, the signs are encouraging. There is food on the streets. Clearly, some of it has been imported—I suspect from Pakistan—but it is being increasingly made available locally.

[Mr. Hoon]

Food security is a challenge. The hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Mitchell) referred to the need to persuade farmers away from the lucrative cash crop of poppies towards something more substantive as far as the people of Afghanistan are concerned. Although in this first year we have had some success in the destruction of the crop, in truth we need to ensure that a system is in place to encourage farmers to grow crops for food rather than for destruction.

Hugh Robertson (Faversham and Mid-Kent): I associate myself entirely with the Secretary of State's remarks about our forces in Afghanistan. However, he is aware that although the Pakistani army has had access to the border areas for some time, it has only recently gained unrestricted access to Waziristan. How confident is he that the remnants of al-Qaeda have not regrouped in that area, and what threat does he think they pose?

Mr. Hoon: The remnants of al-Qaeda certainly continue to pose a threat, and there is some information about their efforts to regroup. That is why, as I said in response to an earlier question, it is vital that there are continuing coalition efforts to make it difficult to cross what is nevertheless an extremely inaccessible border area. Those efforts will continue, as I stated, on both sides of the border.

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): I join the tributes to our armed forces and the exemplary way in which they have conducted themselves in their mission. I also pay tribute to the organisations within the Ministry of Defence that are less visible, such as the Defence Aviation Repair Agency, which has helped to keep the Chinooks flying throughout the mission. We sometimes overlook those organisations.

I endorse the comments of the right hon. Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Portillo) regarding the armchair critics who, to my disbelief, somehow see the mission as a failure because of the absence of bloodshed and killing. That is outrageous, and we should put that on the record.

Finally, I am glad to see a Muslim force taking over from the British, but those troops do not have the same experience as our forces have had in peacekeeping and policing human rights. Will we continue to play a role to support them in their new mission?

Mr. Hoon: As I made clear in my statement, we will continue to play a role. We will supply vital specialist forces to ISAF. It is important that the existing contributors do so and give Turkey the support that it needs. I thank my hon. Friend for drawing attention to an aspect that is often overlooked in the House—the enormous contribution that civilians make to our defence effort. That is not given proper regard, alongside the tributes that are rightly paid to our armed forces. Some 100,000 civil servants work for the Ministry of Defence. In my view, the MOD is the most joined-up Government Department, integrating people from the military and the civil service, and it is right that they should all get our praise and appreciation for the successful conduct of operations such as that in Afghanistan.

Mr. David Laws (Yeovil): I, too, associate myself with the comments of other hon. Members and congratulate all the armed services that have served in Afghanistan over the past few months. I remind the Secretary of State of the answer that he gave me in this place on 20 March, when I asked him how long the deployment would continue. His words were:

> "The deployment will be for as long as it takes to deal with the continuing threats."—[*Official Report*, 20 March 2002; Vol. 382, c. 337.]

Can we really say that we have dealt with the continuing threats, and is there not a risk that as our troops leave the country, the Taliban and al-Qaeda will come back in?

Mr. Hoon: It is important that the hon. Gentleman recognises that our contribution was part of a coalition—an international effort, which continues, as I made clear in answer to a number of questions. There are more forces than the Royal Marines, well though they have served in those areas. As I said, should a requirement arise for British forces to return to that part of the world, we have made contingency plans, including leaving substantial stores available to allow us to return at even shorter notice than we were given on a previous occasion.

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): I thank my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for his statement and welcome what he told the House about the handover of the command of ISAF, which represents an important staging-post in the stabilisation of the military as well as the political situation in Afghanistan. Does he agree that one of the lessons of recent British involvement in post-conflict situations, such as Kosovo, is that British forces can play an important role not just in maintaining security, but in helping to rebuild basic infrastructures, such as the water supply, transport links and the provision of electricity to schools and hospitals? Will he confirm that some British troops will remain in Afghanistan, both for the immediate future, as he said, and beyond the summer, in order to help with such essential tasks?

Mr. Hoon: As I indicated earlier, the task ahead of us is not simply a military one. British forces have made a significant contribution in assisting in the resolution of some of the military problems that Afghanistan faces as well as the reconstruction of an army. Throughout all departments, there will be a necessary effort to rebuild the infrastructure of Afghanistan. There cannot be real peace and security in that country until that infrastructure is properly available to its people.

Mr. Jenkin: I should like to press the Secretary of State very briefly about General Wesley Clark, as he has so far not been clear about the matter, despite my giving his office notice that I would raise it.

General Clark did not say that a decision had been made about military operations, although that is the question that the Secretary of State keeps answering. He said that the decision has been made to

> "go after states, not shadowy networks of terrorists".

Will the right hon. Gentleman clarify whether, if that is the case, we will be dealing with states rather than terrorist networks in the war against terrorism?

Mr. Hoon: The hon. Gentleman draws a distinction without real meaning. In Afghanistan, for example, after an appropriate notice period elapsed and the Taliban regime failed to deliver up al-Qaeda as they should have done, the state was under notice that we would take military action, which is precisely what happened. That has always been the position of the international community. Any state that harbours terrorists and gives them the sort of support that the Taliban regime gave to al-Qaeda is certainly a state against which we will consider taking action.

Business of the House

1.21 pm

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): With permission, I should like to make a statement about the business for next week.

MONDAY 24 JUNE—Consideration of Lords amendments to the Export Control Bill.

Motion to take note of European documents relating to single European sky.

TUESDAY 25 JUNE—Opposition Day [15th Allotted Day]. Until 7 o'clock there will be a debate entitled "Crisis [illegible] the Care Homes Sector", followed by a debate entitled "Crisis in Zimbabwe". Both debates arise on an Opposition motion.

WEDNESDAY 26 JUNE—Consideration of Lords amendments that may be received to the Tax Credits Bill.

THURSDAY 27 JUNE—Estimates [3rd Allotted Day].

There will be a debate on public-private partnership for London Underground followed by a debate on individual learning accounts.

At 7 o'clock, the House will be asked to agree all outstanding estimates.

FRIDAY 28 JUNE—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the following week will be:

MONDAY 1 JULY—Second Reading of the Public Trustee (Liability and Fees) Bill *[Lords]*.

Proceedings on the Consolidated Fund (Appropriation) Bill.

TUESDAY 2 JULY—Opposition Day [16th Allotted Day]. There will be a debate on an Opposition motion. Subject to be announced.

WEDNESDAY 3 JULY—Progress on remaining stages of the Finance Bill.

THURSDAY 4 JULY—Conclusion of remaining stages of the Finance Bill.

FRIDAY 5 JULY—Debate on modernising Britain's gambling laws on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

I should also like to inform the House that the business in Westminster Hall on Thursday 4 July will be a debate on the reports from the Education and Skills Committee on the work of Ofsted. On Monday 1 July, there will be a debate relating to third-country nationals in European Standing Committee B.

The House will also wish to know that, subject to the progress of business, the House will rise on 24 July and return on 15 October. That will, however, depend on the progress of business in the other place.

[*Monday 1 July 2002:*

European Standing Committee B—Relevant European Union documents: 8237/01: Status of third-country nationals who are long-term residents; 11803/01: Entry and residence of third-country nationals for the purpose of paid employment and self-employed activities. Relevant European Scrutiny Committee Reports: HC 152-i, HC 152-ix and HC 152-xv (2001–02).]

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): I thank the Leader of the House for letting us know of the business for next week and for notifying us of the date of the summer recess.

[Mr. Eric Forth]

The House will know that the Prime Minister has just concluded his groundbreaking press conference, in which he apparently gave members of the press about an hour of his time, in contrast to the mere 30 minutes that we get for PMPs each week. I am curious to know whether there are any plans to extend the time that the Prime Minister submits himself to questions by right hon. and hon. Members in PMPs, given the hour that he gave to journalists. I know that it is all supposed to be in the cause of transparency, but it seems that we are being given a pretty shabby deal by the Prime Minister. I hope that the Leader of the House will be able to put that right.

Talking of transparency, I happen to have in my possession the proceedings of the parliamentary Labour party meeting that was held on Wednesday 12 June 2002 at 11.30 am in Committee Room 14. Sadly, Mr. Speaker, you are no longer able to attend PLP meetings. That being so, I am sure that you would like to know what went on at the meeting. This little item reads:

> "The Party Chair referred to his article in *The Times* that morning and stressed the need for colleagues to go on the offensive regarding the merits of politics and politicians."

He then said:

> "We also had to expose the deep hypocrisy of the media and the journalists who printed uncorroborated and unfounded stories on a daily basis."

I wonder whether the party chair had anything to do with the reference to the Press Complaints Commission that was mysteriously withdrawn. There is something rather at odds between what the party chair was saying to the PLP and what Mr. Alastair Campbell was doing at No. 10.

The party chair concluded by saying

> "that the current climate of seeking to undermine politicians was completely unacceptable in a democracy".

We should have a debate on this, not in the PLP but in this place. I should like to know how it is that the chair of the Labour party believes that the press seeking to undermine politicians is unacceptable in a democracy. It is a sinister allegation, is it not? Will there be proposals from the chair of the Labour party somehow to muzzle the press, if he believes that it is being unfair to the delicacies of the PLP? We must know more. I hope that the Leader of the House will give us an opportunity to debate the matter.

Yesterday, the Prime Minister said that the stock market is

> "massively up on where it was five years ago."

My information is that shares are now 2 per cent. lower in value than they were five years ago, when the great pensions tax was first imposed. We need clarification. Perhaps the Leader of the House can tell us—I know how well briefed he is on these occasions—from where the Prime Minister obtained his information. It seems yet again that the Prime Minister has either been misinformed or has rather carelessly let slip something that may not quite be true.

In the same column, the Prime Minister went on to say,

> "we are putting £6 billion more into pensions every year."—[*Official Report*, 19 June 2002; Vol. 387, c. 272.]

I will leave right hon. and hon. Members to conclude whether that is true. However, the Prime Minister seemed to forget to say—I am sure that he would have done so in the interests of fairness and transparency—that, at the same time, the Government are taking £5 billion a year out of pensions as a result of the great pensions tax that was imposed so surreptitiously about five years ago. In the interest of fairness, I am sure that the Leader of the House will want to correct the imbalance in what the Prime Minister said yesterday.

Today, a report has been issued by the Select Committee on the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs that makes some rather sensational claims and statements. I shall give the House a few of them. I hope that this will form the basis of an urgent debate on the report. Surely we cannot fail to debate it when it says such sensational things as

> "we find it extraordinary that the Minister was unaware that there was a potential problem until July 2001, and that his officials had sought clarification of the Regulation on nine occasions without referring the matter to him."

Paragraph 43 reads :

> "Mr. Meacher told the House in January 2002 that the Government had been 'badly let down' by the Commission. In light of the clear evidence we have received that phrase was ill-judged. Mr. Meacher himself told us on 26 March 2002 that 'I would not say it again in cold blood, no'."

I suppose that that is as near as we will ever get to an apology from a Minister.

The report continues by stating that

> "the overwhelming responsibility for mishandling the implementation of Regulation 2037/2000 lies with the Government . . . This debacle will cost the UK around £40 million, a cost which would not otherwise have been incurred."

It adds:

> "We find it deeply disturbing that the Government signed up to the Regulation whilst still suffering from 'knowledge gaps' about its full impact."

Those are extraordinarily serious allegations about the Labour Government from a Committee that is dominated by Labour Members of Parliament. I know that the Leader of the House sets great store by the work of Select Committees, and by their reports and conclusions, and I hope that he can assure us that we will have an urgent debate before the summer recess, so that Members of the House other than those on the Select Committee can give their views on the matters referred to in the report.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois) asked the Prime Minister yesterday whether we could expect a statement on Gibraltar before the summer recess. The Prime Minister replied:

> "The Foreign Secretary has made it clear that there will be a statement when negotiations and discussions are concluded."—[*Official Report*, 19 June 2002; Vol. 387, c. 275.]

I suspect that that response did not satisfy my hon. Friend, and I am sure it did not satisfy a lot of other Members.

I remind the Leader of the House that, before he was promoted to his present position, he said on 4 February 1998 in a speech to the Dependent Territories Association, in his then capacity as Foreign Secretary, "Gibraltar is unique." He then went on say that he wished to

> "restate publicly Britain's commitment to the people of Gibraltar . . . Our commitment to them and to all the peoples of the Overseas Territories remains as strong as ever."

I am sure, therefore, that he will now want to go further than the Prime Minister seemed able to go yesterday, and assure the House that the people of Gibraltar are going to be put out of their misery sooner rather than later, that they need not expect to be kept hanging on in suspense, miserable and unhappy, and that he will keep faith with what he told them way back in 1998 rather more than the Prime Minister seems able to do. I hope that he can do that.

Mr. Cook: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for asking a number of additional questions. I should warn him and the House that one of the recommendations of the forthcoming Modernisation Committee report is that we should both seek to be briefer at the Dispatch Box. He might wish to reflect on that when he has an opportunity to study our report.

I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on his diligent research into my previous speeches. I was not aware that many hon. Members or members of the public had been carefully studying my speech to the Dependent Territories Association three years ago, but I am gratified that it is still current, and I stand by every word that I said on that occasion. I have heard my right hon. Friend the present Foreign Secretary give a clear undertaking that, in the event of the people of Gibraltar rejecting any agreement, that will be the end of that agreement. We cannot, of course, put an agreement either to the House or to the people of Gibraltar until such an agreement is reached. The matter is continuously under negotiation, and, as soon as any agreement is reached, I assure the right hon. Gentleman that he and the House will be among the very first to know.

On the Prime Minister's press conference, I felt that the right hon. Gentleman fell short of his usual standards of generosity. Surely it is right that the Prime Minister should introduce such an unprecedented regular system of openness and transparency, and make himself available for questioning not only by those who happen to be among the privileged few with a pass to the Press Gallery but by journalists who are specialists in a particular topic. Nor is that in any way at the expense of his appearance in the House, where, by the way, he has cancelled fewer appearances at Prime Minister's Question Time than either of his Conservative predecessors, and where he has only recently announced that he will be appearing before the Liaison Committee.

The first of those appearances will take place before the House rises for the summer recess, and I am pleased to say that the Prime Minister will be before the Committee for a whole two hours, not just one hour like today's press conference. I should have thought that the right hon. Gentleman might have found it in him to acknowledge that no previous Prime Minister has ever done this, and that it is a tribute to my right hon. Friend's commitment to the House that he has introduced this innovation.

I am glad to see that the minutes of the PLP are being fully studied and absorbed. I was slightly taken aback when the right hon. Gentleman began that passage, because—if I heard him aright—he said he had the minutes of the meeting of 24 June. That cast a little bit of doubt over what he then quoted. Given the robust views of my right hon. Friend the party chairman, and given my total support for him, I shall try to ensure that the shadow Leader of the House is put on the mailing list for the minutes, in the hope that he will read to us more often such excellent, strong views, which meet with full consensual support on this side of the House.

I repeat what I said to the House last week: this is a serious issue for Parliament and for the press. It is important that we get back to political reporting, which is about politics as it affects the people of Britain. We need less reporting of the gossip of the Westminster village, which we lap up, and more of the policies that affect the real lives of our people, such as the remarkable way in which the Government have increased the number of people in work by 1.5 million and reduced the number of unemployed by 500,000.

As for the fridge mountain, I am pleased to give the right hon. Gentleman the assurance that we have now completed four new sites at which we can dispose of fridges; we expect another three to be completed next month and a further three before the end of the year. We expect the fridge mountain to begin to melt—if that is the right term—in October.

The right hon. Gentleman referred to our attempts to get clarification from the Commission. We approached the Commission on many occasions more than two years before it gave us the fresh clarification that gave rise to the difference. Throughout those two years, the Commission's interpretation of the directive was identical to that followed by the British Government.

Lastly, I regret to say to the right hon. Gentleman that I do not have the incentive to follow the stock market as closely as would be required to answer his question about percentages. I rather suspect that he follows the stock market more closely than I do, but I am happy to confirm that the Prime Minister was absolutely correct in saying that we are spending £6 billion a year more on pensioners—more than double what would be required to uprate pensions in line with earnings.

By next April, the average pensioner will receive £22 a week more than in 1997, and the 2 million poorest pensioners receive a lot more as a result of the minimum income guarantee. Those are big advances on the Conservative Government's record on pensions. What we would all like to know, especially the pensioners who have benefited under Labour, is how much the Tories would cut spending on pensions, given their commitment to cut overall public spending. They cannot say to the nation that they will cut spending, and at the same time say to pensioners that they will maintain the pension.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): May I warmly welcome the Home Secretary's ignominious retreat over regulation and investigatory powers? I draw to the attention of the Leader of the House the fact that no fewer than six motions relating to that are still on the Order Paper. When will those motions be withdrawn to give effect to the Home Secretary's retreat?

Now that the Government have taken over the Bill introduced by the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), will its further stages be debated in Government time and not take up precious private Members' time?

I draw the right hon. Gentleman's attention to the fact that on Monday 1 July he has allocated considerable time to the Public Trustee (Liability and Fees) Bill, which took only an hour to make progress in the other place. Surely that is an excessive use of time. Does not he recognise that that is a classic example of when a more manageable system of business discussion between the parties of what should take precedence in this House would make more economic use of our precious time?

[Mr. Paul Tyler]

The right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) was particularly concerned about the quantity of the exchanges between the Prime Minister and the media, which we have all been watching with great interest. I think that the Prime Minister spent an hour and a half talking to the media. I was able to sign letters to my constituents and still listen to him, and it was an interesting occasion. Does the Leader of the House recognise that it is the quality of the exchanges that really matters? What progress is he making in the Modernisation Committee to try to improve the quality of the real answers that we get at Question Time and the extent to which they are topical? I refer not just to the Prime Minister, but to other Ministers. How will we make Question Time exchanges informative and topical? I have no problem with the Prime Minister speaking to the media, and I think that speaking to the Liaison Committee is a great step forward, but when will the Chamber have the same advantages as the Liaison Committee and the media in getting real answers to real questions on topical issues?

Mr. Cook: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's welcome for the decision to go out to consultation on the order that would otherwise have been debated next week. However, may I gently chide him for describing that as an "ignominious retreat"? If the Government are asked to think again, and if Members of the House invite them to consider their proposals carefully, as a result of which the Government announce that they have taken on board those representations and will reflect and consult, it does not give Ministers an incentive to do the same again if they are told that they are being ignominious.

We have made a sensible decision, in the circumstances, to consult on the matter. It will therefore not come before the House before the consultation is concluded, which will certainly not be before the far side of the recess. In the meantime, I shall consider what to do with the motions on the Order Paper.

On the Bill introduced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), it is for him and the Government to discuss whether there is an acceptable way forward for both parties. The matters are complex and are taking some time to resolve. The Bill is my right hon. Friend's and I have detected on his part no wish to give it up. It was prompted by his constituency concerns and I am sure that he would wish to be identified with the final result.

On the topicality of questions in the House, I share the belief of the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) that it is important to ensure that our proceedings are relevant to debates outside the House and deal with issues of the moment. That is why, as he knows, the Modernisation Committee has been looking sympathetically at whether we can reduce the period of notice for oral questions and take other steps to ensure that topical issues of the moment are discussed at Question Time. I understand that the Procedure Committee will make similar recommendations when it reports in the near future. I hope that that will ensure that proceedings at Question Time are relevant and topical. Unless we make ourselves topical and relevant to the outside world, it will not pay us the same attention.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): Did the Leader of the House hear the Secretary of State for Defence assure my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) and the Opposition defence spokesman that no decision had been made to join the United States and take military action against Iraq? However, on the "Today" programme this morning, General Wesley Clark suggested that decisions had been made to go for states rather than terrorist networks, which presumably includes Iraq. Could we have a debate next week to clarify General Clark's remarks and discuss the implications for world peace should the United States go ahead and attack those states, which are presumably those named in the axis of evil?

Mr. Cook: Having just announced the business for next week, I see no prospect of debate on those matters then. Naturally, I do not wish to commit myself to the general principle that it would be a useful use of the House's valuable time to debate speculation on the "Today" programme, as we may then find that we make slow progress on legislation.

Mr. Forth: Oh good.

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) has an ally on the Conservative Benches.

I heard the interview myself. I am not sure that my recollection—of course we can both consider the transcript—is quite the same as that of my hon. Friend. General Wesley Clark certainly suggested that pressure was best brought to bear on states rather than on what he described as shadowy terrorist groups. Indeed, Afghanistan demonstrates that we have made very good progress, not just on behalf of the international community, but of the people of Afghanistan, particularly the women, who now have a prospect of a better and more decent life than if we had not done so.

The short answer to my hon. Friend's opening comment is that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence is right—we have taken no such decision. No such decision has been asked of us; should one be made, naturally the House will be consulted and we will have a full debate.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): Surely, in the light of the highly critical report of the Select Committee on the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on the fridge crisis, the Leader of the House ought to reflect on what he said to my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth). He should persuade the Minister for the Environment to come to the Dispatch Box and make a statement. Is he aware that, up and down the country, and particularly in my constituency, people want action and explanations? Bracknell Forest borough council faces a financial and logistical nightmare, because it has to deal with 1,000 fridges a month without any help or support from the Minister for the Environment, despite promises. The Minister therefore needs to come to the Dispatch Box.

Mr. Cook: I have already told the House about the vigorous action which will result in 10 new sites for the treatment and disposal of fridges by the end of the year. We will then see the mountain come down. If the right hon. Gentleman wants action he really cannot object if the action that we proposed is well under way.

On responding to the Select Committee report, of course the Government respond to every Select Committee report—we are obliged to do so. When our response is available, it is entirely open to the Liaison Committee and others to pursue a debate on the matter. The Government have acted to provide far more opportunities for debate on Select Committee reports than were ever available under the Government to whom the right hon. Gentleman belonged. Indeed, that opportunity is available to Members who serve on the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee and the Liaison Committee should they wish to pursue it. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment is willing to take part in that debate and looks forward to it with enthusiasm.

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): Can we give urgent consideration to the outrageous behaviour of Argos? It is ruthlessly exploiting a loophole in the law whereby shop workers in Scotland are not given the protection that is enjoyed throughout the rest of the United Kingdom, and sacking staff who between them have given years of loyal service to the company, if they will not accept compulsory Sunday working, thus discriminating in particular against those who have family commitments or religious objections, and in general against employees in Scotland.

Mr. Cook: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for drawing to the House's attention a very serious issue of principle that is of immediate concern to his constituents. I know that he has tried to resolve the matter through discussions with Argos. I regret that those discussions have not produced a better result.

We have acted in this Chamber to provide the flexibility whereby companies can open their stores on a Sunday if they wish to do so, but we have also provided protection: staff should not be compelled in England to work on a Sunday if they object in principle to doing so. Although that is not the law in Scotland, as far as I am aware, every other trading company in Scotland has, rightly, observed that issue of principle. I deeply regret that Argos is failing to act in the way in which its competitors do.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): It is customary to debate the advisability of publishing opinion polls during election campaigns but may we have a statement from the Minister for the Cabinet Office on the advisability of publishing opinion polls between election campaigns? Recently, opinion polls have been showing support for the Labour Government going down, support for the Conservative Opposition going up and support for the Liberal Democrats doing neither one thing nor the other. This morning, an opinion poll suggests that 56 per cent. of the population find the Prime Minister untrustworthy and unreliable. Surely the Government should be very worried about that indeed.

Mr. Cook: For some years now, Conservative party spokesmen, when asked about opinion polls, have been saying that they do not believe them. That seems a judicious, sensible and mature approach. I suggest that the Conservative party do not immediately abandon it the one time that it gets an opinion poll that it might find encouraging. The only poll that really matters is the poll on polling day and, broadly speaking, we are quite satisfied with the past two results.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): My right hon. Friend may be aware that June is national child care month. Since before Christmas, the Government have been engaged in a cross-departmental review of the national child care strategy, in terms both of the spending review and of where we see child care in the next 10 years. Unfortunately, I have not been able to secure an Adjournment debate so far. May I press my right hon. Friend to allow a debate in the House, either before the spending review is announced this summer—this was mentioned in answer to a question that I had tabled—or at least when the spending review is announced, on this important part of Government policy?

Mr. Cook: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising an issue that is a high priority for the Government. She will be aware of the substantial additional investment that the Government are making in child care, which has provided increased child care to thousands of women and contributed to enabling many more women to enter the work force and take up full-time employment. I will certainly bear in mind what she has said about the wish to expose that further in a debate in the House, but possibly Madam Deputy Speaker might report to the Speaker the difficulty that my hon. Friend has encountered in obtaining an Adjournment debate. There may be a more efficacious and speedy response in that direction.

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): May I draw to the attention of Leader of the House the fact that, on 12 March this year, I led an all-party delegation to meet the Minister for Industry and Energy to discuss some serious concerns that we all have about the future of the supply chain in the aerospace industry? I draw it to the Leader of the House's attention because a number of questions were raised that the Minister promised to answer. Those questions were reinforced by me in a letter on 18 March to the Minister's office. As the weeks and months passed, the Minister's office was continually reminded of that outstanding obligation. Such was our frustration in the all-party group that I eventually tabled a written question to the Minister, which was answered on 18 June—precisely three months since I wrote to him. The answer was that the Minister would reply as soon as possible.

When the Leader of the House next meets his Cabinet colleagues, I ask him to draw to their attention the fact that such behaviour can only lead hon. Members to believe that this Government treat us with contempt.

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman makes his point with clarity and force. He will be aware of the deep concern in the Department of Trade and Industry and throughout the Government about the impact of 11 September on the aviation industry, and the knock-on effect on the aerospace industry. I shall certainly draw my hon. Friend's attention to his remarks, and try to ensure that he receives a speedy response.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Did I understand correctly the final sentences of the Leader of the House's reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon)? Did he say that, if any decision on military action was taken, a statement would of course then be made and a debate held in the House? Should not such debate take place before, not after, any final decision? Perhaps Afghanistan is not the most wonderful example

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

from the Government's point of view. I thought that the object of bombing Afghanistan was not so much to remove the burqa from women as to find Osama bin Laden.

Mr. Cook: The objective of the military action in Afghanistan was to prevent al-Qaeda from being able, with the assistance of the host Government—the Taliban—to carry out further acts of atrocity such as those committed on 11 September. I hope that I am not tempting providence by observing that we seem to have been successful in securing that objective, and that al-Qaeda has as yet been unable to mount another operation. Of course, we will continue to be vigilant and active in ensuring that it is unable to mount an operation such as that carried out on 11 September.

I gently point out to my hon. Friend that every hon. Member will surely welcome an outcome that has disabled al-Qaeda, and removed the safe haven from which it could reach out and strike at hundreds of totally innocent individuals across many countries, the relatives of whom are still having to deal with enormous disruption and distress, and the loss of association with their loved ones. That was surely worth doing, and we were right to take action in Afghanistan to achieve that aim.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien (Eddisbury): In his answer to my right hon. Friend the shadow Leader of the House, the right hon. Gentleman asserted that the current Prime Minister has cancelled fewer Prime Minister's Question Time appearances than did the previous two Conservative Prime Ministers. However, did he take into account the fact that the current Prime Minister has halved the number of occasions on which he can appear? The statistic is probably not a fair comparison, therefore, and I would be grateful for clarification.

Today's statement by the Secretary of State for Defence was restricted, appropriately, to operations in Afghanistan. However, I draw the House's attention to widely circulating rumours—I have become aware of them through my participation in the excellent armed forces parliamentary scheme—that the armoured corps will be reduced. May we have an early statement from the Secretary of State for Defence to allay our deep concerns?

Mr. Cook: Having made a statement, my right hon. Friend has only just left the Chamber, so I am loth to summon him back to make another. I say with respect that my right hon. Friend is one of the most diligent of Ministers in making statements to the House. He has an excellent record, and if a matter needs to be shared with the House, he will doubtless volunteer it.

On the hon. Gentleman's other point, perhaps my arithmetic was not sufficiently clear. I shall go through it carefully, so that he understands what we are saying. It is true that the Prime Minister attends this Chamber on Wednesdays, rather than Tuesdays and Thursdays. However, it may not have escaped the hon. Gentleman's attention that the Prime Minister attends for twice as long on Wednesdays as either of his Conservative predecessors did on Tuesdays and Thursdays. In pointing out that they cancelled more appearances, the fact therefore remains that, at the end of any five-year period, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has appeared at this Dispatch Box for a longer time in total than either of his predecessors.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): Will the Leader of the House consider arranging a debate on National Asylum Support Service supervision of private-sector contracts relating to the provision of services for asylum seekers, with particular reference to the Landmark company in Liverpool? Is he aware that following years of reports of poor accommodation, poor management, and harassment and intimidation of asylum seekers in two Liverpool tower blocks owned by Landmark, NASS agreed to stop using those properties a few weeks ago? Asylum seekers who had been housed there, however, found that having left they were required to go to other properties owned by the same company, many of which had not been inspected by NASS.

Mr. Cook: I am interested by what my hon. Friend has said. I recall that concern has been expressed about Landmark properties following other business statements, and I am rather surprised at the outcome that she has described. I will certainly draw the matter to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): Has the Leader of the House received a briefing yet on yesterday's excellent presentations in the House of Lords by three United States Congressmen, and by Mr. Perot and Dr. Haley, on progress made in the US in identifying the causes of Gulf war illnesses? Will the right hon. Gentleman allow time in the autumn for the Secretary of State for Health to tell the House what support is being provided for those who have given service in the armed forces and contracted serious illnesses since the Gulf war, and to what extent scientists here have co-operated with US scientists to determine the cause of such illnesses and hopefully find a cure? Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman could also give the Secretary of State for Defence an opportunity to dispel the perception that the Ministry of Defence wants to deny that there is such a thing as Gulf war syndrome.

Mr. Cook: The Ministry of Defence has no wish or incentive to deny as a matter of principle that there is such a thing as Gulf war syndrome. Results of medical investigation remain complex and disputed, however, so there is no clear consensus among medical experts. That is partly why we are putting £7 million into research into the syndrome to see what we can establish for ourselves. Evidence from the United States is obviously important, and will be fully considered and reflected by those in the MOD who advise on the matter. The MOD is considering an outstanding tribunal ruling, and will announce its response in the near future.

I assure the hon. Gentleman that the Government want, through the MOD as much as the Department of Health, to give every support to former service men who are in poor health, regardless of whether it can be attributed to Gulf war syndrome.

Mr. David Watts (St. Helens, North): I have been trying for eight weeks to secure a debate on entitlement to bank holiday pay. Given my abject failure so far, and given that British workers have some of the worst employment rights in Europe, will my right hon. Friend consider arranging a debate on this important subject?

Mr. Cook: I strongly urge my hon. Friend not to regard his efforts as abject failure. He should develop more self-esteem, and take the credit to which he is entitled for his persistence and for raising a matter that is important to his constituents and those of many other Members.

I cannot promise my hon. Friend a debate—

Mr. Forth: Ah.

Mr. Cook: I often leave this place regretful about the number of Members I have had to disappoint, but I would be in even greater difficulty if I granted debates to all who asked for them. I fear that the subsequent week's business statement would be extremely crowded. Let me tell my hon. Friend, however, that we can both take pride in the fact that the Government implemented the working time directive despite vigorous opposition from the Conservative party. As a result, 2 million people in Britain have the right to a statutory paid holiday that they were previously denied. As he knows, the working time directive provides the right to four weeks' paid holiday, but not to count bank holidays on top of that. He is right to press the case of those people who see others taking bank holidays with pay but cannot do so themselves.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): The Leader of the House will be aware that a debate on Gibraltar took place in Westminster Hall on Tuesday morning at the instigation of my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Mr. Rosindell). In replying to that debate, the Minister for Europe intimated that he would be prepared for the Foreign Office to make a statement on the fact that an agreement had been reached between the British and Spanish Governments, or on the fact that it had not been possible to reach an agreement. More than a third of a million people in Britain, including many hon. Members, have declared their support for the Gibraltarians and the population of Gibraltar overwhelmingly opposes what the Government are trying to do. That being the case, and as the negotiations may not succeed—the rumours are that they have faltered badly—would it not be appropriate to come to the House to make a statement to bring this whole matter to a close and finally remove sword of Damocles from above the heads of the loyal people of Gibraltar?

Mr. Cook: I would not disagree at all with the implication of the hon. Gentleman's question: if there should come a point at which the talks were disbanded, a statement should be made to the House to announce that fact. All I am saying, as in my earlier responses, is that the talks continue. There is no agreement at the moment, nor is there any agreement that there will be no agreement. In those circumstances, I am not clear that a further statement in the immediate future would help to clarify matters to the House.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): Can we have an early debate on further education? I appreciate that the Government are injecting £310 million over the next three years into further education, but the reality is that a huge pay gap is opening between lecturers in FE and teachers in secondary schools. People are simply migrating from the FE sector to schools for better terms and conditions. That problem cannot wait for two or three years, and I hope that it will be addressed quickly and that we can have an early debate on it.

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point, which underlines the extent to which we have made very good progress in schools. Indeed, we are investing further in further education. I and my constituents have seen a remarkable improvement in the quality of the buildings and in the number of students attending further education. I will certainly draw his comments to the attention of the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, and I am sure that she will wish to write to him to reflect on the point that he makes.

Richard Younger-Ross (Teignbridge): The Leader of the House is renowned as a champion of modernisation, so can we debate the use of the royal prerogative? I ask that in the context of his answers to the hon. Members for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) and for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) and of the Prime Minister's answer to questions that I asked four weeks ago and before that on whether there should be a debate in the House before British troops are committed abroad, particularly in relation to Iraq. Can we have a debate on the use of the royal prerogative in that regard?

Mr. Cook: First, I tell the hon. Gentleman and the House, yet again, that no decision has been taken. Indeed, no decision is immediately in prospect of being taken about Iraq and no such decision may ever be taken. *[Interruption.]* I shall come to the hon. Gentleman's question, but I do not want us to proceed on the presumption that such a decision is imminent or will be made.

Secondly, on committing British troops abroad, whatever the legal niceties of the matter, the reality is that this Government—indeed, I suspect no Government—could commit British troops if that were opposed by a majority of the House of Commons. In fairness to those on the Government Front Bench, we were punctilious in consulting the House before, while and after committing British troops to Afghanistan, and we have had six full days of debate, if I remember rightly, and many more statements. Should—I make this very conditional—any action be taken in Iraq, I am confident that it would be accompanied by a similar commitment to ensuring that we carry the House with us.

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): First, may I reassure my right hon. Friend that Labour support in Luton is going well? Last week, a by-election in my constituency was won by Labour with a strong majority and for the first time ever the Conservatives were pushed into third place behind the Liberal Democrats.

My question concerns the housing market and housing finance. The Government have been successful in creating a stable economy and we all applaud that. However, the housing market continues to be an unstable component of the economy—indeed, it is starting to look uncomfortable again and one might argue the case for separate interest rates for the housing market and for the rest of the

[Mr. Kelvin Hopkins]

economy. We need a serious debate on the future of housing finance and its organisation. Will my right hon. Friend consider such a debate on the Floor of the House?

Mr. Cook: I am suddenly conscious of the eyes of about 15 million householders observing me as I respond to my hon. Friend's most original proposal for a separate interest rate for mortgage payers from that for the rest of the economy. I would not want to encourage him to think that the Government are likely to contemplate that as a solution.

On the housing market, I understand that the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors issued a report this morning suggesting that the market may be cooling down, so that may provide my hon. Friend with some reassurance. One of the main factors has been the remarkable success of the Government in delivering interest rates that are at a 40-year all-time low. That is a reflection of the sound economy that the Government have created and which we shall not allow anything else to ruin.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): With his mega-memory, the Leader of the House will no doubt recollect that on two occasions at business questions—last January and April—I raised the issue of the Government's consultation papers on proposals to change our town and country planning system, especially changes in our handling of major planning inquiries, such as Heathrow terminal 5. As the issue is of fundamental importance to an increasing number of people, will the right hon. Gentleman reconsider holding a debate on the Floor of the House? I understand that the demand for parliamentary time exceeds supply, but as the issue is of such vital importance, it would be helpful to the Government to hold a debate to find out the views of Members before they make hard decisions after the consultation period.

Mr. Cook: I cannot offer a debate between now and the summer recess—time is finite and reducing—but, as I said to the hon. Gentleman on previous occasions, there is no way that we can make progress on the matter without primary legislation and thus no way to make progress without the House having a full opportunity to be involved and to consider it.

Points of Order

2.7 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker, of which I gave Mr. Speaker notice this morning. Whatever the rights and wrongs of a prime ministerial statement to the press, it is a new departure and a serious matter for the House, as Mr. Speaker repeatedly says that statements should first of all be made to the House of Commons. This is a complex subject. I am not saying that the Prime Minister is wrong; I am saying that what has been done is a significant departure. Will Mr. Speaker consider making a statement on Monday on the whole issue of whether announcements should first be made to the House? It is not a matter of the House's amour propre; if statements are not made to the House, there are many constitutional implications. If there is a misunderstanding, it should be—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. I think that I understand the point that the hon. Gentleman is making. No doubt the Prime Minister will have had in mind the importance of first of all informing the House of major policy developments.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. On 10 June, the Foreign Secretary told the House:

> "So far as I am aware, no applications have been blocked."—[*Official Report*, 10 June 2002; Vol. 386, c. 155.]

He was referring to applications for arms exports to India. Is it possible to ensure that on Monday, when the Export Control Bill is debated, there is a statement clarifying Government policy on exports to India? Small firms in my constituency are finding that their exports are being blocked while those of larger firms are not.

Madam Deputy Speaker: That point of order is not a matter for the Chair. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman can raise it with the appropriate Minister at a later date.

Energy: Towards 2050

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Jim Fitzpatrick.]*

2.10 pm

The Minister for Energy and Construction (Mr. Brian Wilson): This is a timely debate on energy policy and a good opportunity for me to hear hon. Members' views on its future direction. We are now involved in our consultation on the energy review, which will in turn lead to a White Paper and to actions by the Government that will have repercussions for energy policy for decades to come—hence the title of the debate. It is important that we get it right. Energy is at the centre of all our lives—it lights and heats our homes, powers our industry and fuels our vehicles—so securing affordable, reliable and sustainable energy is of crucial concern to us all. Those objectives should never be taken for granted. It is worth remembering that 2 billion people do not have the benefit of energy at the press of a switch.

Last June, the Prime Minister asked the performance and innovation unit to carry out a major review of strategic issues surrounding energy policy for Great Britain up to 2050. That was in large part a response to the report by the royal commission on environmental pollution, which recommended that the United Kingdom should aim for a 60 per cent. reduction in carbon emissions by 2050. Crucially, that placed the review of energy policy in an environmental context, making it far more pressing than would have been a similar review of 10, or even five, years ago. In future, alongside security of supply, the driving force behind energy policy must be the imperative of countering the immense 21st century challenge of climate change and global warming. We are likely to respond to the royal commission at the same time that we publish the energy White Paper.

The energy review was published on 14 February. Having chaired the advisory group that oversaw that process, I should like to record my appreciation to the members of the team led by Nick Hartley, which produced an excellent report to time. The PIU report was always going to be a report to the Government, rather than of the Government. When the Prime Minister welcomed the review on behalf of the Government, he said that he hoped that it would start a thorough debate. The consultation that we launched on 14 May in the run-up to the White Paper initiated the next stage of that debate.

We are also carefully considering two relevant parliamentary reports—the report by the Select Committee on Trade and Industry on security of energy supply, published on 7 February, and the House of Lords Select Committee report "Energy Supply: How Secure are We?", published on 12 February, which examines the European Green Paper on security of energy supply. Those reports, too, are timely and valuable in signalling Parliament's views about energy issues and indicating where the White Paper should focus.

Just as with the energy review, I am determined to make the consultation process in which we are engaged as open and inclusive as possible. It will run until mid-September and it will help to shape energy policy for decades to come. Of course, as well as looking to the long term, we also face more immediate challenges and decisions. There must be a keen awareness that every policy decision, however short term, should be consistent with the longer-term objectives and obligations that I mentioned. As well as the primary objectives that I described, we are committed to liberalised and competitive markets as cornerstones of future energy policy. Competitiveness and affordability are also key objectives.

Let me turn now to some of the policy areas and key issues that the review will address. I shall deal first with security of supply. Energy security is often characterised as keeping the lights on, but of course it is more than that. It is about having efficient, competitive energy markets with the correct incentives to invest. It is about maximising the economic potential of our own fuel sources and building close relationships with fuel exporting and transporting countries. To that end, we shall, as the PIU recommended, continue to press for liberalisation of energy markets across the European Union, and I shall continue to work with my ministerial colleagues in the Foreign Office to build on the UK's good relations with fuel exporters.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): The Minister mentioned security. Can he tell the House the risk factors used to determine whether a supply of energy can be deemed to be secure?

Mr. Wilson: The PIU report dealt with that issue thoroughly. It came to the overall conclusion that the anticipated sources of imports—especially of gas—have been reliable and consistent respecters of contractual obligations, whatever their difficulties in the past. The report suggested no reason to think that that would change in the future. However, vigilance is constantly required, and the risk assessments that the right hon. Gentleman mentioned are part of that. Work continues, not least by the Foreign Office, on such assessment. Such work, and the past record of reliability of supply, has contributed to the PIU's conclusion that there are no grounds on which to fear a crisis in the energy supply in the UK once we become net importers of gas—which will probably happen by 2005.

Jon Trickett (Hemsworth): I welcome this debate and the strategic context that the Minister is laying out. However, supplies of gas will become increasingly stretched in the next few decades. The EU intends to invest some 60 billion euros in gas pipelines from the east—from Russia and Iran. Will not those pipelines become increasingly vulnerable to terrorists or geological problems and will not that pose severe security risks in the medium term, if we become over-dependent on gas?

Mr. Wilson: If over-dependence on gas is considered to be a problem, it is a result of what has happened in the past 20 years rather than something that might or might not happen in the future. On present trends, we are projected by 2020 to be 70 per cent. dependent on gas for our energy needs, 90 per cent. of which would be imported. That reinforces the point about the need for vigilance, which formed part of the consultation. The PIU looked closely at the issue, including the past performance of those countries likely to export their gas to us, which include Norway, Russia, Algeria and those in the Caspian area. The report concluded that a crisis in supply was not likely. However, things can change, and common sense

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suggests that we should seek a balance between dependence on imported sources and the maximisation of indigenous sources of energy.

The point about dependence on imports was reinforced last week when Centrica signed a major new deal for the additional import of 5 billion cu m of gas a year into the UK from Norway. Such arrangements are already being entered into in anticipation of the continuing decline in our indigenous gas supplies. The PIU report said, in short, that that was not a problem and I acknowledge that. The issue should form an important part of the consultation, but I stress that we should be ever vigilant even if we may be reasonably optimistic on the basis of experience.

Mr. Peter Duncan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): The Minister mentioned the maximisation of our indigenous resources. What part was played in that strategy by the 10 per cent. additional levy on North sea oil and gas reserves?

Mr. Wilson: I can give the hon. Gentleman the good news that it has been confirmed today that the Buzzard field that has been discovered in the North sea will produce 1 billion barrels of oil, making it the biggest discovery there for 25 years. With such positive news on the North sea, on the basis of exploration and investment, I have every confidence that the remaining reserves in the North sea will be developed. We have discussed before and we can discuss again the changes in the Budget, but they are a package that also encourages investment. That is critical to the Government's fallow fields priority, which is to get fields such as Buzzard into production when there are identified reserves that have not been developed by the current licence holders.

I fully recognise the concerns of the industry, and I am working with it to address them. We should also recognise that there are incentives to investment, and we have an interest in working together to make sure that that potential is maximised.

Dr. Stephen Ladyman (South Thanet): My hon. Friend keeps saying that security of supply requires vigilance, but he sets out as a matter of fact what we all know—we will be 80 per cent. dependent on imported fuel by 2020. Vigilance is what one needs when one thinks that everything is all right but one is keeping an eye open in case circumstances change. When he sets out the fact that a problem exists, and we know that it is happening, surely that requires action to reduce our dependency on imported gas.

Mr. Wilson: With respect, that is exactly what the energy review is all about. Many other aspects of the energy review recommend action, and the Government are taking those recommendations, for example, on renewables and on other sources of energy supply.

I am merely setting out three facts. First, on current projections, we would be 70 per cent. dependent on gas as a result of what has happened in the past, 90 per cent. of which would be imported. Secondly, the PIU report says that that is not a particular problem because of the record on which suppliers would be depending. Thirdly, I do not take that as a definitive last word on the subject, and it is therefore part of the consultation. That is a logical progression of statements, which does not imply complacency on the issue of sources of gas.

Paddy Tipping (Sherwood) *rose—*

Bob Spink (Castle Point) *rose—*

Mr. Wilson: I shall make a little more progress, and I shall then be delighted to take more interventions.

In general, we continue to monitor closely security of supply, and we will shortly publish the first report of the joint monitoring group that we set up with the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets. On this, of course, as on other issues, there are different points of view. Some, as we have heard already in this debate, have said that the PIU was too lax on the security issue, and concerns have been expressed inside and outside the House that the market will not deliver and that the Government therefore need to intervene. I emphasise again that we need to understand why those fears persist. Our work leading to the White Paper will help to address those and other security issues.

Paddy Tipping: The very valuable point was made a moment ago that we need a balanced energy policy, and I welcome that. I contrast that with the view of the PIU report that 70 per cent. of our energy supply should be dependent on gas, 90 per cent. of which would be imported, by 2020. That is not a balanced energy policy; it is the road to disaster.

Mr. Wilson: In fairness to the PIU, it did not say that we should be in that position. It said that, on the basis of current trends and the infrastructure that is in place now, that is where we would be. If other recommendations of the PIU report are implemented, however, as we intend, we will not be 70 per cent. dependent on gas. It is a valid point that, in assessing the extent to which we should be dependent on gas, we should also take account of the extent to which that would be imported gas.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): Will the Minister acknowledge that all three of the major disruptions of energy supply in the last three decades have come from within this country, not from overseas? I refer to major industrial action in 1974 and 1986 and the impact of British road hauliers and British farmers in 2000.

Mr. Wilson: The hon. Gentleman makes a perfectly valid point. Again, I am merely telling the House the view of the PIU report, which, clearly, has drawn heavily on past experience and does not make lightly the statement that the anticipated sources of gas in the future have been reliable suppliers of gas in the past.

Bob Spink *rose—*

Mr. Wilson: That is a statement of fact, and it is part of the mix of consultation that is now taking place.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): This is almost like yesteryear. I am listening to speeches from my hon. Friend about the PIU and the problems in the energy industry. We used to say all that in the 1980s, when we told the Tory Government that, if that happened, it would be dangerous in terms of supplies, which would run out. Everybody said that we were living in cloud cuckoo land and that the pits did not matter. Of course, they went ahead and closed the pits. In 1984, there were about 170 pits, and now there are probably about 14.

The situation would be even more dire if we lost those 14 pits. Under private enterprise, the danger of losing those pits is much starker than it would be if we took them back into public ownership. We could get them for a song.

Mr. Wilson: It is always a pleasure to listen to a prophet whose time has come. My hon. Friend is absolutely right, however, as we all were. We said that the dash for gas was bonkers, and it has left us in a situation in which, on current trends, we would be 70 per cent. dependent on gas, 90 per cent. of it imported, by 2020. That is a result of the dash for gas over the past 20 years. My hon. Friend will join me in the satisfaction that, as we are a Labour Government, we are not dashing blindly into the future but carrying out a major energy review that will inform subsequent policy. That will protect us against over-dependence on a single source of energy.

In the context of what my hon. Friend said about coal, I was delighted last week at the Council of Energy Ministers in Luxembourg to be able to finalise the package of measures to support the coal industry. That package includes the flexibility, should the Government choose to use it, to have a scheme based on investment in the deep-mine coal industry. We have argued for and achieved that in the new package, and I am sure that my hon. Friend and others who have a commitment to the coal-mining communities will join me in welcoming it.

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): Has not the dash for gas done more than anything else to enable this country to meet its Kyoto targets?

Mr. Wilson: We will have that debate, but I was about to come on to renewables. If we had done more on renewables 20 years ago, we would have a better balance now, and we would not be starting from such a low ebb in renewables. Nobody underestimates the contribution of gas to the Kyoto targets. Whether that is why the dash for gas was embarked on might be another interesting question. It probably was not. What is undoubtedly true, however, is that, for the past 20 years, we have had a fantastic indigenous resource. We have been gas-rich, which has been a great asset for this country.

Also, given the power of hindsight—as was pointed out, this was not exactly unforeseen to start with—we will, in the space of 25 years, go back to being net importers of gas. At the very least, that seems to call into question whether that great indigenous resource has benefited from prudent stewardship, given that so much of it has gone in such a short time. That is history, however, and we are considering the future, and how dependent we should be on any one energy source.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): To give complete balance to this picture, the other source of energy that we have not mentioned so far is nuclear. My hon. Friend will be aware that at the moment, in advance of the operation of the liabilities management company, there is a possibility of major realignment in generating capacity in the nuclear industry. Some of us are concerned about the speed at which that is being progressed. Will he assure me that Members of the House will be brought into any discussions that involve a public sector company, BNFL, and a private sector company, British Energy? There are major implications for jobs and the basic integrity of the nuclear industry.

Mr. Wilson: I shall say something about the nuclear industry later, but the very first people to know about the proposal to set up the liabilities management authority were Members of the House. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made a statement when the process to establish it was started. The work is going forward.

Before I move on to nuclear and other energy sources, I wish to say something about renewable energy and the crucial role that it will play in future. In fact, the PIU report concluded that promoting energy efficiency and the development of renewables should be the immediate priorities of a low-carbon energy policy. Renewables and energy efficiency were the big winners in the energy review.

I was an advocate of renewable energy many years before I took up this post, but I must point out that there must be healthy realism. The unfortunate reality is that renewables start from a very low base. They comprise just under 3 per cent. of our electricity supply. As I never tire of pointing out, most of that 3 per cent. has absolutely nothing to do with anything that has happened in the past three or four decades. It is due to the vision of our political forebears, notably the great Secretary of State for Scotland, Tom Johnston, who had the vision to put in place a programme of hydroelectric schemes. I join my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) in pointing out that they were under public ownership. Hydro is still our No. 1 renewable. As a great believer in hydro, I would love to see a renaissance of new projects as well as the refurbishment of existing ones. We have made that possible through the inclusion of hydro in the renewables obligation.

Ms Debra Shipley (Stourbridge): A vision for the future of renewables means tackling the construction industry. Not only does it create a large proportion of harmful pollutants, but it could provide a solution to the problem of renewables. If we take the bull by the horns as far as the construction industry is concerned, every new building that goes up could be energy self-sufficient. The technology now exists. If we required all new buildings to be energy self-sufficient, the price per unit could make the policy economically viable.

Mr. Wilson: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend that the construction industry has a huge role to play in energy efficiency and in incorporating renewable technologies into new buildings. I had the pleasure of opening a new primary school—the Catchgate primary school—in County Durham the other day. It had been built along such lines and provides a model. There is no reason why any new school or public building should not be constructed without the same features being built into it. Wearing my other hat as the Minister with responsibility for construction, I make it clear that we are trying to drive forward such a policy through the rethinking construction

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agenda. That will ensure that features such as those incorporated in that school are provided for in design and construction and at the earliest possible stage in the project.

Hydro is still the main source of renewable energy, and the only other significant contributor in terms of volumes or power generated is wind power. We have a long way to go to meet the challenging target of obtaining 10 per cent. of electricity supply from renewable sources in 2010.

Mr. Gareth Thomas (Harrow, West): As well as the short-sightedness of previous Governments in not developing renewable energy sources, does my hon. Friend not accept that the planning system is probably the other most important factor in preventing the deployment of wind power? The fact that so many wind farm proposals are called in for planning inquiries imposes serious additional costs on the businesses that want to develop them. What hope can he give to the renewables industry that some of those difficulties will be sorted out?

Mr. Wilson: I agree with my hon. Friend's premise. Here is a sobering statistic: the forerunner of the renewables obligations was the non-fossil fuels obligation, and two thirds of the projects that were approved under the non-fossil fuels obligation have never happened. The great majority were blocked locally by planning objections. There is a clear dichotomy between the lip service that many people pay to renewable energy as a good thing in principle, and the attitudes that they strike as soon as something is proposed in practice in their localities. Many people in the environmental movement must start to square their conscience with their intellect. If they are in favour of renewables in general, they should also be in favour of renewable projects in practice.

Consultation is going on in England and Wales about the planning guidelines. Again, a balance must be struck. People should have the right to make representations, but they should not use delaying tactics. There must be a bias in favour of a balanced outcome rather than an inbuilt mechanism by which every project can be blocked. I hope that the consultation will be beneficial in clearing the way for many more projects.

Another issue that is being dealt with is the transportability of projects. One of the problems under the previous obligation was that if a project failed to get planning permission in the spot for which it was initially designated, it could not be taken elsewhere. If it becomes possible for a project to try another site where it might obtain planning permission, many of the projects may go ahead.

We can change the planning laws as much as we like, but unless there is a change of attitude and people are prepared to be reasonable, to allow projects to go forward and to recognise that they are beneficial to the local community as well as to the wider society, we will still face bottlenecks. We can have as many targets as we like, but we will not reach them unless the projects come to fruition.

Mr. Peter Duncan: The Minister referred to the inbuilt mechanisms for blocking wind projects. He will be aware that one of those inbuilt mechanisms goes by the name of the Ministry of Defence. What discussions is he having with MOD officials to establish how we can get through the bottlenecks that are stopping many projects that would otherwise have great potential for the Scottish and the UK economy?

Mr. Wilson: We should be fair to the MOD. It is often said that it is blocking everything, but it is not. Some 18 sites have been designated under the first tranche for offshore wind projects, and the MOD raised objections to only four. I hope that the other 14 can proceed. I do not take the issue of safety lightly. It comes above everything else and there are questions to be answered about flight paths and interference with radar. A wide range of issues apply to civil aviation as well as to military activity. The best approach is to work through the cases individually. I do not think that the problems will be as great as they are presented. I assure the hon. Gentleman that there is active dialogue with the MOD and the Department for Transport. I am due to meet Ministers from other Departments shortly to discuss exactly these issues. There is not a blanket ban from the MOD even on offshore projects, and it would be wrong to get the scale of the problem out of proportion.

Other than hydro, wind is the only other significant contributor to renewable energy. Other technologies exist, but little has been done to turn them into commercial industries. That is the hurdle that we must cross. The key mechanism that we have adopted to achieve that is the new renewables obligation for electricity suppliers that came into effect on 1 April this year. It requires them to provide a rising proportion of their supplies from renewables, reaching 10 per cent. by 2010.

We have also exempted electricity from renewable sources from the climate change levy. All that means that across Great Britain as a whole, the total value of the market for electricity generated from renewables will be between £1.5 billion and £2 billion a year by 2010. A massive new industry is being created. In addition, we are providing support worth £260 million over the next three years to boost technologies that are at the demonstration stage—offshore wind energy, energy crops, wave and tidal and solar photovoltaics—and to enhance our research and development budget for renewables more generally.

I emphasise the point that renewables are not just about energy and the environment; they are also about manufacturing and jobs. There are significant opportunities for UK industry within our current targets, let alone those suggested by the PIU for beyond 2010. Even those do not take account of the massive global market that will exist in renewables technology and hardware. If UK industry responds to that, new generating equipment and services will be supplied by UK firms and the jobs will be located here. If our industry does not respond, however, imports will meet the orders.

I am pleased that there is much activity in that sector and many signs that industry has woken up to the opportunities. That is why I decided to establish a new unit—Renewables UK—within the Department of Trade and Industry. The overall aim of the unit, which is located in Aberdeen, is to maximise UK jobs, exports and investment in renewables by promoting the same enterprise and innovation that occurred in the oil and gas industries 30 years ago. In many ways, Renewables UK is an attempt to replicate the success of the Offshore Supplies Office set up by the Labour Government in the mid-1970s, which took the supply chain contribution by British companies to the North sea from virtually zero to well over 60 per cent. within a few years—and it has stayed at that level. I hope that Renewables UK and everyone else who works in the sector will have the same success in turning renewables into a major British manufacturing industry.

Mr. Blizzard: I congratulate my hon. Friend on establishing Renewables UK. It is extremely important. What role does he envisage for regional development agencies in the process, especially in developing the supply chain? That will be the real challenge. We have companies with the skills and expertise that want to build wind turbines, for example, and it is important to get the necessary supply chain for components.

Mr. Wilson: My hon. Friend makes an important point about an activity that is truly nationwide because every part of the country can participate in it. Some of the richest renewables resources are in parts of the country that have not traditionally been associated with the generation of electricity. It is logical to locate the manufacturing activities near them. I am sure that the RDAs are alive to the possibilities. I have visited some outstanding examples. I attended an excellent conference in Manchester at which 500 companies were represented. There is a terrific initiative in the north-east of England based in Blyth. The Scottish development agencies are also very much involved.

I know of my hon. Friend's constituency interest in oil and gas. Renewables UK is located in Aberdeen to maximise the synergies between the oil and gas industries and renewables technologies. In places such as Lowestoft and Great Yarmouth, where oil and gas activity is well developed, it must be possible to transfer that into manufacturing activity for renewables.

The most energy efficient programme of all is one to which we can all contribute: it is simply to use less. The hour has come for energy efficiency to be taken far more seriously in this country. A wide range of energy efficiency programmes are in place, and they go with the grain of all our energy policy objectives. They can help us simultaneously to tackle climate change and fuel poverty, and to enhance security and promote competitiveness.

Energy efficiency offers a major chance to save carbon cost-effectively. The major instruments used to improve energy efficiency are the climate change levy, which encourages business to become more energy efficient, and the energy efficiency commitment. Advice on the promotion of energy efficiency is provided by the Energy Saving Trust and the Carbon Trust working together to lower the carbon intensity of both the domestic and the non-domestic sectors.

The energy efficiency commitment launched on 1 April gives energy suppliers an obligation to offer help and advice to domestic customers to help them to reduce their energy consumption. The commitment runs until 2005, by when we expect it to have generated outgoing annual energy savings for consumers worth more than £275 million, as well as annual reductions in carbon emissions of about 0.4 million tonnes.

The UK fuel poverty strategy that we recently put in place sets out a range of programmes and measures to address the main causes of fuel poverty. In England, our key mechanism for tackling fuel poverty in the private sector is the home energy efficiency scheme, now marketed as the warm front team. The scheme provides grants of up to £2,500 for a range of insulation and heating measures, and has already assisted 350,000 households.

Linda Gilroy (Plymouth, Sutton): The energy review calls for a step change in household energy efficiency of 20 per cent. by 2010 and a further 20 per cent. by 2020. Will it be possible to bring that together with our attempts to tackle fuel poverty, so that we can square the circle? In particular, will my hon. Friend undertake to listen carefully to representations made by organisations such as National Energy Action about the questions raised in the Government's document on the social implications of fuel poverty and how they can best be addressed?

Mr. Wilson: I know of my hon. Friend's interests in such matters, and I agree strongly that the two issues should be brought together. The great benefit of energy efficiency measures is not only that energy costs less, but that we use less of it. There are winners all round. Both those desirable outcomes can be achieved for a very small investment on a household basis. We just have to be more proactive in taking that message to the door of people who can benefit from it, and work with the utilities to put in place programmes that will extend the success of some of the initiatives that have already been taken. We have strong advisory teams on energy efficiency and fuel poverty. I could not agree more that the two should be fused together to maximise the outcomes.

Dr. Desmond Turner (Brighton, Kemptown): The Minister will be aware of my Home Energy Conservation Bill, which deals with energy efficiency. Although the Government support it, there seems to be a minor problem with it. Will my hon. Friend comment on the contribution that the Bill could make, on its great desirability and on how it could help with the issues that he is raising?

Mr. Wilson: We are as one on the principles, and I am happy to continue to discuss the detailed implementation. The Bill has played a great role in raising the profile of home energy efficiency and demonstrating the extent of parliamentary support for more action on that issue. I commend my hon. Friend on introducing it.

I shall say a few words on combined heat and power, because I do not want to be accused of avoiding the subject. On 15 May the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs published the draft strategy for combined heat and power, for consultation purposes. It describes the full range of measures, some recently announced, that may be sufficient to meet the target of 10,000 MW of good quality CHP by 2010. We fully recognise the problems that the sector faces, not least because of the impact of high gas and low electricity prices. Full exemption from the climate change levy for exports of CHP-generated electricity, announced by the Chancellor in the Budget, as well as other measures in

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the strategy, should do much to help. I am seized of the problem and will keep the CHP industry under careful review.

Mr. Gareth Thomas: I welcome the Chancellor's decision on the climate change levy and the publication of the strategy. However, will my hon. Friend comment on the desirability of a CHP obligation to mirror the renewables obligation? Could that be the final bit of the jigsaw to turn round the fortunes of the CHP industry?

Mr. Wilson: It is an option. A range of technologies would benefit from an obligation. One of the problems is that the more we stack up the obligations, the more impact we have on the price that the consumer pays. There is a fine balance to achieve. Everyone in an informed debate would say that the renewables obligation is a virtuous and good measure, but when it was announced the only media coverage that it received concentrated on what it would cost the consumer. A figure was put on it. I think that consumers accept the renewables obligation in so far as they are aware of it—but at what point we run into difficulties and it becomes counter-productive to keep stacking up obligations is another question, and we have to keep that in mind.

There are several technologies that I should like to help in similar ways, but whether an obligation or a series of obligations is the way to do so is a matter for legitimate discussion. That could form part of the consultation, but I caution hon. Members to take account of what I have just said.

Richard Younger-Ross (Teignbridge): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Wilson: Yes, although I want to make progress because I am aware that I have already been on my feet for 40 minutes.

Richard Younger-Ross: The Minister is very kind. Will he comment on the fact that the executive summary in the strategy document lists nine points under which CHP can be helped, but none mentions the need to reform the new electricity trading arrangements?

Mr. Wilson: I am glad that I gave way to the hon. Gentleman, because he has just acted as my straight man. I want to turn now to the electricity market, and in particular to NETA, which has been going for just over a year. The PIU report argues that institutional barriers to investment in renewables and CHP should be addressed urgently. Those include the impact of NETA, the organisation and finance of local distribution networks and the working of the planning system. Action is already under way to address those issues.

NETA has been successful in reducing the generated cost of electricity, but I recognise that it has raised a range of concerns, including those that impact on small generators. Last November we published a consultation document containing proposals specifically aimed at addressing the concerns of small generators. In response to that, changes are being made gradually in the industry through its dialogue with Ofgem. I am pleased that progress has been made with Ofgem and the industry in tackling some of the technical barriers. The Government recently published a response to the consultation document which sets out further action that we have identified to address the remaining issues.

In addition, a frank review is now taking place of NETA's first year of operation and where it should go from here. Everybody who studies the subject knows that at one level NETA has worked very efficiently, but equally, everybody knows that there have been negative effects that either stem from NETA or are attributed to it, perhaps wrongly. We have to get to the bottom of those and make sure that NETA's benefits are not obscured by its negative impacts. We are also preparing legislation that will extend the trading arrangements throughout Great Britain. Before we do that, we have to make sure that they are working as they were intended to, and in accordance with the Government's wider policy obligations.

Richard Younger-Ross: I hope that if I am the straight man, the Minister is not the comedian.

A company in my constituency, British Ceramic Tiles, has a CHP unit that it is not using because of NETA, so it is sitting there wasting away. Reform of NETA is urgent if CHP technologies are to progress.

Mr. Wilson: The hon. Gentleman cannot make the ex cathedra statement, "It's all because of NETA." Other factors affect CHP, and I should be pleased to receive correspondence from him about the particular concerns of the company, or, indeed, for the company to talk to my officials or Ofgem to try to identify more closely what the mix of problems is.

Nuclear power makes an important low carbon contribution to our energy mix. While the PIU report stressed the potential for renewables, it also recognised that nuclear, which provides around a quarter of the UK's electricity, offers a low carbon source of electricity which is larger than any of the other foreseeable options. The report also acknowledged that nuclear is effectively an indigenous energy source, and it therefore argues that there are good grounds for keeping the nuclear option open and for taking practical measures to do that.

The key issues for the consultation are how confident we can be that other low carbon options will be available, and what needs to be done to give substance to the words, "keep the nuclear option open". In parallel we also need to consider how quickly we can find an acceptable long-term solution to the problem of managing nuclear waste effectively, although that is overwhelmingly a legacy issue, which is added to only incrementally by current and future generation.

Mr. Tom Watson (West Bromwich, East): My hon. Friend will be aware of the 1976 royal commission chaired by Professor Flowers, which said that the nuclear industry should be extended only if we found a solution for the long-term management of nuclear waste. Does he agree that if we are to get public consensus on how to achieve that, Nirex must be totally independent of the industry, and that we should consider setting up an independent foundation that has an eye not on shareholder value but on the long-term management of waste?

Mr. Wilson: The status of Nirex is a secondary issue. I agree that there has to be progress in resolving this issue if we are to gain public acceptance. This is a complex public debate, and the better people understand the difficulty of reaching our Kyoto targets and fighting climate change without the nuclear industry, the more balanced that debate will be. Of course waste is a big issue, and that debate will continue.

Dr. Ladyman: I wonder whether my hon. Friend has studied the Finnish experience, in which consultation identified sites and methods of disposing of waste material and gained reasonable public consensus. Will he consider that experience to see whether it could be repeated here?

Mr. Wilson: I am familiar with the Finnish experience, the Japanese experience, the Canadian experience and the American experience, and they all lead to the conclusion that nuclear should be replaced with nuclear. Of course there are other experiences, and they too can form part of the consultation.

Although it is largely outside my direct responsibilities, transport accounts for a major proportion of our energy use, and it too has a key role to play in the shift to a low carbon future. The Government have issued and invited comment in our draft powering future vehicles strategy for promoting the development, introduction and take-up of low carbon vehicles and fuels. I cannot over-emphasise the importance of transport to this debate. One point that stands out in my mind is that if we did all the things that we say we will do in our energy policy but did nothing on transport, carbon emissions would still have risen by 2050, rather than fallen.

I cannot finish without saying something about coal, because of the interests of my colleagues. The PIU report sees coal as having a continuing medium-term role to play in the energy mix, but in the longer term, I emphasise, its contribution, too, will depend on finding ways of handling the CO_2 that it produces. The cleaner coal technology review, published on 5 February, reached similar conclusions. It sets out the work that is needed to remove a number of legal, practical and environmental uncertainties relating to CO_2 capture and storage. I very much want to make progress on clean coal technology, not only for domestic reasons but because globally it has at least as much to offer in reducing carbon emissions as any other strategy that might be conceived. I am acutely aware that there are other more imminent coal-related issues that will be closer to the forefront of the minds of some of my colleagues. I look forward to responding to any points that are raised when I wind up the debate.

It is clear that although energy policy is complex, it is also fascinating and has important implications for us all. There are a range of key objectives: meeting our environmental obligations, guaranteeing security of supply, ensuring competitiveness and contributing to our social objectives, both domestically and internationally, as a Labour Government. All those imperatives have to be prioritised, and as far as possible, made compatible with each other.

I have done what I always said that I would not, and spoken for too long, but I hope that it is acknowledged that in doing so I have taken many interventions and, I hope, dealt with points as we have gone along. In the spirit of wanting an open and informed debate, I look forward to hearing contributions from hon. Members on both sides of the House, and I urge everyone to participate in the consultation exercise. This is an exciting period in energy policy and we can all contribute to it, in the interests of this generation and of our children and their children.

2.59 pm

Mr. John Whittingdale (Maldon and East Chelmsford): I welcome the fact that the debate is taking place. We had originally expected that we might have a debate or at least a statement when the energy review was published in February. When that did not happen, we hoped that there would be an opportunity to discuss these issues when the Government published their consultation paper in May, but that also did not come, so my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) tabled an early-day motion calling for the debate, which was signed by some 40 Members.

Today's debate is very welcome and long overdue. Nevertheless, with all due respect to the Minister of State, whose expertise in this area I fully acknowledge, I regret that the Secretary of State did not think it appropriate to open the debate.

I consider it at the very least unfortunate that the Government have chosen to hold the debate on a day when the members of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry are absent on an overseas visit that has been planned for several months. The Select Committee's report on security of supply is rightly one of the documents listed for today's debate. Although I may not always agree with the hon. Member for Ochil (Mr. O'Neill), his Committee has produced a valuable report, and I fear that the debate will be the poorer for the absence of the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues.

On the face of it, we in the United Kingdom are relatively fortunate. We are blessed with our own natural resources of oil, gas and coal. We have a high level of diversity and supply. We have more generating capacity for electricity than we need, and since privatisation, we have competitive energy markets that have helped to bring about a fall in electricity prices for domestic consumers of almost 40 per cent. in real terms. If we look further ahead, we can already see that some of those advantages will not continue indefinitely. The Government are therefore right to say that we need to consider what actions must be taken now to avoid problems in the future.

In considering energy policy, we should bear in mind four key objectives: economic efficiency, security of supply, environmental benefit, and the relief of fuel poverty. The performance and innovation unit report is a valuable document, as it sets out a large part of the context in which decisions must be made, but it does not fully address certain fundamental questions about the balance that needs to be struck between what are sometimes competing objectives.

At present, our electricity needs are met roughly in the proportions 40 per cent. sourced from gas, 30 per cent. from coal, 25 per cent. from nuclear and 5 per cent. from renewables and imports. However, the domestic production of coal is falling and it is becoming steadily less viable to exploit our remaining stocks. Our nuclear stations are reaching the end of their working lives. Just 12 weeks ago, I attended the ceremony to mark the most recent switch-off of a nuclear power station, which was at Bradwell in my constituency. Within 20 years, all but

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one of the remaining nuclear power stations will have closed, and nuclear's contribution to our energy mix will have fallen to just 7 per cent. unless there is replacement.

On present policies, it is likely, as we have already heard from several Members in the debate, that instead of the present diversity of supply, within 20 years we may be dependent on gas for 70 per cent. of our energy needs.

Mr. Drew: Is there not an element of hypocrisy involved? Anyone who wants to discuss what will happen when we import gas from eastern Europe ought to speak to representatives of Ukraine and Russia, both of which have made it abundantly clear that they will use the investment stream to build nuclear stations in their countries. In other words, all we will be doing by importing gas is encouraging nuclear industries elsewhere. That is a strange way of running future energy policy.

Mr. Whittingdale: The energy supply of those countries is a matter for them, but it raises questions that the hon. Gentleman is right to point up. I shall come on to those matters shortly.

The UK's domestic supplies of gas are running down. It is likely that by 2006 we will be importing up to 15 per cent. of our gas, and that by 2010 gas import requirements will exceed the existing pipeline capacity. As I said earlier, I was slightly surprised that the PIU report seems to be relatively unconcerned about that. Its conclusions are based on a belief that we will continue to be able to obtain plentiful supplies of relatively cheap gas. That is by no means as certain as the PIU seems to think, and I share some of the concerns that have been expressed about that in the debate.

It is becoming clear that we will have to look steadily further afield for supplies, and that we will become more dependent on gas from Russia, north Africa and the middle east. Quite apart from the problems of transmission and cost, that raises serious questions with regard to the security of supply. We have seen in the past the dangers of being too heavily reliant on one source of energy.

The hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) seemed to suggest that the disruption to our energy supplies that we suffered in the past has always come about from actions taken in this country, but we have only to look at the consequences of the oil price shocks on our domestic economy to see what can happen when we become heavily dependent upon an energy source that comes from a particular part of the world which is not always stable.

Dr. Ladyman: I largely agree with the points that the hon. Gentleman is making, but I ask him this question: when 80 per cent. of the supply of gas to the west is controlled by Russia and that country is effectively in control of its own cartel, do we expect the price of gas to this country to go up or down?

Mr. Whittingdale: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. We could become extremely vulnerable. Almost all the major gas producers of the future upon which we may be forced to rely are countries whose political stability cannot be guaranteed. To become so dependent on a single fuel produced from such an uncertain source lays us open to considerable risk.

The risk does not arise just in those countries on whose reserves we will become dependent. The Select Committee pointed out that there are bottlenecks in the transmission system, particularly at the two main points of entry into the UK, at St. Fergus and Bacton, and relying so heavily on those two terminals could make us vulnerable in the event of an accident or a terrorist attack. I know that that is a matter that the Government have addressed in their response to the Select Committee report, which I have only just seen, as it came out this morning. It is a matter that we must consider.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is not just the external security of gas supplies—the gas transmission networks and the interconnector—but internal security that should concern us? If we have nowhere to store large quantities of gas, should there be political disturbances on the continent, we are up the creek.

Mr. Whittingdale: The hon. Gentleman is entirely right. I was about to make that point. As the Select Committee pointed out, we have relatively little strategic storage capacity for gas. That, too, is a matter that we should address as a matter of relative urgency.

Bob Spink: To complete the picture, will my hon. Friend comment on the fact that the UK would be at the very end of the supply chain?

Mr. Whittingdale: That is certainly the case. It will require the transmission of gas over considerable distances to reach this country, and it will have to be transmitted across several other countries. At present, there are severe problems in achieving that. One of the ways in which we need to address that problem is by achieving greater liberalisation of European energy markets. Limited capacity in European gas pipelines is bound to have an effect on the cost of transmission. The market should deal with that problem, but that will happen only if true liberalisation of European energy markets takes place.

Although the UK has one of the most liberalised and competitive energy markets in the world, our neighbours, particularly Germany and France, still have largely state-owned and highly protected energy companies that are responsible for both transmission and supply. They are reluctant to allow others access to their transmission networks. There is no clear pricing mechanism for doing so, particularly where their network is to be used simply as part of a longer transmission route.

It is vital that we make faster progress in this area. Although the Barcelona summit resulted in some movement in the right direction, I understand the concern expressed by the Select Committee that we should not assume that full liberalisation will take place for some time. In those circumstances, it must be sensible to seek to exploit to the maximum our indigenous sources of supply.

My hon. Friend the Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Duncan) has already made well the point that that objective has not been assisted by the Chancellor's Budget. The decision to increase by a third the rate of corporation tax on oil and gas companies is bound to have an impact on future investment in the North sea. A survey conducted by the United Kingdom Offshore Operators Association has shown that half its exploration committee members will be reducing their exploration or reviewing their positions as a result of the tax increase. I have some sympathy with the Minister, because we understand that the DTI was not even consulted by the Treasury before the measure was introduced.

Mr. Jack: Did my hon. Friend not think it rather unusual that the only Minister who saw fit to come to the Front Bench to support the Minister of State was a Treasury Minister? He was almost acting as a minder, so that the Minister did not give away any important source of revenue.

Mr. Whittingdale: We have rapidly become used to the fact that almost the entirety of the DTI's policies currently appear to be determined by the Treasury. Indeed, perhaps it would be even more appropriate for a Treasury Minister to respond to the debate. The tax issue is very serious for the oil and gas companies and will have an impact on the future fuel mix. It may well lead to our becoming dependent on imported gas earlier than we would otherwise have needed.

Before I leave the question of European energy markets, it is worth noting one other glaring difference between the open, competitive regime in this country and the highly protected marketplace that applies in much of the rest of Europe. Two days ago, it was announced that LE Group—the London electricity group—was acquiring Seeboard, the supply and distribution business serving the south-east. It is not until one reaches the notes to editors at the very end of the accompanying press release that one finds the statement that, for the past three years, LE Group has been a wholly owned subsidiary of Electricité de France. Of the 14 regional electricity supply companies privatised in 1990—

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that every penny of profit made from burning the electricity that is currently being used in the Chamber goes to the Minister of Finance in Paris as a result of France's ownership of EDF?

Mr. Whittingdale: I am entirely aware of that. I am afraid that every penny that is paid for electricity throughout large parts of the country leaves these shores, as most electricity supply companies are in overseas ownership. Of the original supply companies that were privatised, only the Scottish companies are still in UK ownership.

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): The hon. Gentleman will recall the privatisation of electricity supply after 1990. When the plans were considered, the people who were at the helm at that time believed that we could create county-type electricity companies that would remain in the UK. However, those people did not take the view that privatising electricity supply even in small companies would result in their becoming very lucrative in the general global market and, therefore, suitable prey for American and French companies. Does he therefore believe that it was a mistake to privatise in such a way?

Mr. Whittingdale: No, I do not, because I think that electricity privatisation has delivered tremendous benefits to consumers. I am not complaining about the fact that overseas companies have acquired some other companies in this country. I have no problem with that at all; at least, I would not have a problem if a similar regime applied elsewhere. I object to the fact that, if other European countries were subjected to bids made by companies in this country for some of their supply companies, it is unthinkable that the French or Germans would adopt the same relaxed attitude. They have highly protected markets, so I hope that the Government will continue to push for greater liberalisation of energy markets to take place as quickly as possible not only to enable easier cross-border trading, but to create the level playing field that is needed. At the moment, the playing field is tilted 45 deg against us.

Mr. Blizzard: Does the hon. Gentleman think that we will achieve greater liberalisation of European energy markets—an aim that I think we share—by ensuring that this country becomes more or less engaged with the European Union?

Mr. Whittingdale: I remain absolutely committed to achieving a free and open market throughout Europe. That is the reason why I have always supported membership of the European Union, and it is why the vast majority of people in this country voted to stay in it.

Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): My hon. Friend is making an excellent point about the failure of EU liberalisation. Is he aware that, at the present rate of progress, the majority of the EU market will be owned in a few years' time by just three national champions? That failure arises from EU competition policy, whose scope for movement in this sector is very limited.

Mr. Whittingdale: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend that that is one of the challenges that we will have to confront. I hope that it will feature in the discussions at Seville this weekend. There is no doubt that there is currently a lack of competition throughout Europe in terms of energy, with the single exception of this country.

Mr. Gareth Thomas: The hon. Gentleman rightly talks about the need to continue to develop our indigenous energy resources. In the context of his comments about Europe, does he recognise that in Britain, our wind resource potential is massively better than that of any other country in Europe? Will he try to exercise some influence on some of the more notorious flat earth opponents of wind power, such as the notorious figure Bernard Ingham?

Mr. Whittingdale: I have a high regard for Bernard Ingham, as we worked together for a number of years, and he has valid views about wind power. I want to speak further about wind power, as it is a valuable resource that we should exploit, although it is not true to say that it is without its difficulties.

Before I leave security of supply and the energy mix, I point out that, although there is considerable danger of our becoming too heavily dependent on one energy source, I am not suggesting that the Government should seek to dictate our future fuel mix. I agree entirely that that is best left to the market, but the matter is not so simple that we can stand back and let market forces work. Many of

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the key determinants of the outcome are under the Government's control, and their decisions will hugely influence the economics of investment in different fuels.

Dr. Ladyman: Before the hon. Gentleman leaves the subject of liberalisation, I should like to point out that my constituency, in east Kent, uses French nuclear-generated electricity that is sold to us by a French-owned company to boil water in our kettles that is also sold to us by a French-owned company. I wonder what we will sell back to the French in the liberal markets that he is talking about. As we are running down our nuclear power stations, we are unlikely to have any excess capacity to sell.

Mr. Whittingdale: I want to say more about nuclear power, but I will not be tempted to do so now. Obviously, we have to look only a short distance across the channel to see a country that has invested heavily in nuclear power and still clearly sees that it has a major part to play in its energy supply.

To finish my point about the mix of fuels, I think that the Select Committee was correct in drawing this conclusion:

> "Even if the exact mix of fuels is left to market forces, it is arguable that the Government should at the very least take no action that closes off options, and perhaps should make adjustments to its policies to keep its options open."

That applies especially in respect of nuclear power, which I want to deal with later.

There is one area where the Government have not adopted a market approach. Instead, they have set a very precise figure for the proportion of our energy that must be sourced from renewables. There is a target of 10 per cent. by 2010, with a PIU recommendation that that should rise to 20 per cent. by 2020. However, it is very important to bear in mind that the target is qualified by these words:

> "provided the costs to consumers are acceptable".

That is a qualification to which I shall return.

We entirely share the Government's wish to see a significant increase in the proportion of our energy that is provided from renewable sources. The environmental benefits of generation from renewables that harness the energy in our natural world—the wind, tides, sunlight and the earth—are enormous. It is now almost beyond scientific doubt that we must reduce our reliance on energy whose generation results in the emission of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. That must be done if we are to avoid potentially catastrophic climate change.

Ms Shipley: On that point of catastrophe, will the hon. Gentleman be clarifying his party's position on the construction industry, and the real need for that industry to be reformed and given statutory requirements, not merely guidance, on energy and on ways of capturing energy so that new buildings are energy self-sufficient?

Mr. Whittingdale: A certain amount of regulation is already in place, but I agree with the hon. Lady that it may well be that more can be done. Energy efficiency is certainly an important component in this debate, but before considering that, I should like to consider renewables, which also constitute an important component.

Despite one or two instances of slight party political point scoring, which of course I expect, it is the case that we have sought over quite a long time to encourage the use of renewables under both Conservative and Labour Governments. It is also the case that progress has been extremely slow. There are a number of reasons for that, one of which is planning requirements. As a result, less than 3 per cent. of our energy comes from renewable sources.

The Government's decision to require energy supply companies to increase that proportion to 10 per cent. will bring about change. Although I might not necessarily have chosen such a blunt instrument to effect that change, we fully support the Government's objectives. For that reason, we have not opposed the renewables obligation. However, the Minister will be aware that there are real doubts about whether the target can be achieved. One of the criticisms of the PIU report is that there was insufficient engineering input into the review, with the result that it fails to recognise practical constraints on the speed with which expansion of renewable electricity generation can occur.

Our electricity transmission and distribution system was built to cope with bulk generation from relatively few power stations. A significant increase in renewable energy will require many embedded generators producing small amounts of power and feeding directly into the distribution system. That will increase the potential for local damage to the network in the event of a fault, and the required extra investment in the network has already made some projects uneconomic.

It appears that the National Grid Company is reasonably confident that the 10 per cent. target will not cause insuperable difficulties for the network, but that is not the case for the PIU's 20 per cent. target. Problems become particularly serious if renewable energy comes largely from wind sources, which are both intermittent and unpredictable. These disadvantages mean that it may be necessary to construct standby plant, which can easily be switched on and off, but that will also further increase costs.

It is such considerations that have led Professors Michael Laughton and Bert Whittington to conclude:

> "the brutal reality is that 20GW of wind power cannot be accommodated in the UK electricity system."

I am not qualified to judge whether their arguments are corrects, but they must be addressed. That is something that the PIU report fails properly to do.

Paddy Tipping: The hon. Gentleman is making an important engineering point. Let me help him on the scale of wind power. Radcliffe power station in Nottinghamshire is an important energy supplier. To build a field of windmills capable of producing the same amount of power would depend upon the spacing of the windmills and the strength of the wind. The best estimates suggest that to produce the equivalent amount of power would require a field of windmills as large as Greater Manchester. That would not be environmentally friendly.

Mr. Whittingdale: I want to deal precisely with environmental questions. However, the hon. Gentleman is right. With all the technical advances in wind generation, a wind farm can still produce only a small fraction of the power produced by a conventional power station.

Developments of wind power—especially offshore wind power, which probably seems the most promising area for development—are expensive in terms of plant and will require huge investment in the transmission network. That has not yet been properly taken into account. For example, the limited spare capacity in the Anglo-Scottish interconnector is a serious inhibiting factor. Yet the cost of a new west coast electricity interconnector, which was originally estimated at about £500 million, is now estimated to be about £2.3 billion. The economics are enormous and have not yet been properly calculated.

Such developments have not only an economic cost but an environmental price. This is where, perhaps, I have some sympathy with my former colleague in the civil service, Sir Bernard Ingham. Opinions differ about the attractiveness of large numbers of wind turbines, but there is no doubt that one of the biggest obstacles to development has been strong opposition to specific proposals during the planning process. To date, about 80 per cent. of planning applications for onshore wind farms have been rejected. Offshore projects have been the subject of protests from local fishermen and, as we have heard, from the Ministry of Defence. Even if a wind farm can be sited offshore where it does not blot the landscape, the necessary infrastructure to connect it with the grid—pylons and sub-stations—will still require planning consent.

Let us be clear that a deliberate policy to increase the proportion of renewables will have to be paid for by higher electricity prices.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): Before my hon. Friend moves from the aesthetic issues that are associated with wind farms and their environmental impact, will he take on board the point that the places that are most attractive for developers of such schemes are often those where the impact is the greatest—for example, the flat fenland landscape of Norfolk, the Cambridgeshire fens and, in my constituency, the Lincolnshire fens? Their effect on the local environment is dramatic because it is disproportionate to the landscape.

Mr. Whittingdale: I agree, but a certain amount can be done to hide wind farms. I visited Wales, where I saw two wind farms. One had turbines on the top of every hill, which could be spotted from about 30 or 40 miles away, whereas the turbines at the other site had been rather more sympathetically positioned—it was necessary to get quite close before seeing or hearing them. I accept that in flat countryside they are obvious and that, for many people, they spoil attractive countryside. It is important that we take account of local objections. There is no doubt that to date almost every application has encountered extremely strong local opposition, and that cannot be overlooked.

Mr. Gareth Thomas: We must carefully consider the aesthetics of energy-producing plant. I have not yet seen an attractive nuclear power station or coal mine, never mind the issues about windmills and renewables. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we might need to contemplate a change in our approach to planning policy, and perhaps to designate certain areas of land to be used specifically for wind projects, renewable projects or energy projects, as is done in other countries such as Germany. That has been a key factor in their exploitation of renewables.

Mr. Whittingdale: The attraction or otherwise of power stations is debatable. For many years, I lived opposite Bradwell power station. I looked at it from my bedroom window every morning. I thought that it had a certain charm. I accept that that may not be a universally held view.

Some of the problems of aesthetics can be overcome by placing wind farms offshore, which is perhaps why most applications are concentrated in such areas. That, of course, carries with it alternative problems of additional costs and other considerations. I would be reluctant to start to impose on certain parts of the country a requirement that they should be wind farm-friendly areas. I accept, however, that the planning process needs to be addressed, in respect not only of wind farm applications but of the development of all our future energy needs. Again, that is matter to which I want to return.

I want to continue with the point, which I regard as very important, that the renewables obligation, however desirable it may be, will have to be paid for through higher electricity prices. Estimates differ about how great the impact will be, but it is likely that it will push up the cost of domestic electricity by 4 per cent. or thereabouts, and by even more for businesses. The Minister said that he believed that people would be prepared to pay that price, and he may be right, but the Government must be much more open about the cost of the policy and to make it clear to consumers that they are being asked to pay more to promote renewables development.

We need to have a proper debate—this might be the beginning of it—about whether we are willing to pay that price, because, by deliberately setting ambitious targets for renewables as well as overall targets for reductions in greenhouse gas emissions that go beyond our international obligations, we are choosing to put up prices and to increase the cost of energy to business by more than we are required to do. Yet our relatively small size in relation to the total global gross domestic product means that our good example will have little overall effect.

There are other ways in which we could cut our emissions and meet our environmental targets. One is to give a far higher priority to increased energy efficiency. The PIU report contains ambitious targets in this area, too, and there is undoubtedly huge scope for reduction in energy demand by increased efficiency, particularly among domestic consumers. We have supported the Bill introduced by the hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Dr. Turner) and hope that it will reach the statute book despite the obstacles that apparently are being put in its way by Ministers.

Although I have raised questions about the Government's renewables target on grounds of practicality, environmental benefit and cost, let me restate that we support the Government's objective of significantly increasing the amount of renewable energy that we produce. There are, however, serious questions surrounding that issue that have not yet been properly addressed.

Even if the problems that I have already mentioned are overcome, and the target is met, that in itself will not be sufficient to ensure that we meet our Kyoto obligations,

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let alone the more stringent cuts in greenhouse gas emissions that many people now believe will be required. The target of 20 per cent. from renewables will merely be a substitute for the 20 per cent. of energy that we currently obtain from nuclear power stations, which will be lost over the next 20 years. It is these hard facts that led the Government's chief scientific adviser recently to conclude that the scientific case for building new nuclear power stations is irrefutable.

Nuclear power is the one proven method of large-scale generation that does not produce greenhouse gas emissions. However, it is also controversial and I fully recognise that it has problems attached to it.

Mr. Patrick Hall (Bedford): The hon. Gentleman's claim that nuclear power production does not lead to the production of greenhouse gases is true as far as it goes. Does he not agree, however, that to make a proper assessment we must take into account the CO_2 produced in the manufacture of the component parts of a power station, in its construction and decommissioning, and in handling the waste? If we take all that into account, we see that the situation is not quite as is claimed by the industry.

Mr. Whittingdale: That is undoubtedly true, and I suppose the answer is that, if we did not have any power stations at all, no greenhouse gases would be produced in constructing them. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that we need to make a proper comparison, but, even having done that, it is almost unarguable that nuclear power is responsible for far fewer carbon dioxide emissions than are fossil fuel-burning power stations.

After the 1997 general election, the Government had a policy that no new nuclear power stations should be built. They now appear to have shifted their position to one in which they state that it is a matter for the market to decide. That is a position that I instinctively find attractive, but it is also highly disingenuous, because the factors that will determine the market's decisions are largely within the control of the Government.

In the last few years, there have been considerable advances in nuclear technology. It is now undoubtedly cleaner, safer and more efficient, but the economic viability of future investment is severely influenced by the time taken to get a power station from the design stage to operation. At the moment, it is estimated that it takes about eight years for a new nuclear power station to be built and, as Sizewell B showed, building on an existing nuclear site makes little difference. If the nuclear option is to be genuinely kept open, the planning and regulatory approval process must be reformed so that decision taking can be speeded up.

Equally, we need a clear policy on the disposal and storage of waste. Other countries have successfully dealt with this problem, but the indecision of the UK Government is blighting the future prospects of the industry. A seven-year consultation period is unnecessary and looks very much like a delaying tactic, although I realise that that is not the responsibility of Ministers at the Department of Trade and Industry. It is a pity that the Treasury Minister who was here earlier has now left the Chamber, because another matter that needs to be addressed is that the contribution of nuclear generation to combating global warming should be recognised by exempting it from the climate change levy—a matter that I shall return to in a moment.

I should like the Minister to confirm that the Government will go ahead with the liabilities management authority Bill in the next Session, as it needs to be put in place to allow British Nuclear Fuels plc to operate as a proper commercial business.

Of course, there will always be legitimate concerns about the safety and security of nuclear power, and they have been heightened since the atrocity of 11 September. Only this week, the BBC television programme "Spooks" had a storyline about a terrorist attack on a nuclear power station. The filming of that episode took place in my constituency, and I am as sensitive as anyone to those concerns. Security worries now affect almost every aspect of modern life, but they alone must not be allowed to change our decisions.

We need to be clear about where we are going. In the past, the Minister has shown a supportive attitude towards nuclear power, as he has done to some extent this afternoon. One of the PIU report's principal conclusions was that a range of actions needs to be taken now to keep the nuclear option open, and the Select Committee called on the Government to make a clear statement on the future of nuclear energy as quickly as possible. At the very least, the Government need not just to say that it is a matter for the market to decide but take the action necessary to ensure that the factors within their control—planning, tax and waste disposal—do not place an insuperable obstacle in the way of a market-driven decision to invest in new nuclear power.

The importance of taking action to tackle global warming is one of the key factors now influencing our future energy policy, so I cannot let this opportunity pass without saying a few words about one of the Government's key instruments for cutting energy demand: the climate change levy. Having only recently put aside his Minister for Industry hat, the hon. Gentleman does not need me to tell him how unpopular that levy is with British industry. By pushing up the cost of energy, it bears most heavily on the manufacturing sector at a time when it already has its back to the wall.

Other countries do not impose a similar burden, so the levy does huge damage to British competitiveness, yet it is almost completely ineffectual in combating climate change. It is a downstream tax, so it makes no distinction between energy generated from fossil fuels and energy derived from non-polluting sources. It is for that reason that my party was committed at the last general election to its abolition.

If the Government wish to use fiscal instruments to combat climate change, there are more effective ways of doing so. In particular, I would gently point out that a carbon tax would represent a true market-driven solution to the problem of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. I hope that that, too, will be taken into account in the debate that the publication of the PIU report has begun.

The Government are to be congratulated on the establishment of the energy review. It would have been easy to duck the hard questions that need to be faced, and to leave them to some future Conservative Administration, who would have to deal with the consequences when the lights started to go out. The

Government have chosen instead to have a debate now, and they deserve credit for that, but the PIU report did not address some of the fundamental issues that need to be confronted. The Minister's speech did not advance that a great deal. Having acknowledged the questions, the Government will have to provide answers. I hope that we will find them, if not in this debate, at least in the White Paper that we are promised later in the year.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. I remind the House that Mr. Speaker has placed a 10-minute limit on Back Benchers' speeches.

3.40 pm

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): I welcome the fact that we are having this important debate, and I congratulate the Government on holding it in Government time. I apologise for the fact that I will not be able to be in the Chamber for the winding-up speeches, for reasons that I have explained to Mr. Speaker. I have also passed a note to my hon. Friend the Minister.

In February this year, the performance and innovation unit published its energy review. The report looks to 2020, and beyond to 2050. The Government are forming their long-term energy policy for our country, and this debate gives Members a welcome opportunity to influence that policy. It cannot be overstated just how important it is that we get it right for the future of this country.

Before being elected to this House, I was a coal miner for 20 years. My constituency once boasted six coal mines, but today, sadly, there is only one, which its owners closed last year. Thanks to the Minister, who agreed to keep the pit on a care and maintenance basis for a few weeks until we found a new owner, it is now doing well and should have a long-term future. Along with the colliers and their families, I remain grateful for his positive intervention. I should also like to pay tribute to Dr. Ian Roxburgh and his team at the Coal Authority, who also played a vital role in keeping the pit open for business until a new owner was found.

It will come as no surprise, therefore, that I will concentrate my contribution on what should be a new and modern future for the coal industry. I do not come from the stable that says only coal can provide the nation's energy requirements. I firmly believe that we need a diverse source of energy supply, and that we should press forward with cleaner, more environmentally friendly energy sources. Gas, oil, coal and renewables all have a role to play in our future energy supply. It is not good sense to rely too heavily on one fuel source alone.

It is important to deal with the carbon output from our generators and to meet our Kyoto targets, which is why I support research and development on renewable energy sources. As I have already said in this Chamber, I do not like wind farms, especially if they are built in the beautiful English countryside. They can be built out at sea, but they should be kept away from the beautiful English landscape. It is early in the development of such farms, and I am sure that with the correct research and development they will get better, as will wave and solar energy, but they are a long way off providing sufficient power to run this great industrial nation of ours.

We need to address the security of supply issue. I know that some people think that there is no long-term problem. I cannot believe such complacency. Is it possible that they have already forgotten that we were held to ransom by OPEC in the 1960s? Do they seriously believe that, in this turbulent world, the status quo will prevail for ever, and that the countries from which we import oil, coal and, in the not too distant future, most of our natural gas supplies will stay friendly and maintain a reasonable pricing regime for ever, when we have run down our indigenous industries?

It beggars belief that some people are willing to close down our coal industry and rely totally on imports, and, when our oil and gas run out—there are varying predictions about when that will be—leave us susceptible to the world market. That is madness. We all know that the very basis of a capitalist economy dictates that countries will get the best price possible for their product. When we have none, and they have all the aces, you can bet your sweet life that the price will go only one way—up.

The Government need a strategic overview of security of supply to ensure that the British people are assured of a power supply when and where they want it. Maintaining an indigenous supply source is crucial, and relying totally on market forces is bonkers.

At the moment, we can generate our electricity from various energy sources. As I have already said, that is the most desirable situation, but is it by design or by accident? I think that it is more likely to be the latter, but we should ensure that in future it is totally by design.

We have much to deliberate on, such as what to do about our ageing nuclear generators. It is true that they produce a clean energy supply, but at what cost? We have absolutely no idea of the financial cost, because we do not know how much it will cost to decommission them and to maintain them safely for ever. We do not know what long-term damage they are doing to our environment, or may do in future.

Our natural gas supplies are in decline—some say that they will last about 15 years. We will then have to import gas from the east and north Africa along mega-pipelines across Europe from countries whose political stability is questionable to say the least: Iraq, Iran, Libya, Nigeria, Ukraine, Turkmenistan, Turkey, Russia—the list goes on. That list hardly fills me with great confidence, but some people think that our gas supplies from those sources will be secure and reasonably priced for ever. Coal has served this country well for many years, and can go on for many years to come, provided that we deal with greenhouse gas emissions—and we can.

British coal is the cheapest and most efficient in Europe, and thanks to the operating aid scheme it has managed to stay in the market. However, that scheme comes to an end on 23 July. Again, thanks to the efforts of my hon. Friend the Minister it is set to be replaced next year with an investment aid package. That is a welcome move, but there is a six-month gap between the operating aid scheme finishing and the new scheme commencing. I urge my hon. Friend to ensure that the gap is filled, so that our industry does not suffer financially in that period. We know that there will be no gap in the other European coal-producing countries, and it is important that there is not one here.

Mr. Wilson: I intervene on my hon. Friend in the knowledge that he will not be present for the winding-up

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speeches. If a case arose in that six-month period and we wanted to intervene, as my hon. Friend suggests, it would be open to us to go to Brussels for approval on that specific case. The six-month gap is more of a hypothetical problem than a real one.

Mr. Hughes: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that information.

With the new generation clean-coal technologies, coal can and should once again play a major role in our energy generation. It is important to fit existing coal-fired power stations with flue gas desulphurisation, because they will be around for a good while to come. However, it is also important that we support the development of new technology, such as the integrated gasification combined cycle power stations. I believe that that is where the future lies for our coal industry and the security of supply for our nation's needs.

IGCC is simple in principle. Coal is fed continuously into a closed pressure vessel, where it is partially burnt with pure oxygen. All the fuel is converted into gas and the ash is melted. The raw gas leaving the vessel is cooled and the impurities—mainly sulphur compounds—are removed. The clean gas and steam raised during the cooling process fuel the combined cycle turbines to generate electricity.

Old-fashioned coal burning, as we know, produces sulphur, nitrogen oxides and carbon dioxide. Capturing those pollutants after combustion is costly and inefficient. Gasification enables all harmful emissions to be removed from the fuel before combustion. The advantage of IGCC is the near-total removal of particulates and sulphur—but that is not all. The waste slag is a valuable inert material that can be used for building-block manufacture and road-building foundations. Captured sulphur can be used in the chemical industry and captured hydrogen for fuel cells. It is also possible to use captured carbon dioxide for enhanced North sea oil recovery.

All in all, new clean-coal technology is more environmentally friendly and can help us to meet our Kyoto targets. Some people have already written off the coal industry, but they are clearly wrong to do so. With IGCC, coal should have a bright new future—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has had his time allocation.

3.51 pm

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): I, too, welcome this debate, which is necessary and overdue. I very much appreciated the Minister's lengthy and detailed opening speech. I shall ask some questions in the hope that he can find time to squeeze in some answers in his winding-up speech.

Energy is a significant planet-wide problem—we are not simply solving a few domestic political issues. In finding the solution to the United Kingdom's energy problems, we have an opportunity not only to improve our own quality of life but to enjoy major economic growth. I hope that we regard that as a positive challenge, and not just as crisis management or catastrophe aversion. There is no doubt that the growth of CO_2 in the atmosphere is leading to global climate change. As the search for economic growth and prosperity continues, energy consumption will rise, putting increasing pressure on the planet's ecosphere. The world's population has tripled in the past 50 years from 2 billion to 6 billion. Meeting the aspirations of people born in that period will be a challenge for the planet.

The UK's energy policy must preserve and develop a strong, sustainable economy and environment. If it is out of kilter with that goal we may both damage economic growth and undermine a sustainable environment. There is no doubt that we need a long-term energy policy, which must be pursued with diligence for a number of decades. Energy investments last for 30, 40 or 50 years. Change cannot be imposed by Government diktat in the course of one Parliament.

We also need to remember that things change over time in the energy market. I am not limiting myself solely to the generation of electricity, which has been to the fore of contributions to our debate. We use energy for transport, heating and processing, and for many other things that produce carbon dioxide emissions and contribute to global warming. A hundred years ago, in the decade 1900 to 1910, the energy scene was dominated by coal. Fifty years later, in the 1950s, it was dominated by coal and the nuclear industry. In the first decade of this century, gas and oil are at the forefront. Liberal Democrats believe that we should move strongly and purposefully towards renewable and sustainable energy generation in the decade 2050 to 2060.

Any energy system produces problems for the environment. However, we need to distinguish between life-threatening environmental issues and secondary issues, however important. There is a difference between the problems created by carbon dioxide emissions and the long-standing problem of nuclear waste and those created by the disruption to the visual appearance of the landscape caused by the building of a major power station or windmills. Britain is a leading industrial nation and its landscape is covered with motorways, railway links and electricity pylons, which are visual nightmares. However, we have got used to them. My own town of Stockport is dominated by a massive 13-arch railway viaduct. We put it on our posters—it is our trademark feature. However, if one viewed it as some people view wind farms, it would never have been built and no sensible person would ever have lived near it. We get used to things. Culture changes our views about the things that we see and how dangerous they are.

Since 1997, the Government, to their credit, have had good intentions on energy and have had plenty to say about the subject. However, they have paid intermittent attention to policy, which has been inconsistent and sometimes incoherent. No sooner had we signed up to Kyoto than we had a moratorium on gas and the protection of coal. The climate change levy was introduced for many perfectly sensible and good reasons, but the Government overlooked the benefits of a carbon tax, which would have achieved their objectives far more effectively. The renewables obligation is good and has all-party support, yet our carbon dioxide emissions are set to increase this year. Only this week, the renewables industry said that there is still a residual problem, even with the renewables obligation, as the escalator will not continue.

The Government have set welcome targets in the past, but as the Minister himself admitted, the target for combined heat and power will not be met. At the moment, between half and two thirds of CHP generating capacity is out of use because of the combined impact of prices and the new electricity trading arrangements. Other targets are not exactly ambitious. When I visited Germany with parliamentary colleagues earlier this year, we were told that, in the past 12 months, it had installed 2,000 MW of wind turbines, while the UK managed only 80 MW. Whatever we say about the differences in culture, legislation and approach, the reality is that we have set unambitious targets and failed to reach even those.

The energy review is good and positive, and is welcomed by the Liberal Democrats. The Government's consultation is a model one because they did not assume that they knew the answers. In fact, some of us might say that the consultation is so open-ended and wishy-washy that it may have been better to circulate the energy review and say, "What do you think of this?" In all conscience, it is hard to see the direction that the Government are coming from, or the direction that they intend to go.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): Very skilful.

Mr. Stunell: The Conservative Front-Bench spokesman suggests that that is skilful, but I always commend a Government who are listening. I always want more listening, especially to the solutions that I am offering, which is exactly what I want to come on to.

If the Government are serious about meeting and exceeding their Kyoto targets, they must give some long-term signals to the energy industry. First, they must take the renewables obligation beyond its plateau in 2010 and continue the annual 1 per cent. escalator. I talked to the Renewable Power Association earlier this week. It said that bankers and financiers are looking at 2010 and saying, "If we advance you money, how do we know that there will still be a demand for the product beyond 2010?" That is undermining the value of the renewable obligation certificates. We need to take account of that. I hope that the Minister will come to the House soon and say that he will go with the renewables obligation beyond 2010.

We need to simplify the rules for the generation of energy offshore. People have talked about wind, but I hope that in due course wave and tidal will be issues for electricity generation, too. They will be greatly inhibited if we do not tackle some of the bureaucratic and interdepartmental fumbling.

Will the Minister tell us when precisely he will put the social and environmental guidelines for the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets in the post? Drafted they have been, posted they have not.

Mr. Wilson: This morning.

Mr. Stunell: That is excellent news. I talked to the director of Ofgem earlier this week. He was looking at his post every morning, so I am delighted to hear that, and I will study the guidelines with great interest. When the Minister set up Ofgem, he gave it a specific market-orientated remit. To achieve some of the environmental outputs that he seeks to achieve, Ofgem needs more specific guidance that would allow it to take account of that factor more completely.

We need more investment in research, although I concede freely that it has been increased significantly, but investment too in pilot projects and the development of near-market technologies. I hope that the Minister will not mind me mentioning a pet hobby horse of mine: the vexed issue of two-way meters. The aim is to have about 3,000 properties equipped with voltaic roofs by 2005, yet there is a major bottleneck in respect of whether, at the small scale, it is possible to resell surplus product to the grid. The development of two-way meters is one way forward.

I have suggested some things that can and should be done on energy policy—things that, on the whole, are not likely to cost the Treasury a great deal of money. I want to move on to conservation and efficiency.

Richard Ottaway: Before the hon. Gentleman moves off what he thinks should be done, what is the Liberal Democrats' policy on nuclear power?

Mr. Stunell: I am happy to address that issue. Indeed, if I had time, I would read out the two booklets that I have written on the topic. The Liberal Democrats' view is that our existing nuclear capacity should be retained for as long as it is safe and economical to do so, but that it should not be replaced by a further generation of nuclear power. The gap should be filled by two things: first, a greatly increased effort at conservation and efficient use of energy; and secondly, an energy mix.

I was pleased to hear what the Minister said about the importance of conservation and efficiency. I am sure that he recognises that it is the one area where it is very difficult to get market-led developments, because those who supply energy do not have any incentive to supply less of it. It is difficult to make them the drivers for conservation projects and for developing efficient use of energy by the end user.

I know that a number of signals, such as taxation signals are in place but some regulatory decisions need to be made as well. We are toughening up building regulations, but they need to be tougher still. We are still nowhere near the Scandinavian level of requirements for energy efficiency. If the majority of our homes could be solar heated for the majority of the year, we would save a great deal of money. I hear from people that they have a gas-heated home or an oil-heated home, but nearly all of us have a solar heated home for three or four months of the year when we do not have our central heating on. By extending that free period of solar heating, much could be gained in terms of energy and carbon dioxide emissions.

We need tougher regulation of the efficiency of domestic appliances of all sorts. I find it unsatisfactory—to put it in very politely—that a domestic appliance made by a German manufacturer is deliberately fitted with a more stupid electronic chip when it comes here. Germany has regulations that require the efficient use of fuel in products such as dish washers and washing machines. Its regulations are substantially stiffer than those in this country. That small step could be taken quickly by the Government and would make a substantial impact over the life cycle of such machines.

A couple of years ago, another private Member's Bill failed to complete its passage through the House. It would have meant that, at the time of sale, each house had to have an energy MOT, so to speak, with its particulars of

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sale. All sorts of signals can be sent for the discerning consumer to take account of. At practically nil cost either to industry or to the consumer, the Government could require certain standards to be in place.

Ms Shipley: I agree with much of what the hon. Gentleman has said, but does he think that the discerning consumer will be sufficient, or might there have to be a rather larger stick than that?

Mr. Stunell: On domestic appliances, it is clear that the way ahead is to regulate and require certain standards to be provided. Just as we expect safety standards to be met as a matter of legal necessity, so we should require environmental standards to be met. The building of new houses is controlled by regulations. The buying and selling of houses is properly left to the market, although if the hon. Lady has suggestions that she would like me to take into account, I would be happy to hear from her on another occasion.

On ways of changing perceptions and moving things on, the Home Energy Conservation Bill, which was introduced by the hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Dr. Turner), moves the argument on. I hope that the Government will find time to accommodate that Bill.

On conservation and efficiency, a recent survey said that the consumption of energy by Government offices was 82 per cent. higher per square metre than that of equivalent commercial offices. The Minister may want to comment on that and suggest how he is approaching other Departments to improve the efficiency with which they consume energy.

I want to say where we should be in 2050. We should look at the direction in which we wish to go, examine what total energy needs will be at that time and balance them by tackling efficiency and the conservation of resources, and by looking at the resources that we use to provide energy.

The Minister—and, indeed, all hon. Members—accept that we need diversity, security, economy and sustainability. Some of those things are best achieved through the liberalisation of markets and the operation of market forces at an international, as well as a domestic, level. Others require direct intervention by Governments and through international agreements.

It is clear that, by 2050, world supplies of oil will be steeply in decline, and gas will soon face such a decline. Perhaps there is a future for nuclear waste—*[Laughter.]* I meant to say perhaps there is a future for nuclear power, but there is indeed a future for nuclear waste: about 100,000 years-worth. I have made it clear that I do not particularly want the nuclear option to be kept open, but if the Minister wants to do so it is absolutely vital that he tell the House what progress the Government intend to make on dealing with nuclear waste. If, in 2050, the majority of nuclear waste—admittedly, it has already been created—is still sitting in ponds at Sellafield or is dotted around the country at the sites of decommissioned nuclear power stations, the scope for building another generation of such stations will be as limited then as it is now.

Bob Spink: Does the hon. Gentleman acknowledge that replacing nuclear with nuclear would increase the total amount of nuclear waste that this country has to deal with by between just 5 and 10 per cent? Waste is therefore a problem that we must manage regardless of the nuclear-for-nuclear replacement question.

Mr. Stunell: The hon. Gentleman must recognise that we are here in this Chamber today because of our democratic system. He must face the fact that, unless that system is totally overridden in order to impose a new nuclear industry on this country, and until the issue of nuclear waste is resolved in the long term to the public's satisfaction, it will be almost impossible to develop a second generation of nuclear power. *[Interruption.]* I am not inviting the hon. Gentleman to agree with me; I am stating my opinion, which is viable in the context of the outside world.

Mr. Hayes: There is surely a paradox in the hon. Gentleman's argument. He said that the transfer of emphasis to renewable energy sources is very unlikely to be dealt with locally, and can be addressed only through national and international agreement. Yet in answer to the intervention of my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink), he said that the democratic process—presumably, he is including the local democratic process—should not be overridden. It seems that he wants to override that process in respect of renewable energy, but not of nuclear energy.

Mr. Stunell: The hon. Gentleman may have misunderstood what I said. I certainly was not implying that the way ahead is to bow to international agreements to which we have not given assent. We signed up to the Kyoto agreement, and we are—I hope—willing participants in ensuring that it reaches a satisfactory conclusion. My point was that Kyoto and beyond will require international action by many nations, not just the United Kingdom. I am sorry if my explanation was not sufficiently clear.

I should tell those hon. Members who are keen to see the nuclear industry redeveloped that not even its best friend would claim that it is the cheapest way to generate electricity. An element of subsidy and support would be required, and my investigations have led me to believe that the Government would get better value by putting the equivalent subsidy into renewables.

Dr. Ladyman: I fundamentally disagree with the hon. Gentleman. Objective calculations by independent engineers on a like-for-like basis show that all the so-called renewable energy sources that he is espousing are more expensive than the nuclear option. Nuclear is the only energy source that, by law, must meet the cost of its own waste and decommissioning. He advocates the future use of wave and marine energy sources, but in both cases the production unit cost is twice that of nuclear power.

Mr. Stunell: I was about to say that, between now and 2050, there will be at least two generations of technology: land-based and offshore wind farms, to which reference has been made, and biomass and other technologies that are ready to be marketed; and other forms that are not yet ready to be marketed, of which—as the hon. Gentleman rightly says—wave and tidal energy are two examples. Such forms have huge potential, particularly in the context of the UK's geography, but at the moment they are a long way from being marketable. I agree that the use of such sources is some way off, as is the use of fusion nuclear power. However, I do not oppose work continuing on that, or on clean coal. Indeed, I was encouraged by the Minister's comments, and I take his point about the development of proper clean-coal technology and the efficient burning of coal. At the moment, perhaps the best way to reduce global carbon emissions is to fit clean-coal technology to existing plant in China. China's coal-burning technology is running at about 19 per cent. efficiency, and it is one of the planet's major pollutants.

The Minister—and perhaps the Prime Minister, too—has some challenges, and I hope that he can respond to them. One is developing targets beyond Kyoto, expanding the renewables obligation, considering carbon tax as a possible replacement for the climate change levy, and setting targets in general beyond 2010 and 2012. Progress needs to be made on two-way meters and domestic appliance efficiency.

Mr. Wilson: The hon. Gentleman said earlier that we should extend the renewables obligation beyond 2010, but perhaps that was a slip of the tongue. In fact, the renewables obligation extends to 2027.

Mr. Stunell: I am aware that the obligation will continue at its 10 per cent. level, but as the Minister knows, my plea is that we do not simply go up the escalator and remain on a plateau. We need instead to increase that figure in subsequent years.

Mr. Drew: I apologise for missing the first few minutes of the hon. Gentleman's speech. Does he agree that one way to advance the obligation to which he refers is to increase customer involvement? Each generating company could enable its customers to buy renewables through the device of ticking a box. Although they would pay more at the moment, there would be genuine customer involvement. One of the saddest things is that customers are not given the option to buy, and generators need to do much more to ensure that that can, and should, happen.

Mr. Stunell: I accept the hon. Gentleman's general point, and I am certainly in favour of much more positive marketing of renewables. Such things can be done—indeed, I myself have signed up to a renewables supplier.

Will the Minister explain what is to be done about interdepartmental co-ordination in this vital policy area? Conservation and efficiency appear to be within the remit of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; the generation and supply side is the Minister's own business within the Department of Trade and Industry; taxation is dealt with by the Treasury; the built environment and building regulations are the responsibility of the newly created Office of the Deputy Prime Minister; and transport issues are of course dealt with by the newly created Department for Transport. Five Government Departments are dealing with what should be integrated policy areas. Will the Minister give some assurance that the Government recognise the importance of this topic, and are co-ordinating it properly?

The United Kingdom can benefit from a sound, sustainable renewable energy policy. Such a policy can improve our quality of life, reduce pollution and flooding, and provide greater home comforts for us all. It can lead to growth in our economy domestically and in our exports nationally. It can certainly give us a far more sustainable environment, and produce far fewer harmful residues.

I suggest to the Minister that there is a route map for the future, a road on which to travel and a vehicle to put on that road. I want to hear from the Government that they will stop dithering—that they will stop just talking, and get on with it.

4.20 pm

Dr. Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test): By coincidence, a while ago I was considering what might be the position of my city, Southampton, in 2050 if business continued as usual in terms of energy use in this country and throughout the world, and nothing was done to curb the growth of energy use and the carbon dioxide emissions that go with that. I consulted the Southampton geodata institute's study, which projected sea-level rises of between 0.8 and 1.2 m, and noted the institute's concern about more cyclones and anti-cyclones, greater tidal surges, and specific conditions in the south of England that would prevail by 2050. It predicted that the defensible shoreline resulting from those developments might be up to 5 m above the present level.

I looked at a map of my city, and imagined how it would look. Freemantle and St. Denys, two of its suburbs, would be completely under water, or defensible only with high sea walls. The River Itchen would not be crossable by bridge. All Southampton's main industrial areas and estates would be under water, and the port that is being built largely on reclaimed land would itself be wholly under water.

That is not an academic fantasy any more; it could happen almost in my lifetime. The forecast may be slightly out in terms of sea-level rise, but something along those lines is distinctly likely unless something is done, in the light of climate change, radically to reduce the energy consumption of all our industries and, indeed, all our countries. The report of the performance and innovation unit rightly identified a target of a 60 per cent. reduction in carbon dioxide emissions by 2050.

I am proud that Britain has taken the lead in terms of the Kyoto targets, and is taking the lead in embarking on what is only the first stage of a process that must go much further. We must accept, however, that whether or not we want to take the lead in the future, other countries are likely to reach the same conclusions. They will therefore probably be subject to international long-term targets that will cause us to take the lead in any event.

The PIU report also considered the cost of reaching the target. It suggests that only six months' growth in gross domestic product would be lost over 50 years. Surely, on any reckoning, the benefits of attempting to reach the target easily outweigh the cost, and would do so even if it were much higher.

The report places much emphasis on renewables. We should double our target by 2020, as it suggests, and I think we need to start picking winners. We cannot afford to stand back and hope that the market alone will make some vital technologies marketable. Such action will entail investment, not in permanent subsidy but in making the renewables market ready to play its part.

I consider two aspects particularly important. One was mentioned by the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell). Photovoltaics are the only urban renewable

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that we can seriously consider, given the overwhelmingly urban nature of our environment. When we talk of planning constraints, we are usually talking about constraints on what we want to put in our rural environment. We have millions of roofs, however, and the sun shines on all of them. The fact that they do not play their part in generating energy to heat the houses below them strikes me as a significant omission in terms of our long-term energy strategy.

The main problem with photovoltaics is the lack of demand for the cells that could be placed on the roofs. The problem is not that the technology does not work, or that it needs extensive research; the problem is that mass production and long-term stability of demand are needed if costs are to fall significantly. We can do much at an early stage to enhance market readiness.

There is already one example of the success of building regulations in making the country ready for the challenge of climate change. Building regulation L changes boiler and double-glazing standards. Once the changes are fully in place, some 1.4 MT of carbon dioxide could be saved over 10 years. That approaches the level of savings envisaged by the Government's 10-year transport plan.

We need a change in building regulations to alter the way in which we clad our buildings. That could make a tremendous contribution. I suggest a regulation embedding photovoltaics in the cladding of roofs of new buildings. Even given its present cost, PV is a competitive alternative to cladding. We need a regime in which buying a PV roof is not the result of individual commitment, whim or fancy. We need PV roofs to be there, part of the low-carbon economy and something that people switch on and off every day.

We should also make progress on the use of biomass as fuel. Astonishingly, we have 800,000 hectares of set-aside land that could be used—and, indeed, was used for agricultural purposes—while we have a crisis in employment in rural communities and their sustainability. Using it for biofuel crop production—for biodiesel, short-rotation coppicing or elephant grass to fuel combined heat and power plants—would have multiple benefits. The advantage of combined heat and power is that it can function on a larger or smaller scale, which makes it an ideal partner for such a change in policy. Again, all we need is investment in creation of the necessary climate and the maturing of the arrangements. No costly investment in research and development is necessary.

Those are just two technologies in which we should invest to expand radically the role of renewables in our energy supply. I congratulate the Government on introducing a renewables obligation that will lever confidence and some investment into renewable development, but the PIU report has done us an equal and longer term service. It has set out calmly and unemotionally the scale of the task involved in transforming the landscape of our energy economy, and has drawn our attention to how quickly action needs to be taken even if we want to address ourselves to much longer-term changes. Moreover, it has told us that action on biomass, PV and a range of other new and existing fuel technologies can be taken and can work. Our task now is to ensure that that happens.

4.29 pm

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): That excellent speech by the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Dr. Whitehead) illustrates the important interplay, mentioned earlier, between matters connected with the environment, technology, taxation, and, indeed, industry. All those factors affect energy policy.

I agree with what the hon. Gentleman said about the role of the rural economy and agriculture in our future policy. I was heartened for a brief moment when I saw the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs come into the Chamber, but she disappeared very quickly. Sadly, the Minister was not supported by someone from that Department. Although such support might be symbolic, it would show a dimension that has not been much discussed hitherto in the debate.

This debate shows the House of Commons at its best. We have heard excellent, well informed and knowledgeable speeches, and I have already learned a considerable amount from the contributions of right hon. and hon. Members so far. None the less, energy security lies at the heart of the matter. The PIU report has been cited almost as a security-free zone, but I would counsel colleagues to read page 86. In box 5.1, we find a telling but short sentence. Under the words "natural gas", it says:

> "Strategic security is therefore a concern."

That is prefaced by this acknowledgement:

> "By 2050, the UK will, like most other countries, be predominantly dependent on imports."

The report acknowledges the importance of what it describes as "geopolitical concerns".

The speeches that we have heard so far illustrate clearly the fact that in the world of energy supply, there are no absolute certainties but a great number of complex issues, so it is important to have a balanced portfolio, as the Minister has said, and the Government have a central role to play. Given the energy providers, it is easy to believe that this is almost a private sector matter—but it is not; it is a very public matter that involves large parts of the public sector.

The public sector sets the environmental targets and the fiscal regime. It deals with agriculture and rural policy. Most importantly, it deals with the establishment of the electricity market, and sets the regulatory framework in which the industry operates. The Government therefore have a central role, so their consultation exercise is to be welcomed, and the questions and challenges thrown up by the PIU are central to our further discussions.

It is important that, unlike the United States, we remain fully wedded to the aim of achieving our Kyoto targets, and address the decline in the amount of electricity that can be generated from nuclear sources in the future. I want to say a few words about that from my constituency standpoint.

My constituency is the home of BNFL's Springfield plant. Apart from the fuel for pressurised water reactors, all the other fuels for nuclear power stations are produced in my constituency. The tremendous efforts that the work force at the Springfield plant have already made to improve not only their efficiency but the safety of their operations are noteworthy. They have recently won a national aware for the way in which they operate.

Although a while ago, the events at Sellafield perhaps represent a blot on the landscape of safety and probity in the nuclear industry. However, post-Windscale, we in the

United Kingdom have had a safe, regular and consistent supply of nuclear electricity and the waste has been dealt with, difficult though that may be. The plants that manufacture nuclear fuel have a record of increased investment and improved safety. Without doubt, if my constituents were here today, they would make a plea to be given an early and clear indication of just what the future of the nuclear electricity industry will be.

BNFL, with its expertise now drawn from Westinghouse, which it took over in the United States, has produced new and interesting design prospects. From the United Kingdom's point of view, the best design is the Westinghouse-designed AP1000 reactor, the potential cost of which could certainly match, if not better, anything currently available. In fact, it is said that that design's potential cost of generation could be competitive with the current average bulk electricity price.

Clearly, we all want a competitive and—I suppose most people think—cheap electricity supply. We need a pricing policy that provides affordable energy, but does not preclude a range of options, and helps to provide a secure electricity supply. If the returns are not right, people will not invest in the variety of energy sources that hon. Members have mentioned today. Without that cocktail of different sources, we will not have the security of supply that, above all, should underpin this country's energy policy.

One of the key issues is the disposal of nuclear waste. The Select Committee on the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, of which I am a member, recently conducted an in-depth study into the consultation exercise that is trying to build a consensus on what we should do with such waste. The time scale is too long and the idea of a universal public debate is heroic. It has been suggested that because there will have been a debate, there will be no explosion of opposition when someone at last points a finger at the map and says, "We'll get rid of it there"—but we have to recognise that that is not the case.

Perhaps we also have to recognise that we are seeking a sort of ideal state that the technology cannot provide, whether for the legacy of waste or for the waste from nuclear power stations. Perhaps we should recognise the fact that what we need to sustain our nuclear industry is an acceptance that we shall do our best with technology at our disposal, such as dry storage, on-site storage at nuclear power stations and some form of deep but perhaps not absolutely final repository, just as the Finns have done. The Finns have recently decided to build a fifth nuclear power station, and they accept that they cannot provide the absolute ultimate answer, because they recognise that the disposal technology is moving on.

BNFL's proposed new nuclear reactor is based on a proven design. Westinghouse has designed about 50 per cent. of the power stations already in service. The design builds on pressurised water reactor technology, which is known and proven. Fail-safe technology has been built into the new AP1000, making it one of the safest designs possible. It relies not on pump technology for cooling water if something goes wrong, but on good old-fashioned gravity. It is an extremely safe design, and I hope that it will commend itself to the House and the Government.

My hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) mentioned waste, and opting for like-for-like replacement would effectively produce less waste, given the newer technology. The old "If it ain't broke, don't fix it" formula underpins the question of nuclear power—it is certainly not broken, and it has proved successful. It is worth stating that some 438 commercial nuclear reactors are in operation, 32 are under construction and 35 are planned.

Nuclear power is the largest source of electricity in Europe, and new building programmes are being commenced in Finland and the United States. It is certainly not a redundant technology. As for providing security, it is something that we can have and hold, and secure for ourselves. Certainly, British engineering technology is well up with the rest of the world when it comes to constructing plants and producing fuel.

Risk is a key word in the energy world. The nuclear industry may be risky, and there are certain problems with it, but coal has its risks, too, including carbon dioxide emissions. Clean-coal technology has been discussed, and I support efforts to secure the use of that indigenous technology. Risk is involved in the interruptability of renewable energy sources, but I personally support the development of those sources because that will give us a balanced portfolio. Saving energy using better insulation and building techniques also involves risks.

There is no guarantee that all the sources will deliver simultaneously, so, as the Minister said, we need a balanced energy portfolio. Not just for parochial reasons, but for good national reasons, I believe that nuclear power, with modern new power station designs, can underpin a sensible United Kingdom energy policy, and I support it.

4.39 pm

Dr. Desmond Turner (Brighton, Kemptown): I am glad that the PIU report has been produced and that we can debate it today, but I want to challenge some of the terms of the debate and the basic assumptions that underpin it.

The terms of the debate drive the outcomes. The political drivers for both the debate and the PIU report are, as we have just heard from the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack), security of supply and the need for cheap affordable energy. That is fine. However, another political driver—the overwhelmingly important one—should be climate change.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs publishes climate change scenarios and recently issued an update. I commend those documents to everyone. We should all read them—they are required reading. The scenarios are scientifically sound—I am convinced of that—and they make it clear that even if we start to take action on carbon dioxide emissions now, the milder of their forecasts, at least, will still come into effect. Some of the more extreme scenarios would happen even if we implemented the Kyoto targets, but if we do not do that things will get worse and worse.

If we are to slow down the inevitability of climate change, we need to adopt targets more like the 60 per cent. cut in carbon dioxide emissions proposed by the royal commission on environmental pollution. We should be doing that almost immediately if we are to make a significant difference.

I give much credence to the catastrophic scenarios—they are truly terrifying. As we know, the polar ice caps are already melting at an alarming rate and mountain

[Dr. Desmond Turner]

glaciers are retreating. Once the ice has gone global warming will accelerate, and one of the likely climate changes will mean dry winters in what are currently areas of tropical rain forest. If the Amazonian rain forest were to burn, the huge quantities of carbon locked up in that enormous carbon sink would be released.

Carbon dioxide concentrations in the atmosphere would double and climate change would again accelerate precipitately. It might reach the point at which the northern and southern oceans warmed up sufficiently for the enormous deposits of methane hydrates on the ocean beds to be released—the seas would boil and methane would be released into the atmosphere in massive quantities.

Methane is a far more potent greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide. The planet would fry. Temperatures would go up by at least 20 deg C. The inevitable consequence would be the mass extinction of species, including the human race. That is a truly terrifying scenario and it could even happen in 2050, if we do not start to take action now. There is evidence in recorded geological history that just such a scenario once occurred. That is why carbon dioxide reduction at the earliest possible moment should be the crucial driver.

It is thus imperative that we put the emphasis on production of energy that does not involve carbon dioxide. The report has a great deal to say about that. I agree with its recommendation for a 20 per cent. saving in home energy consumption by 2010, which is completely consistent with the target in the guidance in the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995, of 30 per cent. between 1996 and 2010.

Unfortunately, if things go on as they are and we take no further action, we shall miss those targets by 6 percentage points. The way to fill that gap, which equates to a few million tonnes of carbon dioxide, happens to be through my Bill, so I hope that the House will forgive me if I do a brief plug for it. Only slight obstacles remain and I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will use his eloquence to maintain Government support for my Bill to ensure its passage. Significant environmental and social benefits could be achieved, and the measure will make a contribution to our energy future.

I want to concentrate on renewables. Although the PIU report recognises that by 2050, wave and tidal energy will make a massive contribution to the UK's energy requirements, I take strong issue with its view that by 2020 there will be almost no such contribution. We are in a unique position geographically, in having energy sources that are capable of supplying more than twice our current electricity generation requirements. It would be complete folly not to exploit them to the greatest possible extent.

Furthermore, to return to security of supply, there is nothing more secure than the waves—who can interfere with them?—and the tide, which flows with exact timing, predictability and strength wherever one goes. Tidal power is just as capable of supplying what is frequently claimed of nuclear power by its proponents—a regular and predictable baseline load. It is vital to develop it.

The assumption is that it will take 30 or 40 years to make significant developments in tidal power. We should consider the example of wind power in Denmark and Germany, where we can see what Government priorities can do—even in a liberalised energy market—to exploit a technology and bring it to a commercial point of development.

There are already demonstrators in the water that are working successfully, and if the Government took wave and tide power seriously and gave the technologies enthusiastic support, which would not need a massive Government investment, those energy sources could be supplying the bulk of the 20 per cent. renewables target by 2020. Furthermore, we would have a wonderful green industrial revolution through the manufacturing industries that supplied the technologies, and we could offer the world a great example by doing something about climate change and providing energy at an economic cost. Even before commercial development and exploitation, the demonstrator machines operate at about 5p per KWh, and it is reasonable to assume that the generating costs will fall to meet the current costs of fossil fuel generation. It is unrealistic to expect that fossil fuel prices will remain at their current low level.

However, there are constraints on the development of those sources—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

4.49 pm

Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): The hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Dr. Turner) speaks with great authority. Indeed, so catastrophic was the picture that he painted that I will certainly take him up on his required reading.

I declare an interest as a consultant to AEP Energy Services, as set out in the register.

I welcome the debate, which is long overdue and necessary. The most notable feature of the performance and innovation unit report was the lukewarm commitment to keeping the nuclear option open without any serious proposals on why—or, indeed, how—that should happen. I am pleased that the Minister did nothing to diminish that commitment today. I suspect that he is a supporter of the nuclear option in any case, but he is right to keep it open and to allow the debate and the consultation process to reach a conclusion.

Some seven years ago, when the last nuclear power station came onstream, the Government were in an enviable position—there was an abundance of supply and plenty of capacity. But the world has moved on since then. Clouds have loomed on the horizon: Californian power failures; oil price hikes and associated fuel protests; the collapse of wholesale electricity prices; dwindling North sea gas supplies; and, as has just been amply demonstrated, growing political pressure to address the issue of climate change. That affects our views on the future of nuclear power and the nuclear option.

We all share the aims and objectives of reducing carbon emissions, although I think that the Government will have some difficulty in meeting their target of a 10 per cent. reduction by 2010. It is right to try, but, as the Minister will appreciate, it is a very big job, even with the assistance of nuclear power. As nuclear power will start to be phased out after 2010, and will be totally removed from the energy mix by 2035, the task will be even greater. The probable decline in the use of coal—at least, dirty coal—will make the situation more difficult. There are no easy options, but in my judgment nuclear power has to replace the dwindling reliance on fossil fuels. It gives diversity and security to the energy mix, and is a reliable low-carbon source of energy. We all assume that gas will take its place, but, as other hon. Members hinted, there are inherent dangers in placing an excessive reliance on gas and on reducing the energy mix. The Government should employ whatever options are necessary to support the nuclear industry and to provide a stable regulatory framework for the nuclear sector.

We have to reach a decision on waste disposal. There have been countless consultation processes, and it is time to make up our minds. Until we do so, it will be hard to make decisions on new nuclear plant. We have to make those decisions, otherwise we cannot achieve our low carbon targets.

I welcome the Government's commitment to renewable energy. Barely a day goes by without a Minister announcing another initiative or a subsidy for this project or that piece of research. That is just the sort of role that the Government should be playing, and I congratulate them. Although they will have difficulty in hitting their targets, it will not be down to any lack of energy and effort on the part of the Minister.

I want to discuss a factor that has been hampering the development of green power. In the past, the Minister has welcomed the use of co-firing to meet renewable energy requirements. In layman's language, that is a mix of, say, 90 per cent. coal and 10 per cent. biomass, which produces 100 per cent. electricity with 90 per cent. carbon production. It is therefore a good process, as it reduces carbon output. The problem is that the Environment Agency has less enthusiasm for co-firing than has the Department of Trade and Industry. Its policy is far from being developed—in fact, it is still working on it—and producers trying to embark upon co-firing are having difficulty in persuading the agency to give them its full support. The problem is not insurmountable—it is a question of joined-up government. The Department and the agency need to get together to improve their liaison on that important matter.

The PIU report centres on security of supply. The word "security" can be loosely defined, and in this context it has many definitions, including stable prices, availability of a good energy mix, and physical security of supply.

It is a given that gas will be the central feature of our drive for a low carbon energy sector. However, North sea gas supplies are dwindling, and we will be a net importer by 2006. As more than half the world's gas supplies are based in Russia, it is essential that we build up a good long-term working relationship with that country. We must develop long-term commercial contracts and work with the Russians as partners. Their pipeline system is old and their own demand is growing, and it is essential to get right alongside them to produce security of supply.

European market liberalisation—a matter touched on by my hon. Friend the Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale)—is the area where most problems exist. The PIU report makes it clear that the liberalisation of European Union gas and electricity markets is essential to safeguard national security of supply. That puts the future in doubt, as the one thing that we do not have is EU market liberalisation. The distortions are manifestly obvious to all who study the EU market. The UK cannot be looked at in isolation—it must be regarded as 20 per cent. of the EU market. One cannot draw up a plan for 20 per cent. of the market and ignore the rest. Unexpectedly, the Government seem to be going down that road by acquiescing in EU developments. The Barcelona summit was a failure in that respect, and a comprehensive proposal from the European Parliament was largely ignored. The French made a concession on their domestic market, but not in the business sector. How is it possible to have a genuine market if British generators cannot sell into the French retail markets, but EDF is allow to sell into the British market? We need a level playing field with a symmetrical market structure.

It is a matter of growing concern that the whole EU energy market is slowly falling into the hands of three players—EDF, which already owns a substantial part of the UK market, and the two German companies, RWE and Eon, which are currently buying Innogy and Powergen. The issue is not that those events are taking place in the UK, but that they cannot take place in France or Germany. At every opportunity, those players are buying up all the available assets in the European electricity sector, and within a few years they will control more than 50 per cent. of the European market. That is a totally unacceptable state of affairs, and I am astonished that the Government do not seem to realise the impact of what is happening. We have been through the pain of breaking up the market in this country into small fragments, which has produced genuine competition. To put it back into the hands of three major players that do not have the British interest at heart is to take a dangerous road.

At the root of the problem is a failure of EU competition policy. As far as I can see, the PIU report makes no reference to competition policy whatsoever, yet it is emerging as the most critical aspect of the European energy market. The difficulty is that transnational mergers and acquisitions in the European market are distorting the market as a result of the revenue rules that prevent competition policies from intervening. EU competition law must be revised or a special set of rules must be introduced for the electricity market; otherwise, we will have a completely distorted market dominated by powerful players with little interest in this country. The Government should press for divestment of assets in Germany and France and market-driven access to transmission capacity. That can be achieved only by unbundling the transmission and transportation companies from the supply companies, as was demonstrated and implemented in the UK.

Generators are having a difficult enough time as it is. Wholesale, not retail, energy prices in this country are at a rock-bottom low. That is a result of the NETA rules introduced by Ofgem, which has made it clear that its priority is to reduce prices regardless of the consequences. The sale of electricity in this country is a nakedly open market that reduces prices to the lowest level, and the NETA rules are having an impact. Several power stations have closed down and several generators are in serious financial difficulties. Consequently, the banks will close power stations and maintenance schedules will slip, resulting in brown-outs such as those that happened in California.

I can see that my time is running out. I welcome the report and what the Minister is trying to do, and I look forward to his White Paper.

4.59 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Unashamedly and unambiguously, I say that I would like to see three new nuclear power stations authorised, probably at Sizewell, Hunterston and Hinkley. Of course, the difficulty is the waste issue, as outlined by the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell). Therefore, I wish to press the question asked of the Minister by my hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet (Dr. Ladyman), which was also mentioned by the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack), about the Finnish situation.

In Britain, we should all take note of the remarkable developments in nuclear energy in Finland, including the progress made in the storage and disposal of spent fuel and radioactive waste—for example, at the Olkiluoto plant.

Some 15 years ago, the Finns built a surface store to keep lifetime spent fuel safely for 50 years and 10 years ago they built a deep underground repository, sized to dispose of all the low and medium level waste products from lifetime operation. They have also selected the site for the ultimate disposal of all Finland's spent nuclear fuel and have parliamentary and local community support for it. People may wish to claim that no community in Britain would act like the Finns, but I think that people would do so in the area of Caithness and Dounreay, where they are familiar with the nuclear industry.

The Finns have reviewed their future energy needs and they have decided to build a new nuclear power station, for which they have got parliamentary and public support. Clearly the Finns have moved on from debate to implementation. They are demonstrating that solutions to the issues do exist. In the light of such progress elsewhere, why are we in Britain making such slow progress in dealing with the waste and the possibility of replacing our existing nuclear stations?

The House of Commons has shown this afternoon that it is more pro-nuclear power than I ever remember before. Members may think that they have to fill 10 minutes, but I would be content if the Minister would address the Finnish situation when he winds up. He may have to visit many other places, but he should buy a ticket to Helsinki and see what they are doing there.

5.3 pm

Bob Spink (Castle Point): As a responsible nation, we must move from a carbon-based economy to a hydrogen-based one. Only by retaining a nuclear option can we provide the stepping stone that we need to make that change successfully. A hydrogen-based economy is not yet a practical option—for instance, we need continued research and development into fuel cells—and we need time to reach a longer term solution. A reliable, safe, cheap, environmentally friendly, secure interim solution is not available now. We will have to compromise on some of the criteria, but we cannot sacrifice safety or our environment and, therefore, cost is under great pressure.

The PIU report predicts that gas could supply 70 per cent. of our total electricity needs by 2025, 90 per cent. of which will have to be imported from Russia, north Africa and the middle east, with all the obvious threats to security of supply and cost that that would entail. The suggestion that gas is an easy solution, and that we can be sanguine about our increased exposure to imported gas, is naive. Other hon. Members have called that total madness.

The Kyoto protocol sets the goal of a 50 per cent. reduction in carbon dioxide emissions by 2050. Renewables and energy savings, especially in the domestic market, must be energetically pursued and can make a sound contribution, but only at the margins. The real option for replacing the current 27 per cent. nuclear capacity is between new nuclear reactors, based of course on the best available safe and reliable technology with improved economy, or even more carbon, at a time when carbon emissions must be reduced.

Some Labour Members baulk at the word nuclear. They are averse to technology, but Lord Sainsbury—who I presume was speaking for the Government—said that it was most important to convince the public that the application of science and technology is the solution to the present problems, not the cause. He said:

> "Persuading people to change their habits will have only a limited effect but it is the scientists and engineers"—

perhaps even the nuclear engineers—

> "who will be mainly responsible for protecting our environment."

The belief that people will not change their habits conflicts with the PIU report's recommendation that we should aim for a 20 per cent. power saving in the domestic sector in only eight years, and for 40 per cent. in 18 years. Those targets are overly optimistic.

We need to follow Japan, which is committed to maintaining nuclear power. Like Finland and the US, Japan has a plan for long-term radioactive waste management. It has also committed itself to a major programme of research on nuclear fusion. It is a partner with the EU in the international thermonuclear experimental reactor.

We must hope that nuclear fusion will be the longer term solution, because it is potentially the most significant opportunity facing the scientific world today. Recent developments are encouraging. Physicists in the USA make claims—viable ones, I hope—to have created nuclear fusion through sonoluminescence or bubble fusion, using deuterated acetone. Other scientists have voiced doubts about that method and the truth will emerge from the current debate in good time.

There are other ways to create nuclear fusion. For example, the fast-ignition approach uses intense short-pulse energy to initiate fusion reactions. Those could be generated by the upgraded Vulcan laser at the Rutherford Appleton laboratory near Oxford, which could create temperatures and pressures comparable to those found inside the stars. That is exciting and—to some—frightening, but nuclear fusion offers an unlimited and safe energy source with no waste problems. It is a target for the whole world to aim at, in this blue sky debate.

Other hon. Members have mentioned waste problems, and I shall try to put them into context. If we decide to replace nuclear with nuclear, we would add only 5 to 10 per cent. to the existing stockpiles of nuclear waste that we need to manage regardless of the decision. Therefore waste is not a key issue in the debate, although it is an important problem that we need to tackle.

We have much of the technology to deal with nuclear waste but we have none of the political courage to make the decision to deal with it appropriately. The PIU report seeks, impossibly, to square a circle in advocating low cost and low carbon outputs. Those two are incompatible. It is granted that costs are currently very low—1.7p per kWh—

but to achieve those low costs we are running out our oldest, least efficient and dirtiest plants. Indeed, carbon emissions increased last year by 1.5 per cent. at a time when we are promising to reduce carbon emissions by a massive amount, and when global temperature in the first three months of this year was the highest ever. With parts of my constituency—Canvey Island, of which Members will have heard before—below sea level, global warming as a result of increased carbon emissions, which is causing sea levels to rise, is a matter of pragmatic concern. It is not an academic debate for my constituents—they live with it day to day.

Another key and difficult issue is that very low prices inhibit new investment, and, therefore, hold back the development of safer and cleaner technologies. Many commentators regard 2.7p per kWh as a more appropriate current price planning level. Even at that level, however, the private sector would be reluctant to finance innovative new technology such as the new nuclear plants that are now emerging—for instance, pebble bed reactors. Government support will be needed to ensure that we get medium-term energy supply that is secure, reliable, safe, environmentally friendly and as cheap as possible, consistent with those aforementioned criteria.

The PIU has avoided the obvious decision to replace nuclear with nuclear. It talks of 20 per cent. of energy coming from renewables by 2020. I believe that that is an unrealistic target. I suggest a future energy profile, an alternative to the PIU approach, using coal via gasification with CO_2 sequestration, balanced with a third of generation from gas—that is just about manageable within our objectives of stability and security—with about 15 per cent. from renewables and savings. That would provide a realistic strategy. It would require the replacement, however, of the UK's existing nuclear capacity with the latest reactor technology, as David White of the Institute of Chemical Engineers has explained. That more balanced strategy is lower risk. It spreads our sources of energy evenly and creates a greater degree of self-sufficiency while we buy time as a nation to pursue the necessary research and development into new hydrogen-based technologies and improved renewables.

In summary, our current energy generation plant and technology is old, inefficient and in dire need of replacement. Our over-dependence on gas is not the answer; it is the soft, sloppy, dangerous option. It would put our supplies at security and cost risk and hand strategic control of our nation's energy to uncertain foreign powers in unstable areas of the world. The sensible solution is a balanced generation strategy, building up renewables to supply about 15 per cent. of our energy requirements, with one third produced from new coal technologies, one third from gas, and 20 to 25 per cent. from new reactor capacity. That is the courageous, and, if I may say so, the Churchillian vision—the rational interim solution. It provides an environmentally sound and geopolitically secure medium-term energy supply while we search for a—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

5.12 pm

Ms Debra Shipley (Stourbridge): I am pleased to be called today because I want to explore the position of my Government regarding nuclear power, and to consider some of the statements made by Ministers, including the Prime Minister, on the environment and renewables. In brief, the argument appears to be: we are running out of natural energy resources, CO_2 is a problem, nuclear power is CO_2-free, and renewables cannot meet out power requirements. Let me try to deal with some of those points.

Are we running out of natural energy? A statistical survey by the World Resources Institute of the world's mineral reserves predicted that, in 2050, we will have run out of oil and will have just two years' supply of gas left. Better news is that we will still have 380 years' supply of coal, but, of course, consumption of coal creates CO_2, a major greenhouse gas. The same study suggested that we will run out of arsenic—very useful—cadmium, copper, gold, lead, sulphur, tin and zinc, and that recycling will be the only way to get hold of those primary elements.

Meanwhile, the world population is growing quickly. I will be one of 9 billion—not 6 billion—people on the planet. All 9 billion of us will aspire to living standards that Britain currently enjoys. Many visions of a dystopian future are offered to us: apocalypse by volcano, the coming global super storm, global warming, rising sea levels and warfare over diminishing stocks of fresh water and energy. Current nightmares are sparked by 11 September and dirty bombs. All that does not include things such as weird weather conditions and incoming asteroids.

It is important to remember how wrong most warnings have proved to be. In 1914, the US Bureau of Mines forecast that 10 years worth of oil was left. In 1951, the Department of the Interior predicted exhaustion of oil reserves by 1964. However, the overwhelming scientific evidence that we have suggests that global warming indeed exists and that it is a human creation. I therefore commend my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's timely foresight in reviewing our energy requirements. That review must be wide ranging.

For instance, the politics of some of the most unstable and illiberal regimes critically affect world raw material and energy reserves, and western involvement in the middle east is inextricably linked to the importation of energy. Oilfields and gas pipelines are central to the developed world's concern with Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, the Gulf and the ex-Soviet states.

A book on the Taliban by Ahmed Rashid revealingly illustrates the existing and proposed oil and gas pipelines in the region and the oil and gasfields that they serve. The suggestion is that energy control is already playing a significant part in warfare on the supply side while, on the demand side of the equation, consumption, consumerism and economic growth seem addicted to using up diminishing energy resources. By 2050, Kyoto will seem to have been a muted wake-up call.

To survive in the current century in a comfortable and relatively peaceful way, we will need to make a supreme political effort and engage in global co-operation. Dystopia is extremely easy to create. The real struggle will be trying to create the conditions for our continued long-term existence. We will have to do so with less, and harvest the sun, wind, rain, tides and energy stored in the core of the earth.

[Ms Debra Shipley]

What is the Government's position? In response to my question on the environmental impact of the proposed European energy market, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister illustrated the current dilemmas. He said:

> "We have made it clear that at the same time as opening up the energy market, we must push forward on energy efficiency and fulfilling the Kyoto targets. We are well aware that opening up the market may benefit consumers on price but that it is important to take other measures on energy efficiency that are necessary for the environment."

Later in the reply, he stated the current orthodoxy:

> "All the evidence that I read week after week suggests that climate change has become a more serious rather than a less serious issue. It is essential that the Governments of the world face up to its seriousness."—[*Official Report*, 18 March 2002; Vol. 382, c. 30.]

I could not agree more.

I have since asked a series of parliamentary questions on renewable energy to see the state of play of the Government's commitment to alternative energy sources. I received a reply from the Department of Trade and Industry to my question about the renewables obligation. It said:

> "The renewables obligation will require licensed electricity suppliers to demonstrate through a system of renewables obligation certificates (ROCs) that they have brought a specified proportion of their electricity from renewable sources. Alternatively, suppliers may meet their obligation through the independent market purchase of ROCs."—[*Official Report*, 25 March 2002; Vol. 382, c. 704W.]

That is interesting.

I welcome the creation of demand for renewables, however small, and I suggest that it is very small. Furthermore, £260 million over three years to March 2004 is proposed to be spent directly on support for renewable energy initiatives. Again, I welcome that, but proportionately it is a very small sum.

I also asked the DTI how it would ensure that sustainable energy and realistic pricing would not increase fuel poverty. My hon. Friend the Minister for Energy and Construction said:

> "The Government will continue with actions to put downward pressure on prices. The Government's Fuel Poverty Strategy also sets out a range of programmes to improve the energy efficiency of homes of the fuel poor."—[*Official Report*, 25 March 2002; Vol. 382, c. 694–5W.]

In the same reply, however, there was an implication that energy prices would rise. I am therefore not totally reassured that my poorer Stourbridge constituents will be protected from increasing fuel poverty, but I am pleased that some of them have already benefited from the warm homes initiative to insulate their properties.

I also welcome the planning Green Paper, which made several references to sustainability in its introduction. However, sustainability is not embedded in the proposals.

Construction creates nearly half the harmful pollutants that now concern us. It also depletes natural resources and the countryside. My recommendation to the planning Green Paper was that there should be separate statements about the sustainability of any development and that they should include statements on the embodied energy of chosen materials, life cycle costs, adjacency of public transport, car use and pollution generated by use.

The previous Minister for Planning and Housing assured me in writing that the omission will be rectified in the White Paper. I am pleased to put his response on record. He said:

> "I can offer definite assurance . . . We now recognise that the Green Paper did not emphasise sustainability sufficiently. Therefore we intend to set out a statutory purpose for planning that will put sustainability at the heart of the system. We want planning to promote environmental quality, sustainable economic development and social inclusion."

I will be most interested to see how the Government do.

Furthermore, excellent design can meet stringent environmental designs. One of the current awards by the Royal Institute of British Architects is for a barn conversion by Hudson Featherstone that limits materials to those available within a five-mile radius. It is possible to reduce energy expended in construction in a simple and direct way. Energy wasted in construction and in the use of buildings is only just beginning to be tightened in new building regulations. The move to limit the generation of CO$_2$ by domestic buildings could have a significant impact. Dr. Susan Roaf built a suburban house in Oxford using existing technology to reduce the amount of CO$_2$ produced to around 150 kg per annum from the average of 6,500 kg for a comparable conventional house.

The nuclear option ignores two things: the dangerous waste products that are created and the intrinsic threat that nuclear power stations now pose as terrorist targets. What does exist requires generations of political stability, which is unrealistic. In addition, 11 September demonstrated the potential vulnerability of nuclear plants.

The existing nuclear programme is coming to the end of its life, and maintaining a nuclear component for energy production means building new power stations. Private money has yet to be attracted to the lifetime costs of construction, disposal and, importantly, the decommissioning of nuclear power stations. It is an expensive, insecure, uncertain and hazardous option. By contrast, if every dwelling in this country came just part of the way to meet the CO$_2$ reductions of the Roaf house, nuclear power would become an irrelevant option. We must consider how much more secure a country is if it is full of dwellings that act as micro-power stations, each self-sufficient in an emergency.

Every surface of every man-made object, from roads to buildings, could collect energy from the sun. Solar trains could have massive collectors on their backs and run on rails ballasted by solar collecting rocks. That is not a utopian dream. It is a real option and we have the nascent technology for it. For example, Marks Barfield Architects, designers of the London Eye, has just won an architectural competition for a solar collecting walkway in Cambridge to power electrical shuttle buses. That uses a developing painted, not manufactured, technology.

Many hon. Members who contributed to the debate have nuclear interests in their constituencies and they rightly pressed their constituents' concerns. I have no such nuclear interests and my constituents probably have different views. I cannot do better than quote from Mr. Lea Williams, who wrote:

> "As one of your constituents I am writing to ask you to join me"—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am afraid that I have to cut him, and the hon. Lady, off.

5.23 pm

Adam Price (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): I congratulate the Government on at least resurrecting the notion of having an energy policy; the previous Administration largely left it to the vicissitudes of the marketplace. I also welcome the fact that the Government are taking a long-term approach to energy trends and are seeking to combine economic and environmental objectives. Having said that, I take issue with some parts of the energy review, although I realise that it is meant as a platform for debate. Following the lead of the hon. Member for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes), I will focus principally on the role that the coal industry could play in meeting the Government's objectives of security, diversity and sustainability.

The energy review is a little complacent about the risks of disruption to energy supplies, as hon. Members explained. It observes that the UK will be heavily reliant on gas imports, but does not regard that as too much of a problem. It notes that the gas grid can be disrupted by disabling a relatively small number of key points—landing points—and that the effects could be dramatic. The review largely ignores the risks, however, and it seems that it was written before 11 September. As the report notes, coal is at much less risk of such disruption.

In general, the report highlights the importance of diversity as a means of ensuring security, but it is silent on how that should be achieved. We have heard from several hon. Members about the consequences of falling gas reserves in the UK. Over the past eight years, the remaining lifetime of our gas reserves has fallen by 19 years, so we are obviously using them much faster than they are being replenished. As a consequence, we are increasingly reliant on gas imports. It is estimated that Gazprom in Russia and the Iranian national oil company control almost half of the global gas reserves. The knowledge that the future custodians of our energy security are a company allegedly run by the Russian mafia and another run by Islamic fundamentalists does not inspire much confidence in anyone.

The UK is at the end of a very long pipeline that passes through many countries, which means that we are subject to the highest transportation costs and the greatest risk of supply interruption. The right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) mentioned the Californian blackout. The report recognises the significance of that experience and the need for incentives for investment to prevent the same thing from happening here. However, although it says that the UK should learn from that mistake, it is silent about what should be the consequences for policy options.

Coal clearly offers long-term security and diversity of supply at an affordable cost, and the report acknowledges that. Coal reserves in the UK are far greater than those of gas and oil. At the current usage rate, we have at least 50 years of reserves. Coal is a defensive fuel in terms of security of supply because it is plentiful, it is cheap and it is available from a variety of sources. UK producers of deep-mine coal are able to compete on the world market if current subsidies are taken into account. The cost of coal production in the UK compares very favourably with that of other EU producers.

We have heard about the prospects for investment in clean-coal technology, which will enable us to replace the current, ageing coal-fired stations with far more efficient and environmentally friendly capacity, while sustaining diversity. However, that will clearly not happen without Government support. We need to ensure that we invest in new technologies such as clean-coal combustion and the capture and sequestration of carbon dioxide. It should be noted that, globally, the demand for coal is still growing, and we could make a positive contribution to the reduction in CO_2 emissions precisely by investing in clean-coal technology. As global demand continues to grow at about 2 per cent. a year, we could ensure that it does not damage the environment through CO_2 emissions.

Ensuring diversity and security of supply means that we must protect the indigenous coal industry. One of the worrying factors over the past few years has been the increasing competition caused by coal imports. Imports of steam coal rose from 8 million tonnes in 1996 to over 14 million tonnes just four years later. The Minister talked about keeping the options open with the nuclear industry, but if we are to keep the options open for the domestic coal industry we must take a long-term view. If the remaining deep-mine pits close, those assets will be permanently sterilised. The coal industry faces high set-up costs and relatively low marginal costs, and if supply exceeds demand, investment will be affected in the short term, so we need to look to the long term.

Finally, I should mention my constituency and the specialist coal produced there, anthracite, which is not widely available on world markets. The anthracite industry is important to the domestic heating market in a number of specialist applications. The only alternative sources of anthracite are China and Vietnam, which present particular problems with security of supply.

I have some sympathy with the Minister, who is continually bombarded by various sectional interests, some of which we have heard in the debate. He should be lauded for taking an open-minded and balanced view of the potential role of the various sources of energy. I was grateful to hear his reply to the intervention from the hon. Member for Doncaster, North about the hypothetical six-month gap, which we hope will be closed shortly. I look forward to welcoming the Minister on his visit to Betws colliery, and I hope that there will shortly be an announcement from the Government about continued support for the coal industry.

5.30 pm

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): I, too, welcome the debate. It is important that the House should have the opportunity of putting its view on the record before the Minister reaches his conclusions in reply to the PIU report. The contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Dr. Turner) showed us clearly why we must develop an energy policy that is considerate of the environment.

I shall develop three points. First, any balanced energy policy takes account of the environment. I support the coal option rather than the nuclear option, and I believe that the coal option addresses the environment argument. Secondly, there is a great danger of UK over-dependence on gas. Thirdly, the coal industry can make its contribution to the UK economy. It can be a competitive and sustainable industry, provided that we get a coal-aid scheme that deals with the investment aspect. I was encouraged by the Minister's comments. From the negotiations in which he has taken part in Brussels, it seems that we will get an aid package that focuses on

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investment in the coal industry. I shall discuss some of the features that I think should be included in that aid package.

On the environment, it is clear that, as other hon. Members have said, there needs to be a fall in CO_2 emissions. We must meet our Kyoto and other international obligations. However, it is worth pointing out to the House that between 1990 and 1994, there was a fall of 18.5 per cent. in carbon emissions in the UK. That was the result of the massive colliery closure programme and the cut in some of the coal generating plant. In a bizarre way, it shows that mining communities have already made their contribution to the environment argument.

There are at present four coal-burning power stations fitted with flue gas desulphurisation, and I understand that another six stations are likely to be equipped with FGD. That short to medium-term option gives us the opportunity to address the long-term issue. Over the next 10 to 20 years, we will require more than 10 GW of replacement for nuclear stations and coal stations. We need to concentrate on clean coal technology to replace those stations.

My hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes) referred to IGCC as the technology that should be replacing coal-fired stations. He is correct. The Minister should aim high and that means going for the best that is available. He should consider the current support for clean-coal technology and how we might improve it. The current level of assistance for research and development is £17 million over five years, but that is insufficient. We should consider how we can improve the assistance that we give to clean-coal technology. I believe that IGCC, the gasification way, is the way to the future.

The PIU report refers to an increase of about 20 per cent. in the use of renewables by 2020. We must take that route, but at the same time, we should take into account the fact that renewables are not the whole answer. They are costly, which means that we will need a cheaper supply of electricity to subsidise their development. Again, the energy source that could be used to subsidise investment in renewables is clean-coal technology. I refer the Minister to the International Energy Agency, which recently said that the one option that would reduce CO_2 was gasification. It referred to IGCC technology rather than renewables. Indeed, it added that the use of such technology would reduce CO_2 faster than investment in renewables. I hope that he will consider that aspect.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Clapham: I am sorry, but we are tied to speeches of only 10 minutes, and I want to make my points.

My second point relates to gas and the increasing over-dependency on it. In 1990, no gas was burned off in power stations, but today, a third of our electricity is generated by gas. The decision made in 1989 to allow gas to be used in power stations was wrong, but it is a matter of history and we must now deal with the consequences. Three years ago, the gas interconnector allowed suppliers to push their gas down into Europe, chasing the higher prices. They pulled UK prices in train behind them. The fact that prices began to increase attracted investment in generating capacity, and the result is overcapacity.

I refer the Minister to the cost of the pipeline from Russia to the European national grid, which will be of the scale of 35 billion euros. I understand that the trans-European network will take another 26 billion euros of investment. In comparison, the infrastructure for transporting coal to our power stations is already in place. World coal production is now in excess of 4.5 billion tonnes—and that comes from secure sources of production. We should start seriously to consider investing more in clean coal technology, because the source for supplying our electricity is there, safe and secure.

I want to make one point about the gas network. I understand that Coalpro commissioned a study by a military expert and has made the report available to the Government. It shows that the detonation of a bomb placed in the UK network could disrupt about half our gas supply. We must bear it in mind that the supply of gas is vulnerable to terrorist attack.

The coal industry contributes about £1 billion to the economy annually. It is small compared with its previous size, but it is a large national and regional player. In Yorkshire, it contributes about £400 million per annum to the regional economy. Mining machinery manufacturers contribute about £35 million. There has been investment in the industry and we have high-tech collieries. However, we need an investment package of aid that will include certain features. One of the main features should be the inclusion of the Coal Authority—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order.

5.41 pm

Mr. Peter Duncan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): I welcome the debate, which gives us the opportunity to examine in detail the Government's current energy policy, their review and the implications for the future. I question in passing whether 2050 is the right date for the title of the debate. The issues that I shall outline will require Government action much sooner than that time scale would imply. Some decisions need to be taken now to cover our short and medium-term objectives while securing the United Kingdom's long-term future energy needs.

The debate is also appropriate as we contemplate continuing change in the balance of our energy mix. During the 1950s, almost 90 per cent. of fuel used in the UK was coal. By 2000, that had declined to only 15 per cent. There were major increases in the use of natural gas and oil. Over 50 years, the combination of natural gas and nuclear generation grew to account for more than 65 per cent. of power created. The past 50 years have seen huge changes in the mix, and we should not underestimate our opportunity to make significant changes by 2050.

Without change in energy policy, the UK will become increasingly reliant on natural gas imports. We face being dependent on a single fuel to an extent never before experienced. According to industry consultants Wood Mackenzie, in its report to the Department of Trade and Industry in 1998, it expected the UK to become a net importer of gas any time between 2003 and 2009. It reported that by 2020 the UK may need to import between 55 and 90 per cent. of its gas requirements. The major emerging exporters that will then be keen to exploit the commercial opportunity are Russia, the middle east and north Africa. Put simply, our security of supply will be in question, and supply will certainly be subject to price manipulation in future.

The House will be aware that we have the opportunity to change what seems to be a worrying prospect. Expansion of the renewables sector is perhaps the most media-friendly and certainly the most environmentally acceptable alternative together with promoting continued energy efficiency programmes. However, the objective must be a secure, sustainable and deliverable supply that enjoys consumer support, is environmentally friendly and cost-effective. That will not occur automatically. The Government need to make it happen.

I regret that the Government are prone to putting off decision making to such an extent that existing nuclear stations face imminent demise. Renewables will be unable to fill that gap. It is inevitable that the gap will be filled predominantly by imported natural gas. Even the Minister estimates that the UK will become a net importer of gas by 2005, and points out that we already import natural gas during periods of high demand. We face being highly vulnerable to international price variations.

The Government have set a target of securing 10 per cent. of electricity from the renewable sector by 2010. I sincerely hope that that target will be met. I am delighted that Scotland in general, and my constituency in particular, has the potential to make a significant contribution towards its achievement. Galloway's existing wind turbine scheme at Windy Standard has been a huge success. Interestingly, it has enjoyed its most vocal support from the communities closest to it. Proposals are now going forward for its extension, and I compliment those involved on the sympathetic way in which they have developed their scheme. Notwithstanding the Minister's earlier reassurance, I would point out that the Ministry of Defence consistently remains the biggest single obstacle to these new schemes.

My constituency also faces plans to host one of the new offshore wind farms for Scotland, with proposals being put forward by TXU to build on the Solway Firth, some nine kilometres from the Colvend course. This has understandably elicited considerable public interest, and I have suggested that such a scheme, located, as it is, adjacent to a national scenic area, deserves a full public inquiry. That would enable a proper, full and frank debate on the merits of the proposal. On my recent visit to Denmark—the acknowledged world leader in wind energy—people whom I spoke to revealed that they would not have chosen such a location for this kind of offshore scheme. However, I trust the Scottish Executive, as the ultimate arbiter on planning matters north of the border, to make the right decision after proper scrutiny.

There are also questions about the additional costs involved in developing the infrastructure to distribute the wind energy generated. As is common in most renewable projects in Scotland, the ideal sites are rarely in the ideal places for the national grid. Power Systems, for example, has raised with me its concern that adequate incentives are not yet in place for investment in and development of the renewable energy infrastructure. Indeed, its planned investments have often been ruled out of order by the industry regulator.

Scotland faces a new devolved landscape in energy policy. Plans for fossil fuel and nuclear power generation are set by the UK Government, while those for renewables, the environment, and, crucially, consents for power stations are set by the Scottish Executive. There is clear potential for conflicts of interest and confusion, which was considerably added to by our debate in the House on 5 March 2002. On that occasion, the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Minister who is with us today failed to resolve the issue over which Parliament would make the final decision if a nuclear plant was welcomed in Westminster, but planning consent was withheld by Holyrood.

At present, Scotland has a relatively balanced mix of fossil fuel, nuclear, and renewable power sources, together with oil and gas reserves from the North sea. We are currently a net exporter of electricity, although planned plant closures on nuclear sites such as Chapelcross in Dumfries and Galloway indicate that that position could be reversed before the end of the next decade unless new builds on old sites such as Chapelcross can be Government-led.

Scotland has the potential to exploit its geography and become a centre of excellence in all existing and emerging forms of renewable energy. Even the Danes look at the Scottish coastline with envy when contemplating wind and wave developments. The Scottish Executive have recently announced their programme to develop the market, but action is required from central Government to make that happen.

Taxation is reserved, and, as a result, the main mechanisms for encouraging the development of these new technologies remain in the control of Westminster. It is a matter of regret that, in the Chancellor's April budget, he announced a 10 per cent. supplementary charge on the UK's oil and gas production. However, this presents us with an opportunity. The Danish Government saw the strategic advantage of investing in wind power development and research in the late 1960s and 1970s. They created an industry in which they became world-beaters, and now, some 30 years later, it employs 40,000 people in that country.

Surely, by directing a small proportion of the supplementary charge on oil towards renewables research, we too could become world leaders by exploiting fully the economic and environmental potential of the next generation of renewable energy. Wave and tidal power, along with the biogas and biomass industries, are still in the early stages of development. Further Government commitment to investment in research could reap huge rewards for employment in our most vulnerable rural communities.

Nuclear plants remain the backbone of our electricity production, and urgent decisions need to be taken by the Government to encourage their replacement as successive plants approach decommissioning. Failure to do so will further expose the UK consumer to the vagaries of the international natural gas market—a risk that Ministers are duty-bound to address urgently.

This has been an important and balanced debate.

Mr. Wilson: In answer to the hon. Gentleman's point, there is no ambiguity about where planning powers for nuclear new build in Scotland would lie. They would lie with the devolved Parliament.

Mr. Duncan: I thank the Minister. I simply observe that, if he reads the debate on 5 March, he will see that it was far from clear.

We must remain focused on a balanced future for UK energy production. Anything less would leave us all in the dark.

5.50 pm

Mr. Patrick Hall (Bedford): I am pleased to contribute to a debate in which hon. Members from both sides have revealed great enthusiasm for and expertise in a crucial subject with far-reaching implications. I acknowledge the respect that the Minister has shown for the House by remaining in his place for almost all the debate. He has made his point by remaining for so long.

In thinking about energy policy towards 2050, we are also invited to think about the world that we would like to see in 50 years' time, or, as I would be in my 99th year by then, the world that we would like to hand on to our children and to future generations.

The Minister set out the context of the debate. Clearly, there is no shortage of information, reports, interest or research. The record shows that there have been a number of well-informed debates in the House on these matters. That is as it should be and it is understandable because the production and use of energy is fundamental to human activity.

Energy is a crucial and highly political issue. It is central to the economy, and has a significant impact on the environment. It affects every one of us, and has the potential to affect all living things for good or for ill. Energy policy helps to shape society and the world in which we live. Access to energy raises questions of social justice and social equity. Civil nuclear power also has a bearing on the secrecy that Governments want to impose on society, and on the nature and activities of security and surveillance services.

In thinking about the world in 50 years' time, it is uncontentious to look to a world in which energy is produced in a sustainable and efficient manner with the minimum of pollution, in which supplies are secure, accessible and affordable to all, and in which innovation is welcome. In thinking about the next 50 years, I am drawn to reflect about the past 50. That period saw the dramatic demise of coal, which was our major, historic, commercial energy source even though we still have well over 300 years of supplies in the ground untouched. We have seen the rise and the peaking of North sea oil and gas, and we have witnessed the rise and, it would seem, the fall of nuclear power. The energy utilities have changed from the might of the publicly owned Central Electricity Generating Board, and to many private and foreign-owned companies that provide our electricity. We have seen the privatisation of British Petroleum, and the end of the National Coal Board. We have seen the relentless and massive increase in road transport, which is now the major user of oil and the major producer of pollution and greenhouse gases. We have had the Gulf war over oil supplies, the shocks produced by the 1973 OPEC-forced oil price rise, and the widespread panic buying that was triggered by a small group of people who sought to bring down the Government by blockading petrol supplies in September 2000. We have also witnessed incidents at Three Mile Island and Chernobyl, which helped to bring down nuclear power.

Significantly, our modern economy has broken the historic link between gross domestic product growth and energy growth, as we have changed from having a heavy industrial base to there being a greater role for service industry, together with greater energy efficiency. Now, by sharp contrast with 50 years ago, we are members of the European Union, and I have every confidence that we will remain members of the EU in 50 years' time.

Three key elements of the proposed long-term EU energy policy provide a framework for the future: security of supply, environmental protection and competitiveness. The lessons of the past suggest that we should be cautious about simplistic campaigns on future energy policy. At different times in the past 50 or 60 years, we have been told that the future is coal; the future is oil; the future is nuclear; the future is gas. Now it is tempting to say the future is renewables.

Renewables have a huge role to play in fulfilling a range of desirable objectives. I would like to believe that the future is renewables, but to get there we cannot just switch off nuclear power stations. There is a big gap between the run-down of the old nuclear capacity and the point at which renewables could take over. We should not seek to close off the possibility, which the European Union is exploring, that future innovation might deliver nuclear fusion. However we look at it, renewables, together with greater efficiency and conservation, must play a significant role. Until now, British Governments have been reluctant to get going. Even now, there is a long way to go.

However, provided that there is leadership from Government, much will be delivered locally. Bedford and Kempston, which I have the honour of representing, need to play their part as does every other area of the country. Bedford was wisely selected by BP as the first place where solar photovoltaic systems were installed on two new petrol stations. At Little Barford on the Bedfordshire-Cambridgeshire border, Innogy has built Britain's first industrial-scale megawatt regenerative battery, which represents a breakthrough in electricity storage and opens exciting possibilities for the more efficient and widespread use of renewables such as wind power.

In the middle of the county, the considerable landfill capacity in worked-out clay pits, which supply the local brick-manufacturing industry, produces a great deal of methane gas which is used to generate 29 MW—enough electricity to meet the needs of 30,000 people. That fits in neatly with plans to build a new settlement for 10,000 people at Elstow in Bedfordshire which will incorporate high energy standards—higher than those required by current building regulations—as well as combined heat and power fuelled by landfilled methane and, in future, by biomass based on forestry waste from the adjoining new national forest. There is a great deal of enthusiasm locally for those initiatives, which in turn have given impetus to the search for local opportunities for sustainable energy measures driven by the local Agenda 21 process.

In looking ahead to 2050, many complex issues are involved. A key requirement is the reduction of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases. When making investment decisions, we are all familiar with the concept of economic payback time. In assessing future energy policy, we should enhance our ability to decide the best way to proceed by exploring the idea of energy payback time. The relative savings of carbon dioxide associated with different types of electricity generator are clearly of great importance. Renewables and nuclear fuel do not produce carbon dioxide. Indeed, the nuclear power industry has gone on the offensive to point out that it does not contribute to global warming—a point that I made to the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) earlier.

However, we cannot make a proper calculation unless we account for the carbon dioxide produced in making a generator, building it, running it, decommissioning it and dealing with the waste. Research on those matters suggests, for example, that photovoltaic panels have an energy payback time of two years or a little more. A new nuclear energy plant needs to produce energy for at least 10 years before it has paid back the CO_2 produced in its manufacture and construction. That is an important concept, and it could be a useful tool. I urge my hon. Friend the Minister and the Government to explore and to develop it, so that we are better informed and better able to make rational decisions about the best systems for the future.

6 pm

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I commend the performance and innovation unit report. It gave not just a good canter around energy issues, but a good sense of strategic direction. It made it clear that although affordable energy was an essential driver, there are a lot of risks. Among those risks, one is pre-eminent: global warming and the need for a low-carbon economy.

The report dealt with security of supply in an intelligent, unemotional and balanced way. It brought out the fact that there are good arguments in relation to security of supply, which we must deal with, but there are also rather disreputable arguments, which are fundamentally economically nationalist and protectionist. I think that we had a bit of that from the Welsh Nationalist and from the Conservative spokesman, who was particularly striking as he was talking about free trade yesterday, but not today.

There was a helpful contribution from the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Richard Ottaway), who made a distinction between different types of energy security. It is worth while breaking them down. One has nothing to do with Russian gangsters and Arab fundamentalists. It is about how to manage the relationship between the producer, the consumer and the regulators—the California problem: how to create an environment where energy producers can invest as, say, oil companies do over 30, 40 or 50 years in gas projects or, for a big new power station, over a decade or more, when consumers are looking for short-term advantage; and how to balance those issues. It is the job of the regulator to do that by creating an environment in which one can have long-term contracts. There is a genuine issue that Mr. McCarthy is familiar with but has not yet fully solved.

There is a second problem, a different issue: disruption of production. There can be disruption of production for a variety of reasons: technical reasons, failures in the grid, man-made disruption—as we had with the energy blockade a couple of years ago—and disruption of raw material supplies from overseas. However, there is a solution: if there are risks and they can be quantified, one builds up strategic reserves. One of the lessons of the blockade two years ago was that the oil companies and the Government had not correctly built up the right level of strategic reserves.

There is a third type of energy security issue, again a different one, which is about price shocks. The problem is that we are not economically an island. The fact that a country has indigenous oil and gas does not protect it from oil and gas shocks internationally. The Brent crude price is linked to the middle east price. There is an international gas price and an international coal price. Having indigenous production does not insulate us from those factors.

When we talk about energy security of supply, we need to be more specific about what time horizons we are talking about. That is crucial. I go back to what my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell) said. The debate should focus on 50 years from now, when the world will be very different. It will be dominated by renewable energy and major advances in energy efficiency, possibly things such as carbon sequestration, which would in the long term be the future of the coal industry. Many of the worries people are expressing are not about that period half a century on, but about the intermediate position, when we have a relatively high proportion of gas in the electricity mix. A lot of those security issues surround that precise issue.

There is a high percentage of gas in the electricity input for good reasons. It has been competing with coal on price because it is cleaner, emits less sulphur and emits 60 per cent. of the carbon dioxide. It is competing with nuclear power on economic grounds because nuclear power has environmental risks, so there are good reasons why gas has that position, at least in the medium term. A lot of the negative comments about gas are misconceived. I make two brief points about it.

The first is the running out of supplies issue. The hon. Member for Stourbridge (Ms Shipley) made some helpful historical points. We always underestimate the availability of reserves. In the oil and gas industry, constant exploration takes place. There is horizontal drilling and deep-water drilling. No one knows how much gas and oil there is west of Shetland in the deep continental shelf. All the current estimates of supplies could be way out. They constantly have to be revised.

The more important point is that the sophistication and robustness of the international gas business and market has been underestimated. Several of the many pipelines that exist are in north Africa, which represents just one corner of the business. There are also pipelines going through Spain, Italy, Algeria and Russia. Although Algeria has experienced a civil war and Russia has been through a period of upheaval, such events have had not the slightest impact on the supply of gas from those countries. Gas is increasingly supplied by boat and liquefied natural gas carriers, rather than through pipelines. Various means of supply therefore exist within the gas industry itself. Although we must be responsible and think about the threat of terrorism and so on, alarmist talk about it has been wildly exaggerated.

In the very long term, gas must of course be phased out, but because it is a carbon-based fuel rather than because of foreign suppliers. The reason why gas will have to go is that some 60 per cent. of the molecule by weight is carbon. In due course, it will have to be replaced by renewables. We should focus on creating a set of

[Dr. Vincent Cable]

incentives through which renewables can be brought onstream rapidly, and in the right manner. The way to do that is to create a level playing field and send the right signals by establishing a carbon tax and a renewables obligation. We should not try to pick winners, or be highly prescriptive about which renewables will be competitive in 20, 30, 40 or 50 years' time, because we do not know the answer.

Yesterday, the European Commission produced a particularly daft initiative: a biofuels directive that establishes a renewables obligation specifically for biomass. Perhaps biomass is the fuel of the future—I have no idea—but to narrow the field in that way is to adopt completely the wrong approach. In establishing a very strong long-term commitment to renewables, we must accept that we do not yet know which are the fuels of the future. A strong argument exists, therefore, for diversity and variety and for having an open mind about which fuels will come through in the long term.

6.7 pm

Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): The title of today's debate—"Energy: Towards 2050"—shows clearly that we are talking about long-term policies. Our discussions and decisions in the coming months and years will have real consequences for the economic activity, living standards and—perhaps most importantly—environment of our children.

I welcome the performance and innovation unit's report and the vigorous debate that is taking place. I want to focus on two key issues raised in the report, one of which is the prospect of cheap energy. Indeed, in his foreword to the report, the Prime Minister says:

> "Securing cheap reliable and sustainable sources of energy supply has long been a major concern for government . . . Electricity prices are now cheaper than ten years ago."

He is of course right, but the conditions have changed. The days of cheap energy and cheap electricity are perhaps behind us. There are various reasons why energy is cheap at the moment, but by and large the practical reasons have disappeared.

There is an issue of principle here. We have discussed the need to invest in new plant and new equipment, but the notions of cheapness and of investment in the future do not sit easily together. One current problem in the nuclear industry is that of replacing nuclear with nuclear, which has not only environmental but cost implications. Power stations that produce electricity from coal are aged and need replacing, and by definition, higher prices will lead to a focus on conservation. I am therefore sceptical of the notion of cheap energy that underpins the report. Indeed, the renewables obligation belies that notion, because it clearly acknowledges that we must pay more for sources of renewable energy.

Another vital issue raised in the PIU report is the notion of a balanced energy policy. I feel that the report is complacent on that score. The hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) spoke of the importance of gas. I do not deny its importance, but I think that it would be risky in the long term to allow 70 per cent. of our energy supply to depend on gas, 90 per cent. of it from abroad, by 2020.

The Minister spoke emphatically of the need for a balanced energy policy. I want him to trust his own judgment, because the PIU report was made to and not by the Government. I hope that the voices we have heard here today calling strongly for a balanced energy policy will be heeded.

All sources of energy involve difficulties. The hon. Member for Twickenham, who produced a vigorous defence of gas, pointed out that in the long term there were sure to be problems, although they might not be as serious as we think. Although I support them, I consider the targets for renewables very challenging: I anticipate real difficulties in our achieving 10 per cent. by 2010 and 20 per cent. by 2020.

Planning issues have been mentioned, but there are other key problems with the transmission system: recyclables, or renewables, will require a different system. As has been said, the most important issue for the nuclear industry is the cost of disposal and decommissioning, which the private sector alone will not be able to meet.

That brings me to coal. As my hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes) said, coal is an old friend. It has done its business over the years. It is indigenous and reliable. The problem is that it is not clean.

The coal industry has short-term difficulties, mid-term prospects and long-term environmental constraints. Let me tell the Minister how delighted I was with the coal aid operating scheme. I am extremely pleased that a new European Union framework has been established. It must, however, be translated into a United Kingdom context, and it is vital for that to happen by January, because, as the Minister knows, the current subsidy scheme runs out on 23 July. I am very keen on the notion of bridging, and I heard the Minister say that he would consider it on a case-by-case basis, but I think the industry needs more clarity.

The idea of investment aid, which is part of the new EU framework, is very important. I know it has been difficult to negotiate with partners, but it is good that for the first time we shall be investing in the long term—in new faces and new seams. At Clipstone colliery, for instance, there is a desire to access the black shale, at a cost of perhaps £20 million. There is a possibility of £6 million in support, which would be vital in the mid term.

In the long term, we need to do more to make coal environmentally friendly. It pains me a great deal that we in the United Kingdom spend less on clean-coal research than is spent in Japan, which has no coal industry. I hope the spending review will acknowledge that, and will make a move on clean coal technology.

It is vital to consider carbon sequestration, which, as has been said, involves real problems but is a source of help for the future. I would like to see a demonstration plant. I would like to see the public and private sectors working together. I would like to see coal producers and generators establish a clean coal plant. As we have heard today, coal is a growing fuel throughout the world—so we can demonstrate new technology and sell it across the world. We can sell it to China and India: it can be a world leader.

We need to consider other issues, too. Coal-mine methane is a legacy of the coal industry, and if we can tackle it, we will be in a win-win situation—it is a pollutant, but we can get energy from it. We made progress in this year's Finance Bill, but it is vital to go further. Methane from landfill is covered by the renewables obligation, but coal-mine methane is not. That issue is being tackled in debates on the Finance Bill at the moment, and I hope that the Minister will carefully consider the amendments that have been tabled, as they would provide an easy way out that would cost the Government nothing.

I hope that the Minister will also think about combined heat and power. He did accept that there were problems, but those problems are very real. Not only will we not achieve our target in 2010, but we have not yet achieved our 2000 target. Again, the renewables obligation for exported electricity and CHP plants, along with other measures, needs to be considered very carefully.

I want to say a few words about different forms of renewable energy sources. Biofuels are very important, and again, progress has been made. Biomass has real environmental benefits as a source of fuel; it is also good for wildlife. We should focus on biomass, but we should also look at the liquid fuels, such as biodiesel and bioethanol. Again, progress has been made in this year's Finance Bill—the rate of duty on biodiesel has been reduced by 20 per cent.—but it ought to be put on the same basis as hydrogen-based liquid fuels such as LPG, which benefit from a 40 per cent. rebate.

It is important that we make further progress in that direction. We need to do better. We need to ensure that we have an energy policy that has good consequences for our children: it must be balanced, and it must recognise the importance of the environment.

6.17 pm

Richard Younger-Ross (Teignbridge): My constituents are particularly aware of the importance of this debate in two ways. They are aware of the problems of climate change. The main line from London to Penzance passes along the sea wall between Dawlish and Teignmouth, and services have frequently been interrupted in recent winters by severe storms. We are only too well aware that if the sea level rises by half a metre or a metre, the closures on that line will be more dramatic and more regular. It is clear that we need to act to cut CO_2.

We are also aware that there are solutions. At Newton Abbott we have an excellent company called Centrax, which tries to make and market combined heat and power units. I use the word "tries" because although the company makes excellent units, it is not helped by the Government's legislation at the moment.

Do the Government recognise either of those issues? The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs clearly recognises the first. On 26 April she said:

> "research tells us that the effects of climate change in the UK are likely to be sharper and stronger than many people originally thought."

Does she recognise the solutions? On 15 May, in the foreword to the CHP consultation document, she said:

> "The Government is committed to a sustainable approach to energy that reflects the environmental, social and economic impacts of both its supply and use."

She went on to say:

> "Combined Heat and Power . . . has a vital role to play in achieving this."

So why have market conditions for CHP been worse in the past 18 months than for a decade?

The Combined Heat and Power Association says that that is largely due to the impact of the new NETA electricity market and the loss of local generators. The net effect has been the loss of more than 1,500 jobs directly from the industry, the virtual collapse of new CHP investment and the departure from the CHP industry of major companies, including Powergen, Innogy, Northern Electric and Scottish Power. The Government's formal target of 10,000 MW of CHP by 2010—the current capacity is only 4,600 MW—will be difficult to achieve unless those issues are addressed. Their carbon targets have already been undermined: carbon dioxide emissions have risen during the past two years.

The CHPA and its member companies have been lobbying the Treasury and other Departments to support the industry in order to balance the impact of the unfair market conditions under NETA. I know that the Government have listened to representations about the climate change levy, but they have not yet acknowledged the need to reform the NETA agreement.

The full climate change levy exemption has been welcomed by the CHP industry as a much needed shot in the arm, after two years of unrelenting damage to its prospects. The CCL exemption for power exports will assist companies exporting significant electricity as part of the design of their CHP system or those which need to import and export power to meet the energy needs of their customers during the year. The full exemption will especially help the food and horticulture industries, hospitals using CHP and major industrial sites serving a number of customers.

However, as I pointed out earlier, not everyone is helped by the CCL. Some people are counting on reform of NETA. The CHPA argues that other measures will be needed if we are to accelerate new CHP investment. Such measures include removing the unfair balancing penalties under NETA for CHP and wind power, extending enhanced capital allowances to improve finance-based leasing, and introducing arrangements for CHP similar to those for renewables.

CHP needs to secure financial benefit for the carbon savings that it delivers. That will help to get the industry moving again and could deliver the Government's CHP target. The CHPA has submitted a NETA action plan to the Government. When the Minister sums up the debate, will he address the following points from the plan? The CHPA calls for

> "fair access for small generators and consolidators to all markets and revenue streams; proportional transaction costs; a single cash-out price; removal of the barrier to new market entry imposed by imbalance risk especially during plant commissioning; the end to conflict between industry codes, including restrictions on 'self-balancing' under the Grid Code that affect larger CHP plant; a change of the governance arrangements in the Balancing and Settlement Code to ensure that small and independent participants have an effective voice."

There is a future for the CHP industry and the Government are correct in the belief that CHP has a role to play. However, it is difficult to explain to the 300 people in Newton Abbot who are losing their jobs how the Government's actions follow their words.

6.23 pm

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): Governments initiate many important debates, and this is certainly one of them—rightly so, because, like food and shelter, energy is a basic human need. I am pleased to be able to take part in the debate, albeit briefly.

The publication of the UK fuel poverty strategy by DEFRA last year, and of the PIU energy review this year, have catalysed the debate. It is spreading across the nation, and I hope that everyone will be aware of it before the Government take decisions that will be among the most important that they take. Those decisions will lock future generations into an energy policy for decades, so it is important that we get them right.

I am pleased to announce that next Tuesday, the Royal Society of Chemistry is holding a parliamentary links day in the House, to which all Members have been invited. We have chosen as our theme the future of energy, and I hope that many Members will take part in it.

Three Select Committees are already considering the energy debate. The two most important considerations should be security of supply and diversity of supply; the first can be achieved through the second. All options should be left open. We should not put too great a reliance on any one energy source, as we tend to do at present. In the past we thought that we could rely on nuclear power, but for various reasons, we were wrong in that assumption. Then there was the dash for gas. Following privatisation, it was not surprising that the industry turned to gas, because combined cycle gas turbines can be built with very low capital costs and give far faster returns, owing to shorter construction times.

As a chemist, I have always objected to the burning of fossil fuels. That is not only because it produces carbon dioxide, which has become more significant because of climate change, but particularly because our fossil supplies—with the possible exception of gas, but especially coal and oil—are the sources of the chemicals from which we prepare our pharmaceuticals, paints, dyestuffs and other products that we take for granted. It is important to leave those fossil fuels in the ground for as long as possible for the benefit of future generations. That is why I strongly support non-carbon methods of generating energy. Energy conservation, too, must play a large role in the future, and I am pleased that the PIU report recognised that.

Just as Denmark led the way on wind power after our lack of investment caused us to lose out, so we must invest in wind and tidal power. Some people believe that the winds and tides could provide all our energy requirements if we tapped into them. I am pleased that the Government are now turning towards investment in wind and tidal power, although whether the process will be fast enough remains to be seen. Another reason for investing in wind and tidal power is that, despite the Minister's announcement today about the discovery of a new field in the North sea, the North sea oil industry will decline rapidly. A great deal of manufacturing expertise is invested in that industry, which could be transferred to the generation of wind and tidal power—as Denmark employed agricultural equipment manufacturers to manufacture equipment for generating wind power.

I say in passing that I am a strong supporter of the Home Energy Conservation Bill that my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Dr. Turner) is steering through the House. I hope that the Minister, and other Ministers and Secretaries of State, will strongly back that Bill when it returns to the House on the last day for private Members' business.

The big debate this year will be about the role of the nuclear power industry and the future of renewables, although gas and its future will obviously play a part in the discussions, too. There is no doubt that renewables, including wind and tidal power, could supply our entire energy needs. Rapid and considerable investment in basic and applied research will be necessary to deliver a range of demonstration projects in the renewables sector. Later, we will need to provide new infrastructure and bring existing infrastructure up to this century's standards.

I have great doubts about whether we can bring renewables on board fast enough to replace the declining fossil fuel-burning industries. Those doubts are echoed in the PIU report. That is why I am a strong supporter of keeping the nuclear power industry going. Its expertise needs to be maintained, for a reason that other hon. Members have mentioned: we are not too far away from nuclear fusion. It has reached phase 2, and the Select Committee on Science and Technology is going to Japan in the autumn to look at the new fusion experiment that is to take place there. Most commentators think that we are about 50 years away from nuclear fusion, which is not long in historical terms. The chief scientific officer, David King, believes that that period can be cut down to about 30 years, and he is very keen on investment in nuclear fusion.

The nuclear power industry is already losing personnel, and it is critical that the Minister and the Government send the right signals to those who remain. They must be retained at least until the Government have made a decision on nuclear energy—and, in fact, until long after that, so that they are there eventually to introduce nuclear fusion. It is a sad reflection of the present situation that new graduates are not choosing to work in the nuclear power industry and it is already suffering from a shortage of skills. It is important that the Government send out strong signals from this debate about the future of the nuclear power industry.

An energy research review group, under the chairmanship of the chief scientific officer, has met and identified six key areas of research that need investment. I hope that the Minister has noted those six areas and will get together with Treasury Ministers to find that investment.

I was a housing chairman for 10 years, which has given me an interest in energy efficiency. Not one contributor this afternoon has mentioned the condition of the housing stock in connection with the debate about energy efficiency. Bolton has 22,000 unfit houses, of which some 5,000 to 6,000 are irredeemably unfit, and they are pumping energy into the atmosphere. I ask the Minister to join other Ministers in an effort to ensure that the condition of the housing stock is improved. I hope that the comprehensive spending review will put housing further up the agenda, so that we can tackle the poor energy efficiency of the clapped-out houses that still exist throughout the country.

6.31 pm

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): It is difficult to look 50 years ahead. If we went back 50 years from today, few people would have foreseen the massive contribution that natural gas from the North sea would make to our energy supply. The world and its technology are changing ever more quickly, so looking ahead is very difficult.

The first principle of any energy policy must be to keep the lights on. Woe betide any Government of any party who cannot achieve that. When people argue against any particular source of energy, they should bear that warning in mind, because we might end up with not enough energy. The second principle is not to waste energy. Energy saving is a prerequisite of any policy, but that issue has been well covered by other hon. Members today.

We have to start from where we are, with oil and gas representing 85 per cent. of total UK energy production, with our own oil and gas supplies constituting 75 per cent. of all the energy we consume. Some 40 per cent. of electricity generation, on which we have concentrated today, is currently from gas. The hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) put the gas supply industry fairly in context. It is our gas, so it would be difficult to find a more secure supply. It has enabled us to reach the Kyoto targets and the dash for gas happened because the economics were good, delivering energy without the Government needing to put in taxpayers' money.

An important plank for energy policy, therefore, is to maximise our own gas production and to delay for as long as possible the moment when we have to import big gas supplies. If we look at our gas reserves, we see that 58 trillion cu ft have been produced so far, but it is estimated that 72 trillion cu ft remain. Thirty-five years ago, people said that we had only 20 years' supply left. People now say that we have only 20 years' supply left, but who knows what new technology will bring?

My hon. Friend the Minister was right when he said that we must squeeze every last drop of energy out of the North sea, and that is what the DTI's Pilot strategy has aimed to do. It is against that background that we should consider the tax measures in the Budget. I must say that they came as a bombshell to me and many others, and we will have to look carefully to see whether they prove to be so in terms of what wreckage they may cause. They certainly do not sit easily with the direction that was being pursued by Pilot. My first reaction was to ask how one could take so much money out of an industry and retain the investment in it. I must admit that the Treasury proposals are very clever, because while they increase the tax on existing developments, they provide generous capital allowances that will—at least on paper—make the return on future developments look better.

Those are powerful arguments. I am concerned, however, that decoupling upstream and gas corporation tax from general corporation tax will offer less fiscal stability, pose a greater fiscal risk, and, therefore, have an effect on investment. The Treasury is saying, basically, that we now have fiscal stability, as the 1997 review has been concluded. I am not sure that the industry will necessarily see it that way, however, as the Budget announcement was a surprise compared with the direction in which we had been going. Although Government can say, "Yes, we are not going to change the tax regime for the remainder of this Parliament", that also implies that it could change again after three or four years. Consequently, those investors who have just been burned might not be as keen as they were before.

What can we do under the new regime proposed by the Treasury? We must focus on how to generate the most investment. We should give particular attention to the smaller companies and new entrants, which are the feature of mature provinces around the world. We must focus on the current proposal on financing costs because access to capital is absolutely crucial to the companies. At the moment, it is proposed that financing costs should not be offset against the supplementary charge. Will my hon. Friend the Minister ask the Treasury—as I have asked the Treasury—to reconsider whether that is really necessary? The Treasury says that it is necessary to make the supplementary charge work. I think that that is disputable. There is a risk that double taxation might deter American investment. As we must accept that the Treasury wants to impose a supplementary charge, we should consider again whether there is another way to deliver that without disallowing firms from claiming their financing costs. That is a crucial element in getting the investment needed to realise the underlying assumption of the PIU report—that we must maximise our own gas supplies. That is in line with my hon. Friend the Minister's argument.

One of the advantages of persisting with energy produced from gas is that it is relatively easy to transfer to imported supplies. Our most obviously secure next supply is from Norway—one could hardly ask for a friendlier, more stable neighbour—because we can connect relatively easily to Norwegian gas. It is worth noting that the PIU report says about security of gas supply that those countries about which Members have raised doubts today need the revenues from their gas as much as we need their gas. I know that gas pipelines are vulnerable to terrorism, but that is true of just about any other generating plant, whether a nuclear power station or another type of power station. Somehow, we have to live with terrorism, because if we say, "Terrorism rules this out", we will not be able to do anything in the world. Again, I thought that the hon. Member for Twickenham put security of supply for imported gas in proper perspective.

Clearly, we need a diverse energy policy, and we must focus particularly on renewables. We must look at what is our most obvious natural asset—wind. After all, we are the windiest country in Europe. We must get over some of our self-imposed obstacles to energy production from renewables, however, as we need to make sure that we can create a market in which they can flourish. I was very impressed by what we found on a recent visit of the all-party group on renewable and sustainable energy—PRASEG—to Germany, where there is a kind of feed-in law that gives people a price on which to rely to encourage investment in renewables. I hope that our 10 per cent. obligation to encourage such investment will work. Above all, however, we must sort out the planning laws. We must pursue and persist with the Green Paper's ideas. If it takes 10 years to get planning permission for whatever power source we choose, we will not get very far. The planning system will be one of the biggest obstacles to achieving our energy policy.

We must ensure that we have supply chains in place for the offshore wind industry so that we can develop an indigenous wind turbine manufacturing industry. That would make the economics much better and would enable us seriously to get into renewables and to convince people to invest in them. My one doubt about nuclear power is that, if the Government step in and solve the problems of decommissioning and waste management for the industry, they may deter people from investing in renewables. We need that investment.

6.40 pm

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): In the 10 minutes left to me, all that I can do is thank the Members on both sides who have taken part in the debate—in particular, I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) and my hon. Friends the Members for Croydon, South (Richard Ottaway), for Castle Point (Bob Spink) and for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Duncan)—and try to set down an agenda for the future.

It was perhaps a disappointment that so few people who have spoken in the debate have looked forward to 2050 and taken this important opportunity to do so. In the next 40 or 50 years, the issues will be carbon emissions and literally saving the planet. However, the issues will also involve education, and everything from the conservation of energy, the reduction in energy use and the efficiency of energy use in distribution, industry, generation or the home.

The issue is also about science. From primary schools onwards, we have an anti-science popular culture in this country, and that is damaging. It means that we do not have the engineers that we need for the future and that we shall not have the scientists to work in any sophisticated energy field if we are not careful. From primary schools to postgraduate research, we need to devote far more attention to science.

The debate has also been about engineering, engineering and engineering. Whether we are talking nuclear or whether we are talking wind, we are talking engineering. We are desperately short of engineers, and they are perhaps the key to finding the way forward in energy over the next 50 years.

We need to make it clear that renewable energy and nuclear power are part of the same agenda. We will come to different conclusions and different points of balance, but those two sources of energy are not mutually exclusive—far from it. They are part of the same agenda, because they are both carbon-free. If we are serious about carbon emissions, we should not rule out nuclear power. The handling of nuclear waste is a separate issue—a red herring, distraction and diversion. It is a problem and a challenge, but it does not involve the future of the nuclear industry.

The hon. Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) spoke about housing stock and he was entirely right. If we want to do something practical comparatively quickly to start to save energy, we must replace deficient housing stock. The Carbon Trust is doing a fantastic job. Its chief executive, Tom Delay, has said:

> "There is huge scope for better energy efficiency and if we take these opportunities they would carry us half way to the Royal Commission's target. Energy efficiency must become as natural to us all as riding a bike."

I could not put it better myself.

The fact is that whole areas of energy production have hardly been mentioned in the debate—solar power, for example. We are near the longest day in the year and nights will start to draw in from tomorrow. Cloudy, grey old Britain is perhaps not the ideal place to install solar power. However, it is not the climate that is holding back solar power, but cost. Photovoltaics have an important future, but we face the problem of the high system costs—£10,000 to £12,000 a house—and that investment will take years to pay back.

Solar power—converting sunlight into electricity—is one thing, but water heating units on the roof cost about £2,000 to install. There is great scope for them. There is also huge scope for geothermal heating and air-conditioning systems using heat pump technology. Chesterfield borough council is using them. Why cannot more? That interesting technology is widely used across the United States and more used in Europe than it is here. Energy efficiency is the key to solving most of our problems.

Another important issue that has been mentioned by one or two hon. Members is the possible use of liquid and solid biofuels. The National Farmers Union is right to be keen that we take the idea seriously. We know what the problems are with the energy input into sowing and harvesting those crops and transporting them to central units for burning. We need to explore that further.

We also need to concentrate on nuclear fusion. It is crucial to the future, certainly in 2050. That new nuclear technology is safe. It joins nuclei rather than separating them and is nearer than we think—in fact, it is at Culham now. I have seen the tokamat there and it is extraordinary to realise how close we are to having that technology. The director at Culham pointed out that it is up to politicians to decide how seriously they want to take the technology. Culham can deliver electric generation using fusion in 50 years if we go at the speed we are at now or in 30 years if we increase the budget a bit. However, the budget is being cut this year as a result of a European Commission decision. Although that is not the Minister's fault, I hope that he and the Government's chief scientist will argue strenuously for nuclear fusion to receive a higher priority. Were people to see the process of the creation of nuclear plasma on a television screen inside the tokamat with their own eyes, they would realise that it is not science fiction but today's reality.

Future fuels are important. We cannot ignore transport. The Government are groping their way through a huge range of alternatives as we decide what to do about the motorist and the commercial vehicle. Some important fuel experiments are taking place, none more so than the hydrogen revolution, which will be relevant much sooner than we think. It does not matter whether one believes BMW, which says that it will take 15 years to arrive, or Ford, which says 17. What we know is that it will happen in that time scale because it is market-led by the greatest producers in the world. They want to do it but have not decided which way to go. With hydrogen generation, the fuel will either have to be pressurised and liquefied before it is put into car tanks, which means that it will have to be transported, or there will have to be fuel cells on each vehicle. We do not know what those companies will do. Perhaps the Government could think about giving a steer, if I can put it that way, in that direction.

Much is happening. For example, there are dual-use vehicles. Toyota has produced the Prius which allows electric power and petrol to be used in the same car depending on the type of motoring. Those are great realities. The biggest message that we should give to the Government, however, is that we recognise that it is possible to have a mixture in future. It would not just be a strategic mix, in the interests of the United Kingdom, but an engineering and technology mix. That will ensure that we beat the devil of carbon emission at the same time as providing more efficient use of resources and fuel in our homes and at work.

We should rule nothing out. We should have an open mind. We all have vested interests, which are perfectly legitimate. The coalfield communities must, of course, contribute. They will be part of the future equation. Similarly, we must be cautious about the costings of, for example, wind. We should never forget the cost of transmission. We know that a change is happening between embedded generation and transmission over long distances. We need to access technology and put behind us some of the prejudices and battles of the past. In that way, we will set an agenda for 2050 that will work.

6.49 pm

Mr. Wilson: With permission, I should like to respond to the debate.

I know that it is a cliché to say how good the debate has been, but today it is true, and that is a tribute to all hon. Members who participated. If we compare it with an energy debate at probably any time in the post-war years, it is striking how non-ideological it has been. As an old-fashioned ideological guy, I am not sure how comfortable I am with that. I like to know where the enemy is, and it should be on the Opposition Benches—*[Interruption.]* Well, so long as it is not on the Benches behind me.

It is a tribute to the way in which the debate has been conducted that there has been great openness of mind and diversity of view in all corners of the House. Labour Members talked about liberalisation and competitiveness, and the Tories, in the person of the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack), correctly acknowledged the primacy of the Government's role in maintaining security of supply. Members on both sides acknowledged the environmental imperatives that were barely recognised a decade ago. The policy objectives are pretty clear, and the debate is about means, rather than ends.

The challenge that I set, for myself and my colleagues in government as well as for others, is for intellectual consistency within the parameters of that debate. In other words, the policies for objectives to which we pay lip service should be consistent, and not merely a series of contradictory aspirations or headline-catchers. Each of us has a responsibility to ensure that the bits of our thinking join up. The Government create more initiatives and policies and have more Departments than anyone else, so the responsibility on us is commensurately greater to make sure that there is consistency and intellectual honesty.

That is why I am wary—perhaps more than someone in this position would normally be—of setting targets that will not be tested against reality until we have all moved on, and maybe even passed on. It is infinitely more important to make sure that existing targets are compatible with what is happening on the ground. The usefulness of the debate lies in the fact that Members have tested consistencies and inconsistencies in a very helpful and considered way. It is a good model for the wider debate about energy policy until 2050 that should be taking place in the country, although I am not optimistic that it will be discussed in the pubs and clubs and on the highways and byways of Britain. The conclusions of that wider debate will come together in a White Paper.

Turning to the points made by my hon. Friends the Members for Southampton, Test (Dr. Whitehead) and for Brighton, Kemptown (Dr. Turner) and others, it is important to look at these matters from the perspective imposed on us by the climate change imperative. This is not an academic abstraction. It is about flooding, and the submersion of people and the places in which they live and work. Globally, it is about wholesale loss of life and the means of subsistence. It must be taken seriously, and, faced with that prognosis, we have to be very sceptical about special pleading. Everything that we do in energy policy has to reflect that environmental imperative.

I shall try to tackle some of the specific matters that have been raised, but obviously I will not get to them all, and where appropriate I will write to the Member concerned. The debate about gas supplies is interesting, and this has been a good forum to air both sides of the argument. I have certainly listened carefully to the concerns about the security of gas supply expressed by hon. Members on both sides of the House, and I take them very seriously. Equally important, there was support for the PIU conclusions from the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) and my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard). This is not a one-sided argument.

It is easy to exaggerate these matters and to suggest that all the pipelines will be vulnerable to threats that for some reason have not manifested themselves in all the years that countries have been supplying us safely. However, security is clearly a source of concern. Perception and acceptability to public opinion are very important, so we must be clear that the gas supplies that we will be relying on, possibly to a large extent, are secure and are seen to be secure. From the tone of today's debate, I am in no doubt that that is an important part of the consultation in which we are involved, and it is an aspect of the PIU report that will be tested in an exchange of views as robust as the one we have heard today.

I was asked by the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) about the liabilities management Bill. I can confirm that a liabilities management unit has been set up in the DTI as a forerunner for the agency that will emerge. The parliamentary programme for the next Session is still the subject of discussion, so I cannot give the hon. Gentleman a definitive answer.

The hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell) incorrectly said that the renewables obligation plateaus in 2010. As I pointed out, anyone entering into renewables now has the unprecedented security of 25 years of the renewables obligation. It is true that the present target is set for 2010, but I revert to my previous point. It is not due to some inherent caution or lack of commitment that we do not set targets of 10 per cent. a time for 2020, 2030 and so on. Let us hope that that is attainable, but it is far more important to get everyone satisfied that 10 per cent. by 2010 is attainable.

There is no party in government or prospectively in government—hopefully not before 2030, 2040 or 2050—that is not signed up to the renewables obligation and that agenda. Any City financier who is sitting in his tent worrying about the length of the Government's commitment to the renewables obligation is raising a spectre that does not exist, and possibly an alibi for non-investment and non-support, rather than any rational reason.

[Mr. Wilson]

The hon. Member for Hazel Grove made clear his support for wind power. I look forward to the leader of his party coming out clearly in support of the wind farm developments on the Isle of Skye, on which I note he has been conspicuously silent.

On nuclear power, I am not sure that I would go to the length of reading the two booklets written by the hon. Member for Hazel Grove, but I note his views.

On my earlier comments about intellectual consistency, anyone who suggests that we should not replace nuclear with nuclear must say how our environmental obligations are to be met if nuclear is not replaced with nuclear. The debate will move on. The world should not be divided into fan clubs—pro-nuclear or anti-nuclear. People must consider all the arguments, see the advantages that nuclear undoubtedly provides in a low-carbon economy, and balance that against any doubts that they might have. There is the potential for a much more rational debate. I and my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) have been pleasantly surprised that the nuclear argument in the Chamber today has been so balanced. There is certainly not the blanket hostility to nuclear that some vested interests would like to pretend exists, both politically and in the country as a whole.

I was asked about photovoltaics. I agree that more money is needed in the longer term. We have launched three pilot projects—domestic trials, public building pilots, and the first phase of a large demonstration programme worth £20 million over the next three years. Progress is being made in photovoltaics. As in so many such projects, the tragedy is the low point from which we are starting.

I was pleased to be asked about tidal and wave power—two of my particular favourites. Earlier this week at Wallsend I was pleased to launch the Stingray device, which has been developed in the north-east of England and will be tested in the Sound of Yell in Shetland over the summer. I have been hearing about wave and tidal devices for 25 years, but at present the total industry in wave power, not only in this country but worldwide, is half a megawatt in Islay.

That is great, but it is not conclusive proof that those technologies can make a serious contribution. I desperately want them to make a serious contribution. However, as far as I know, no research and development project has been proposed that does not have the support of Government. I give my personal commitment to try to push those two technologies. I cannot emphasise strongly enough that at some point R and D must be turned into a manufacturing industry if those technologies are to be serious contributors, rather than long-term dreams, as they have been for the past 25 years.

The hon. Member for Croydon, South (Richard Ottaway), who told me that he would have to leave before the end of the debate, spoke about market liberalisation. I agree entirely with what he said. We must create a level playing field throughout Europe. We are working hard and we did make progress in Barcelona, contrary to what the hon. Gentleman said—

It being Seven o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

PETITION

Road Traffic Accidents

7 pm

Mr. Nigel Beard (Bexleyheath and Crayford): The presentation of this petition arises from the death of my constituent, Stephen Williams, aged 24, and his fiancee, Sheila Ryan. They were both killed instantly when their car collided with a lorry whose driver had fallen asleep at the wheel. The driver, Paul Couldridge, knew that he suffered from a condition that sent him to sleep uncontrollably. For that reason, he did not have a licence to drive a heavy goods vehicle.

Stephen's parents have campaigned with the relatives of those killed and injured as a result of similar negligence through the organisation RoadPeace. I have the highest respect for the bravery of Mr. and Mrs. Williams in overcoming their own grief and campaigning to avoid other parents and loved ones having to go through the misery that they have experienced.

The petition, which has been signed by 6,458 people, states:

The Petition of supporters of "RoadPeace" declares that court sentences for offences which result in road death and injury do not take into account the fact that such offences involve the killing or hurting of fellow human beings.

Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Secretary of State for the Home Department to bring forward legislative proposals which will ensure that road deaths caused through negligence or law breaking are prosecuted as homicide; that serious injuries so caused are prosecuted with appropriate severity; that all such offences be prosecuted before a judge and jury; and that sentences for such offences should properly reflect the level of culpability involved.

To lie upon the Table.

Fisher Frozen Foods

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

7.2 pm

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): I should like to thank Mr. Speaker very much indeed for granting this debate on the situation at Fisher Frozen Foods. I raised the matter under Standing Order No. 24 a week ago and asked him for an emergency debate, which was understandably turned down, but I am grateful to him for awarding me this debate. I should also like to thank the Minister for coming here to respond. I point out that the hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) is going to say a few words, which has been cleared with the Minister's office, and the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) would also like briefly to speak, as his constituency is obviously affected by the receivership of the Albert Fisher Group plc.

It was announced on 23 May that the Albert Fisher Group had collapsed into receivership. KPMG was appointed by the banks with instructions to sell off the various individual plants as going concerns if that were possible. One of the biggest plants was Fisher Frozen Foods on the Hardwick road in my constituency. The factory had been operational since the mid-1960s and employed more than 400 people. Its main business was processing, sorting, packing and freezing various vegetables, but in particular, it dealt with peas, beans, carrots, cauliflowers, rice and French fries. Indeed, one in four of all frozen vegetable packs in UK supermarkets were processed at the plant.

KPMG moved into the factory and gave two weeks to find a buyer for the company as a going concern. In spite of the receiver's efforts, none of the six parties that visited the site came up with a bid for the business as a going concern. On 16 June, KPMG dropped a massive bombshell on King's Lynn and west Norfolk when it announced that the plant would close, with the immediate redundancy of 351 employees at the firm. Frigoscandia, the neighbouring cold store, issued 84 HR1s. The pea crop in East Anglia was imperilled and many experts in the processing and packaging industry said that the knock-on effect in unemployment would be job losses at a 4:1 ratio. We were obviously faced with possible devastation throughout the locality and the prospect of unemployment in my constituency almost doubling.

When I applied for a Standing Order No. 24 debate on Tuesday 10 June, the situation appeared grim. It looked almost inevitable that the plant, equipment and site would be broken up and the factory asset stripped. I am extremely pleased to say that today the receiver, KPMG, announced that a buyer has been found for the site, the plant and the equipment. It is a Belgian company called Pinguin, which is in partnership with Frigoscandia, which owns the plant next door.

The chink of light emerged last Friday, and slightly unexpectedly. At that stage, the hon. Member for North Norfolk and I were fairly depressed. However, an announcement was made today that a deal has been completed. As we speak, Pinguin and Frigoscandia are bringing staff into the plant to start the pea processing campaign tomorrow. This year's pea harvest will be dealt with, and when the six to eight week campaign is over, I hope that the new company will turn its attention to other crops and vegetables.

There is every chance that it will be taking on 200 to 250 employees out of the previous 400 or so. It is extremely good news that a dark cloud has been lifted. I take the opportunity to wish Pinguin and Frigoscandia every success in running the plant.

Last week, I was critical of KPMG, the receiver. I said that I felt that it had not given enough time to find a buyer of the business as a going concern. Strong language was used, and I apologise for any offence that was caused. At the time, there was a great deal of emotion in west Norfolk, with 351 people being made redundant at Fisher Frozen Foods, and another 84 next door. It was a bleak time.

I put on record now my gratitude to KPMG. Since the announcement of redundancies was made, it has worked tirelessly to try to find a buyer of the site, the plant and the equipment. The hon. Member for North Norfolk and I had a constructive meeting with KPMG. It made it clear that it would work tirelessly to try to find a solution to the problem, and to find a buyer who would continue production on the site.

I pay particular tribute to the partner in charge, Michael McLoughlin, and to his colleague who was on site conducting negotiations, Murray Stewart.

A complication set in earlier this week. It revolved round an outstanding Anglian Water bill of £228,000. In the words of the receiver two days ago, the bill was a real "deal breaker". Understandably, Anglian Water was insisting that either the receiver or the incoming buyer should clear the bill. It was in a strong position because the incoming buyer would need water to continue to run the business. There were also discharge consent charges.

The hon. Gentleman and I talked to the receiver on that point and on other matters. As a result of negotiations between the receiver and Anglian Water, a deal was done on the bill. I thank him and my right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard) and my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Moss) for discussing the issue with Anglian Water. Initially, it took a legalistic view, but we managed to talk to personnel at the highest level. They understood that it was in their interests to have a thriving business on the site paying water rates and discharge consent fees rather than having no one on the site. It is a good example of a real team effort to resolve a potentially serious obstacle.

Another obstacle has arisen, on which I would like the Minister to comment. I was telephoned this morning by the senior Transport and General Workers Union steward on site, Neville Addison. He is working hard with the new owners of the company to bring in a large number of staff so that the pea campaign can start tomorrow and the business can get under way with processing.

The problem revolves around the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981—the TUPE legislation—because the staff coming in to work for the new company will have TUPE entitlement. This is a problem, because they were made redundant roughly 10 days ago, and the average redundancy payment could be anywhere between £5,000 and £20,000. That redundancy is in respect of Fisher Frozen Foods, and those people feel strongly that they should have that redundancy money because it relates to the employment that they had with that firm. On the other hand, TUPE is giving them the same rights, pay and conditions as they had before, and they will effectively be doing the same job.

[Mr. Henry Bellingham]

I would like the Minister to comment on that. The hon. Member for North Norfolk might also have an idea of the answer to this problem, because he is a former employment lawyer. This is a real problem, first, because the company is determined to get as many people in as possible who are experienced and have the appropriate skills; obviously, most of them are former employees. Some, however, are holding back because of the threat to their redundancy payments.

Secondly, the receiver kept 28 employees on at the plant to ensure that—certainly, to begin with—it was kept on a care and maintenance basis. What will happen to them? Will they get extra compensation as well, if the 351—or perhaps 250—people come back into the plant with their TUPE entitlement as well as their redundancy payments? On a further, smaller point, if the redundancy money is not paid and the employees come back into the plant and are entitled to TUPE protection, what will happen in relation to the eight, nine or 10 days during which they were out of work? Will they get jobseeker's allowance?

I would like the Minister to comment briefly on the employees of the company who will probably not be brought back into the operation. There will still be a significant number who, having been made redundant, will probably not have a job, and they are obviously concerned about their jobseeker's allowance entitlement, and about re-skilling and retraining. Perhaps the Minister could tell the House what his Department would recommend to help those employees to get back to work as soon as possible.

The new owners of the company have made an important and significant commitment in terms of cash resources and of the investment that they are going to make for the future. They will undoubtedly be looking at new technology and at various other forms of innovation. Perhaps the Minister could pass on to the Department of Trade and Industry the new owners' concern that they want to hit the ground running, and to find out whether they have any entitlement to Euro-grants, innovation grants or any other form of DTI grant. North-West Norfolk is not an area with any special status, but if there is any possible entitlement, it is important that the company should know about it now. All too often, in my experience of dealing with grants, I have found that if a grant application goes in once an investment has been made, it is almost certainly too late. Perhaps the Minister will comment on that important point.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has also had a watching brief on all this, because when the announcement was made about the closure of the factory and the redundancies, there was a real threat to the entire pea harvest of East Anglia. There was also a serious threat to jobs in agriculture, haulage and contracting. If the factory closure had gone ahead, no bidder had come forward for the plant and equipment, and the pea campaign had not been able to start in the very near future, much of that pea crop—up to 24,000 tonnes, grown over 14,000 or 15,000 acres—would probably have remained in the ground because it would have been uneconomical to harvest.

There was a great deal of national coverage of this issue, but I am afraid that DEFRA was noticeable by its silence on it. There are lessons to be learned here, because there are strategic implications when one crop is controlled by a small number of contractors and totally dependent on one plant, as was the case here. That would have had an impact right across Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire. I would have liked to see DEFRA being much more proactive.

I am very pleased to have been able to come to the House for this Adjournment debate with this very good news. There is a huge sense of relief, although I have no illusions about the possible future pitfalls. I shall be particularly pleased if the Minister will be able to talk to other Departments, and to answer some of the specific questions that I have put to him. This has been a very bleak few days for west Norfolk, but a huge cloud has been lifted and we are now much more optimistic, thank goodness.

7.14 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I congratulate the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham) on securing the debate, and thank him for allowing me to make a necessarily brief contribution to it. I welcome the fact that there is better news from Norfolk for the plants in his constituency.

I want to turn the Minister's attention to the fish division of Fisher Frozen Foods, which consists of the key plants in Fraserburgh and Peterhead in my constituency, as well as some important factories south of the border. It is the largest private sector employer in my constituency: some 700 jobs in a rural community that has experienced a number of closures and setbacks in recent years. The Minister will understand just how vital this subject is for my constituency. We are hopeful that there are buyers for the businesses as going concerns, but no deal has been signed and nothing is guaranteed.

A few weeks ago, when I raised this issue with the Leader of the House, he was kind enough to undertake that Government Departments—presumably the Department for Work and Pensions and the Scottish Executive Departments—would be standing by to ensure that any assistance that could be given would be provided to any new investors in these factories. Have approaches been made, either here or at the Scottish level, and does the undertaking of the Leader of the House still stand good? I hope that the Minister will be able to repeat it now.

The hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) may deal shortly with a receiver's duties and obligations to creditors. As I said, we hope and believe that KPMG is working hard to secure buyers for these plants as going concerns. However, a difficulty may sometimes occur when the receiver's duties are narrowly drawn, so that it has a duty only to creditors as opposed to a wider duty that encompasses the work force, the public interest in terms of the public purse, and the key communities. Will the Minister reflect on that?

I want to make it clear that I make no criticism of KPMG, because I hope and believe that it is as anxious as I and other hon. Members are to ensure that the factories are sold as going concerns. There may be a constraint in its fiduciary duties. Will the Minister make some observation on that, because it is in the interests of everyone, especially the wider social and economic interests of my constituency, that the factories are sold as going concerns and not for their break-up value?

7.17 pm

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk): I congratulate the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham) on securing this debate. It is good news that the plant has been rescued. We all thank the various parties who have played a part in making that possible. The hon. Member for North-West Norfolk, other Norfolk Members and I have worked together on a cross-party basis to facilitate a solution to the big threat that has hung over that part of Norfolk in the past couple of weeks. KPMG, the workers, the trade unions, the buyer and Anglian Water have all played their part in making this possible, and our thanks go to all of them. It is important for the economy of this part of Norfolk that the plant survives. This evening, we face the future with more hope than we did last week.

As the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) said, the duty on the receiver is very narrow: it is a duty to the creditors. The combination of that duty and the practical application of the TUPE regulations means that the interests of the employees and the wider community are not properly taken into account.

There is a problem with the TUPE regulations. Although they are designed to protect the rights of employees, when a company is in receivership they often work perversely in the opposite direction. They encourage potential buyers to hold back and allow the plant to close so that they may be able to buy plant and equipment without taking on responsibility for employees. My reading of the legal position is that, with the plant reopening so soon, it is almost inevitable that the receiver will get legal advice that it is selling the plant as a going concern and that the TUPE regulations should apply. If that is the case, there will be no redundancies and the redundancy pay that those workers are expecting will not be paid.

I should be grateful if the Minister would take away from the debate a plea for the redundancy payments office to make an urgent decision and communicate it to the workers. As I am sure he understands, there is a lot of concern among people who have made applications and are due to receive an invitation to return to work, but do not know whether they will lose payment, in particular for the period between the plant closure and the date on which they returned to work. Reassurance and certainty for those workers is clearly important, but at the moment they are receiving conflicting messages. The legal situation in such circumstances is often complex, as I am sure that the Minister knows, but we need certainty as soon as possible.

I am grateful for the opportunity to speak and thank the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk for giving me the chance to contribute. I should be grateful if the Minister would respond to my concerns.

7.21 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Malcolm Wicks): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham) on securing a debate on an issue which is important not only for his own constituency but for those of other hon. Members. I listened carefully to the points that he and other Members have made. Inevitably, I may need to return to some of the more detailed points in writing, or ministerial colleagues may have to respond.

Obviously, we now have better news about the situation in Norfolk, which will be welcomed by the people and communities directly affected. Not many days ago, however, things looked much gloomier. Since the news broke of possible redundancies at the Fisher Foods processing plant in King's Lynn, our local Jobcentre Plus staff have been working closely with the receiver KPMG, the company itself and the regional development agency. Following the announcement of 350 redundancies on 10 June, open days were organised at a local conference centre on 12 and 13 June, which were attended by our Jobcentre Plus staff, local training providers and 18 local employers, as well as about 300 of the people who were made redundant.

The local Jobcentre Plus office reports that the local labour market is buoyant, and it is advertising a large number of vacancies, particularly for people with food-processing skills. Our staff felt that anyone affected by the possible closure of the plant would soon return to the labour market. Indeed, the eastern region has a working-age employment rate well above the United Kingdom average. For example, in the hon. Gentleman's constituency of North-West Norfolk, unemployment has fallen by 57 per cent. and long-term unemployment has fallen by more than 80 per cent.. Moreover, since 1997, every region has experienced falling unemployment and rising employment.

In the past few days, our Jobcentre Plus staff have helped 50 people from the plant to find alternative work, and 50 more people have had job interviews arranged for them, obviously before we had had the better news. However, that shows how quickly our agency could swing into action. Fifty more people are believed to have begun arranging alternative employment themselves, and the remaining employees continue to receive advice and support from Jobcentre Plus.

We acknowledge that the farming industry is going through difficult times. The loss of an important processing outlet would have led to substantial repercussions for local farmers and the economy of which they are part, especially in frozen pea production, where a particularly close relationship between growers and processors is essential. I therefore welcome the announcement by KPMG today that it has succeeded in concluding the sale of that site.

I recognise that there are some remaining uncertainties, which were articulated by the hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members on behalf of their constituents. However, growers now have the assurance that the crop that is about to be harvested can be processed. The future market for peas grown in Norfolk lies in the hands of new owners. We wish them success in securing continuing markets for the product. The important and complex issues surrounding TUPE are not matters for my Department but for the Department of Trade and Industry. However, I will draw the remarks of the hon. Gentleman to the attention of my ministerial colleagues.

Mr. Bellingham: The problem that the TGWU senior steward has is that many people are saying to him that they would want to go back to the factory today, tomorrow or the next day to help on the pea campaign, but they do not know whether they can afford to do so if they are going to lose redundancy, so we need a decision on the matter tomorrow if possible, and advice from the DTI.

Malcolm Wicks: I will draw those remarks to the attention of the Department tonight and stress the urgency of clarification on what I know to be an important issue.

[Malcolm Wicks]

When it comes to entitlement to social security benefits, particularly the jobseeker's allowance, the fact that my colleagues in Jobcentre Plus are already engaged will enable advice about entitlement, should it still apply—it is a complex period—to be forthcoming from my colleagues.

The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) raised important points about his constituency. Unfortunately, I did not know that he was going to speak in the debate, so I am not briefed on those issues, but the assurance given to him by the Leader of the House still applies. I will endeavour to ensure that colleagues in different Departments are apprised of the situation and that any help that can be forthcoming—I can give no guarantees of that—will be forthcoming. We all understand that it is always best in these situations if concerns can be solved as ongoing concerns, if at all possible, but obviously that is not a matter for me.

I understand the importance of the points made by the hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) about the complexity that may now surround the issue of redundancy payments. We will obviously want to give that due consideration too.

In such cases where redundancies are large, potentially large, or will have a major impact, we have what we call our rapid response service, which was introduced recently. The service helps the whole community to cope with the impact of significant redundancy by looking at the total picture rather than just at those being made redundant.

The service works closely with key partners such as the regional development agencies, the still fairly new local learning and skills councils—there can be a retraining issue—local authorities and trade unions to co-ordinate an effective response to redundancy.

The exact nature of the help is always tailored to the needs of the individual, the employer, the local economy and the labour market concerned. From April this year, the service has received nationally an additional £6 million over the next two years, in order to strengthen its work.

In the case of the Albert Fisher business, as we have been saying, it now appears that at the King's Lynn site there has been a successful outcome; we certainly hope that that is the case. I also understand that the receivers have had a number of offers for the eight remaining sites of the business and are conducting detailed discussions with all potential buyers.

The successful conclusion of the sale of the King's Lynn plant is in no small part due to the co-operation and co-ordination of the efforts of all parties involved, including the strong interest of local Members of Parliament—hence this debate. In situations such as this, Government Departments are very willing to assist in any way that is valuable or relevant to find alternative buyers or an alternative future for the employees. I acknowledge the work of my colleagues at Jobcentre Plus, who clearly moved quickly and had already found outcomes for employees before we heard the news affecting the plant.

It is important that we do all we can to ensure that firms continue in production if at all possible. In the first instance, that is a matter for the private sector, but we stand ready to assist companies or the work force in any way that we can, should they face redundancy and loss of employment.

In welcoming this debate on an important issue—perhaps nothing is more important for families than the future of work in such areas—I acknowledge that, for various reasons, I have been unable to answer all the detailed questions put by concerned Members. The issue cuts across different UK Departments, and also affects the Government in Scotland. I understand the urgency of these matters, and I will do my best to draw them to the attention of ministerial colleagues as soon as possible.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes to Eight o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 21 June 2002

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Orders of the Day

Employee Share Schemes Bill

As amended in the Standing Committee, considered.

New Clause 1

DEDUCTIONS: INCOME TAX AND CAPITAL GAINS TAX

'(1) Schedule 8 to the Finance Act 2000 is also amended as specified in this section.

(2) In paragraph 88 (income tax), after sub-paragraph (4) there is inserted—

"(4A) In the case of shares acquired by the trustees by virtue of a payment in respect of which a deduction is allowed under paragraph 112A, the period applicable to the shares is (notwithstanding sub-paragraphs (3) and (4)) the period of ten years beginning with the date of acquisition."

(3) In paragraph 98 (capital gains tax), after sub-paragraph (3) there is inserted—

"(3A) In the case of shares acquired by the trustees by virtue of a payment in respect of which a deduction is allowed under paragraph 112A, the relevant period is (notwithstanding sub-paragraphs (2) and (3)) the period of ten years beginning with the date of acquisition."

(4) In paragraph 100 (classes of share for the purposes of capital gains tax), at the end there is inserted—

"(4) For the purposes of that Chapter, any shares which—

(a) were acquired by the trustees by virtue of a payment in respect of which a deduction is allowed under paragraph 112A, and

(b) have not been awarded under the plan,

shall (notwithstanding that they would otherwise fall to be treated as of the same class) be treated as of a different class from any shares held by the trustees that were not so acquired by them."—*[Mr. Lazarowicz.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

9.33 am

Mr. Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

When I realised a few weeks ago that this morning's debate would coincide with other events thousands of miles away in the far east, I was somewhat alarmed. I was even more concerned when the eventual participants were confirmed a few days ago. I am therefore grateful to the Members who have come to the Chamber this morning and dragged themselves away from the analysis of the game. As a Member representing a Scottish constituency, I extend my commiserations on the result to colleagues representing English constituencies.

Moving quickly to the substance of the new clause, I declare first as an interest support from the Co-operative party and Job Ownership Ltd. in the preparation and development of the Bill, which I have declared in the Register of Members' Interests. If we reach Third Reading, as I hope we will, I shall say a little more about that support.

New clause 1 was tabled following a welcome offer by my hon. Friend the Paymaster General in Committee. When the somewhat lengthy Committee proceedings were drawing to a close, I told Committee members that the Government were willing to extend the scope of tax advantages in the Bill—an offer that I and people supporting the Bill both inside and outside the House welcomed. It was not possible to introduce an amendment in Committee, but new clause 1 gives effect to the change proposed by the Paymaster General. As hon. Members can see, the new clause was tabled in her name and mine.

To clarify the purpose of the new clause, I shall make brief reference to the provisions in the Bill that it seeks to amend. The Bill includes a provision allowing corporation tax relief to be granted upfront where a significant block of shares—10 per cent. or more—is transferred to an employee trust. Under the share incentive plan provisions that give taxation advantages to encourage employee share ownership, such corporation tax relief is available only when shares are transferred from an employee share trust to individual employees. However, such a transfer of shares to individual employees may take a long time when a large part of a shareholding in a company is transferred at the outset for the benefit of employees. As a result, the current taxation concession would not be available in such circumstances, making such a route expensive and in many cases so prohibitive that the transfer of shares would not take place.

Clause 1(3) allows a period of 10 years in which shares can be held by an employee share trust if it is to gain the benefit of corporation tax relief. That measure makes it much more feasible for an employee trust to acquire shares and gradually distribute them to employees if it wants to do so. The trust will therefore be more easily able to plan the acquisition and distribution of shares in the best way for the development of the business and the trust itself. No doubt it is also in the interest of the employees and may encourage the trust to act as their corporate voice, particularly when the provisions in clause 1(2) are utilised.

New clause 1 seeks to give a further tax concession to trustees holding employee shares. It does so in two ways. First, subsection (2) ensures that the dividend and other distributed income arising from shares held by the trustees during the 10-year period and not otherwise appropriated will be charged to income tax at the special rates applicable to such trusts as set out in section 686 of the Taxes Act 1988. Secondly, subsections (3) and (4) ensure that such shares will not be charged to capital gains tax during the time in which they are held by the trustees in the 10-year period.

Mr. Tom Watson (West Bromwich, East): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way, and I am particularly pleased by his kind comments at the start of

[Mr. Tom Watson]

his speech. I assure him that there is no more solid return to reality than discussing new clause 1, after a heroic performance by England that was none the less disappointing. How does my hon. Friend think the new clause will affect take-up by companies?

Mr. Lazarowicz: It is impossible to give a precise estimate of the number of firms that might benefit from the new clause, but a number of businesses have told me that they would welcome the package of measures contained in the Bill as a whole. I shall refer to that at greater length on Third Reading, if we get to that stage. There is certainly some evidence of companies wanting to make use of the entire package. I hope that hon. Members accept that we are discussing not just the measure, but a change in the culture and attitude of business, financial institutions and the tax regime to employee share ownership. We are pointing the way for changes in the future which, I hope, many companies will take advantage of.

Mr. Andrew Love (Edmonton): I add my voice—which may seem a rather strange voice, coming as it does with a regional accent—to that of other hon. Members who have commented on England's sad loss today. The players put up a heroic performance, but the run of play did not quite go with them.

Does my hon. Friend recognise that there was concern that if we had continued with the tax advantages for only the two and five-year periods, as set out in the original legislation, that would have been a significant disincentive, given how long it takes to set up a trust—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. Even on a Friday, that is going beyond the bounds of an intervention.

Mr. Lazarowicz: My hon. Friend makes a good point—so good that I was about to make it myself. As he pointed out, provisions for such tax concessions already exist under the Finance Act 2000 for shares held in an employee trust, but they apply only for periods of up to two or five years, depending on the specific circumstances. There was concern that, with the welcome 10-year concession applying to the company that transferred the shares to the employee trust, but with the trustees not having a similar 10-year concession, the effect of the measure could be restricted. He made that point well.

The combined effect of the provisions in the new clause is to bring the treatment of shares acquired with the benefit of upfront corporation tax relief into line with the treatment of shares acquired by the trustees of the employee trust, in respect of both taxation of dividends on the shares held by the trust and capital gains for a period of up to 10 years, depending on how long the shares are held. In other words, when the shares are transferred to an employee share trust, the company transferring them gets the up-front corporation tax relief and when the trustees have acquired those shares, they get those advantages also.

Such a concession will greatly increase the utility of what I might term the 10-year period of grace before shares must be distributed to individual employees by a trust. That will make the concession much more attractive and of much greater assistance to businesses and owners of businesses who want to go along this route. I am grateful to the Government for volunteering a further tax benefit to encourage the holding of shares by employee trusts, and I commend the new clause to the House.

9.45 am

Ms Meg Munn (Sheffield, Heeley): I, too, welcome the new clause, which was ably moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz). I shall not say anything about the football. I do not know much about it, other than the result, so let us move on to more important and long-lasting matters.

The new clause is complex. When I first read it, I thought that I would never be able to understand it, but fortunately I was a member of the Standing Committee, where my hon. Friend the Paymaster General explained in great detail what the new clause would mean and why the Government were offering the concession to further the aims that my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith is trying to achieve. The commitment was made at that stage, and it was most welcome. It clarifies the position, by bringing the extended period of 10 years for shares acquired with the new corporation tax relief into line with other tax provisions. The new rules will improve matters for everybody concerned.

As we discussed at length on Second Reading, there is an important role for share incentive plans. The measure adds to the incentives for companies to go down that route. The early deduction of corporation tax is particularly important on the money that is provided by the company to a share incentive plan trust, so that it can buy a block of shares that, over the longer period, it can begin to transfer to its employees.

I support the new clause, which improves a strong and welcome Bill. I hope that the House will endorse it.

Linda Gilroy (Plymouth, Sutton): I add my voice to that of my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Ms Munn). As a member of the Standing Committee who struggles to understand some of the more technical clauses, I could perhaps say in plain English that the new clause is a way of moving goal posts—if I may make an oblique reference to a subject that we are all trying to pass over—in a favourable way. Perhaps that might have been helpful out in Japan earlier today.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) on the new clause. By means of it, probably after some rather painstaking discussions with our hon. Friend the Paymaster General, he proposes to extend income tax and capital gains relief for share incentive plan trustees from two to five years under the current rule to 10 years, to correspond with the time allowed in the Bill for shares to be distributed.

At present, corporation tax deductions are given when shares in the share incentive plan trust are distributed to employees. The Bill provides for corporation tax deduction to be given earlier, when a company contributes money to a share incentive plan trust to buy a block of shares. I think I have got that right. Under the new clause there will be no risk of the benefit of that early corporation tax relief being eroded by tax changes affecting the shares within the 10-year period.

All that is relevant only where the trust holds 10 per *cent. of the ordinary share capital of the company*, which it must do before it qualifies for the deduction, and the shares must be distributed to employees through the share incentive plan within the 10-year period.

With the addition of the new clause, the Bill will be better designed to encourage the flow of shares from the trust to individual employees over that period. It will thereby meet more fully the key objective of the Bill: to improve productivity by encouraging employees to take out a long-term stake in the company and share the rewards of the company's success. I congratulate my hon. Friend on negotiating the new clause. It satisfies the Treasury, which is no mean feat, as others who have failed in such matters will confirm.

We have heard how share incentive plans were introduced in 2000 after extensive consultation. Officials worked with an advisory group made up of representatives from large and small businesses, the TUC, share scheme experts and academics to design the plan, which has been well received.

Earlier, my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Watson) asked how the new clause might improve the number of those taking up the scheme. We know that almost 600 companies have already applied to set up plans, over half of which have formal approval from the Inland Revenue. The remaining plans are in the process of seeking that approval or are being worked on by the Revenue with the companies to ensure that they meet the legislative requirements and are therefore capable of approval.

The new clause, along with the other measures in the Bill that is set to come into force in April 2003, will add significantly to that number over time as people become familiar with the new possibilities. The growth in the sector is still modest, but I am sure that it is set to increase. The acorns that are being planted now will become saplings and perhaps, during the millennium, a veritable forest of trees will bear the fruits of the benefits that we all attribute to the potential of employee share ownership schemes today.

I add my voice in support of the new clause and hope that it will be added to the Bill.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): It gives me extreme pleasure to support the new clause in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) and to put on record my admiration for his consistent pursuit of positive but not extreme measures for the benefit of those in his constituency and throughout the United Kingdom. I also wish to put on record for the first time my great joy at the fact that he has eventually joined a number of us who served for many long and weary hours in local government under the previous Conservative Government, fighting the cause of the Scottish people.

The new clause is an excellent Government concession that extends the benefits under share incentive schemes to 10 years rather than two. Ten or 20 years ago I would not have viewed encouraging employees to share in the ownership, responsibility and benefits of successful enterprise as a positive move. I would rather have been seizing the commanding heights of the economy than sharing the benefits of such enterprise among its employees. But we have clearly moved on.

Many employees wish to be involved not just in the *information and consultation* processes that are coming from Europe but in the incentive of having a share in the capital of an enterprise and the benefits that flow therefrom. If the new clause were not to be approved, some of those benefits would be taken away by the requirement to pay capital gains tax and income tax at an early stage.

Mr. Love: Does my hon. Friend agree that because the Bill is specifically geared to substantial share ownership transfer, which will take a considerable time, without the new clause there would have been a significant disincentive as the trustees would have had imposed on them taxes that would have detracted from the transfer?

Mr. Connarty: My hon. Friend puts lucidly the benefits that flow from the new clause. The idea is to incentivise share ownership, and the removal of barriers to that, which have been revealed in Committee, will be beneficial, but we still have a long way to go.

I am a long-term member of the Co-operative party and the Co-operative Society and a former chairman of the Stirlingshire branch of the Co-operative party. Some older members had these ambitions in their early days—

Mr. Gareth Thomas (Harrow, West): Name them.

Mr. Connarty: I acknowledge my hon. Friend's intervention. We are remaking the co-operative ideal in introducing such Bills, and I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith for that.

I hope that the new clause will be supported and will give people the incentive to take up these employee share schemes. It will probably be more difficult to find trustees than we think because they will have great responsibility. As we see in the credit unions movement, convincing people requires much work and is often a slow and arduous progress. The new clause will make it easier to convince people that this is a tax efficient and beneficial way to invest in an enterprise. If the tax man and the Government are willing to help, people will be enthused. I commend the new clause to the House.

Mr. Iain Luke (Dundee, East): As a co-sponsor with the hon. Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks), and one of the five Scots who added their name to the early-day motion, I am disappointed that we will not have the joy of a Bank holiday on 1 July. However, I should like to propose an amendment to that early-day motion to add "and Brazil", so that we have the best of both worlds.

I support the new clause. As a member of the Committee, which met for only a short time to consider the Bill, I am happy to see the new clause. It is evidence of the collaborative approach that we have witnessed to this small but worthwhile Bill. It is testimony to the thoughtful approach adopted by my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) and my hon. Friend the Paymaster General, who was particularly helpful. That approach demonstrated the Inland Revenue's commitment to making SIPs—share incentive plans—work practically for the benefit of those who take them up. In that regard the measure should be commended. This is a small step. I am not a Co-op

[Mr. Iain Luke]

member—*[Interruption.]* Perhaps I should be. I do not want to declare an interest at this stage, but I shall certainly join, given the pressure—

Mr. David Lepper (Brighton, Pavilion): As we all know, the foundations of the co-operative movement were laid in my constituency in the 1820s and I commend to my hon. Friend membership of that movement. Does he agree that, welcome though the Treasury's co-operation is on the Bill and the new clause, once the Bill receives its Third Reading today, as we all hope that it will, the Government, the co-operative movement, the credit unions, and so on, will have an important job during the next few years in publicising the real merits of the Bill?

10 am

Mr. Luke: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend's commitment to the co-operative movement. When I was a young boy in Scotland, co-operatives were the only major form of retail store. I remember queueing up with my mother to put the book in the slot at the end of the week and the discount on one's goods that one got for doing so. In Dundee, we called it the "sosh" rather than the co-operative and social society.

My hon. Friend made a relevant point. Further co-operative and collaborative efforts are needed to bring the industry together and give employees a more vigorous say in how their workplace is operated, which is enhanced by the Bill and the SIPs options introduced in the 2000 Budget. It is worth making sure that people know about it, and we should advertise it more widely. Uptake is the big issue—it needs to be greater than it has been.

On Third Reading, I hope to address extending such schemes into football clubs. There has been some movement towards that, and we need to give it some attention.

Mr. Watson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) for clarifying the provision, which is very complex, as every member of the Committee said. They had the greatest minds of the Treasury to unpick it for them; I am afraid that I do not. I was concerned that its complexity would discourage employers and employees from taking up the offer, but clearly that is not the case. The new clause will help to lighten the burden, and it is a welcome concession. Now, those shares acquired with up-front capital tax relief can be distributed over a longer period. That will go a long way to increasing the impact of the Bill. There is consensus in the House on extending the role of share incentive plans.

In a busy workplace, the employer might have felt that the scheme was another burden on his time, so I am pleased that the Treasury has agreed to this incentive. I have talked to employers in my constituency who have said that extending the period to 10 years means that they will definitely take another look at the provisions. I hope that they will go some way to encourage the flow of shares from the trust to individual employees over time. So far, only 600 companies have applied or shown an interest. I have 4,500 companies in my constituency that would welcome the new clause, and I am pleased that it is before us this morning.

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): I put on record, as have other hon. Members, that this is a very sad day for English football. If anything has prepared me to confront that psychologically and emotionally it is the fact that I am only just recovering from another sad day for English football two weeks ago—the Football Association's decision to allow Wimbledon to go to Milton Keynes.

Mr. Watson: Does my hon. Friend agree that if the new clause had been enacted at that time, the players at Wimbledon football club might have had greater direction over the decisions of the club's management, which might have gone some way to ensuring that Wimbledon stayed in its rightful home—Wimbledon?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on cleverly steering his hon. Friend back into the realms of the new clause, but I hope that he will not be tempted to maintain a sporting theme.

Roger Casale: I will not be tempted, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I sometimes refer to my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Watson) as the hon. Member for West Bromwich Albion. The answer to his question is yes. Perhaps I shall elaborate on that on Third Reading.

Although I was not selected to serve on the Committee, I welcome the new clause, as I welcome the Bill itself. It will strengthen and widen the benefits of the Bill. The Bill will bring many benefits to those who take up the opportunity of employee share ownership, but also to the economy as a whole. As well as establishing a framework for economic stability, the Government are concerned to use the tax system to change incentives at the micro-economic level in a way that encourages enterprise and boosts productivity. The Government introduced many such tax measures in previous Budgets, and did so again in 2002, many of which enjoyed, and are enjoying, cross-party support and will help to boost Britain's productivity.

The Government's support for the Bill is entirely consistent with their approach to promoting enterprise and Britain's competitiveness. It is important to frame legislation in a way that accommodates the understandable demand to broaden share ownership consistently with the Government's overall approach to economic stability and to reforming the tax system. That is why I am pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) has had such good consultations with the Treasury and that the Government have worked with him jointly on the new clause, which is a beneficial measure that will enhance the overall benefits of the Bill. Extending income tax and capital gains tax relief for share incentive plans to 10 years will, as my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith argued so well, make it more likely that such schemes will be taken up, because early corporation tax relief will not be eroded by tax changes on the shares within the 10-year period.

The Government's support shows that they are prepared to allow, and indeed to encourage, such measures to come forward from the co-operative movement. There has also been support from trade unions, as well as a great deal of input and support from small and medium-sized enterprises—through the Small Business Federation, for example.

The new clause will make employee share ownership more viable. It will encourage more schemes and encourage more employees to participate in them. Many people in my constituency of Wimbledon support the Bill and the new clause, and perhaps some will pioneer such schemes and take them up. The newly formed Wimbledon amateur football club, set up because the professional club is disappearing, will be able to take advantage of these new measures, as well as many others that the Government are introducing, such as the tax relief announced in the Budget for participation in and donations to community amateur sports clubs.

I am pleased to support the new clause, to have the opportunity for the first time to voice my support for the Bill as a whole, and to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith on introducing it. I also put on record my appreciation of the fact that the Government have worked with my hon. Friend and with organisations outside the House to draft the Bill so as to ensure that it works for everybody. I hope that the House will give it its support.

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): I lend support from the Opposition both to the Bill and to the new clause. The Conservative party has long supported the principle of employee share ownership. As hon. Members will know, we introduced the save-as-you-earn option scheme, the approved profit sharing scheme, the company share option plan and the qualifying employee trust, two of which the share incentive plan replaces.

In my personal career, extending share ownership of the business that I led and built up for 15 years meant that it succeeded. The mentality of motivating everyone who works for a business to want to make it a success so that they are willing to work extra hours if necessary and pull together makes a dramatic difference. From 1992 until last year, and the sad fall of the stock market after the pensions crisis, the performance of companies that had substantial employee ownership was roughly double that of those that did not. However, I cannot help but make the point that people who had not previously thought about such matters become capitalists once they have an ownership stake. They understand profit and loss and that it is hard to win business; things do not simply drop into one's lap. They adopt a capitalist mentality.

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): Is it not true that if everyone shares ownership, we all become socialists?

Mr. Flight: The hon. Gentleman should return to his political studies because the essence of socialism is not the profit motive, and the essence of employee share ownership is ownership and participating directly in profits and the capitalist mentality that accompanies it. However, the possibility of crossing strands and overlap is interesting.

Linda Gilroy: Will the hon. Gentleman sign up to at least one important part of our clause 4, which states that wealth, power and opportunity should be in the hands of the many, not the few? Far from all being Thatcherites now, we are all socialists now.

Mr. Flight: I shall not stray into the realms of unreality. Business is business. As the employees of the John Lewis Partnership and the other successful businesses that have widespread employee share ownership would tell the hon. Lady, we are not considering Utopia. Hard decisions must be made and people have to devolve decision making, just as the socialist Government have devolved decision making to their Ministers. However, hon. Members should be happy that there is widespread support for the Bill.

The new clause was essential to make sense of clause 1(3) and (4); otherwise the Bill would put in place the block transfer of 10 per cent. and the requirement for attaining an SIP basis in 10 years; but if the business did not receive the same tax treatment, it is unlikely that anyone would use the measure. The new clause is sensible and in line with the Bill's intent.

A question was asked about take-up. The latest figures that I have seen for SIPs since they were introduced in 2000 show that there are 202 schemes. That is positive, but we would like a great deal more take-up. I shall be interested to hear whether the promoter or the Government have any plans for promoting the achievement of the full mechanisms that enable employee share ownership.

If I understand the position correctly, the clause that the Government deleted—I call it the John Lewis clause—tried to encourage employee share-owned companies, the shares of which were already held collectively in employee trusts, by enabling the shares to become eligible for distribution to individual employees under the SIP. I also understood that the Government's objection to that was that they did not want the SIP to allow anything other than ordinary share capital to be distributed under its provisions, because of the danger of employees having inferior shares. However, SIP arrangements permit employers to select non-voting shares and it could be argued that voting shares are more valuable and powerful than non-voting shares. The arrangements that the new clause tidies up would, in principle, enable the block schemes with their tax advantages to involve non-voting shares, so I cannot understand the logic of the Government's earlier objection to the John Lewis clause.

10.15 am

The Bill is a positive measure. The more widely shares are owned in this country, the more successful we shall be. All the studies that have been undertaken here and in the United States show that companies with serious employee share ownership have succeeded markedly better than those without it. We welcome the new clause, which completes the necessary facilities for companies to put in the 10 per cent. block employee share transfers.

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): I welcome the comments of the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) on the contribution that employee share ownership schemes can make not only to involving employees in businesses but to the success of the businesses. I do not want to go down the route on which the hon. Gentleman started and dwell on the definition of the difference between capitalism and socialism, but if he has a spare moment over the weekend, he should examine the proud history of the co-operative movement and the Labour party. He will then realise that social ownership, sharing and wealth creation have been at the heart of the Labour movement's philosophy.

I shall deal briefly with take-up of SIPs. So far, it has been satisfactory. To date, the Inland Revenue has approved the plans of some 337 companies. Of those,

[Dawn Primarolo]

160 never previously had an all-employee share scheme. That is well on track for meeting our aim of encouraging approximately 1,750 companies to adopt an all-employee plan for the first time. Forty per cent. of the approved plans are from unlisted companies and 45 per cent. are small or medium-sized enterprises, with fewer than 250 employees. I am delighted with that progress.

Linda Gilroy: I am interested in my hon. Friend's progress report. Does she hope and expect that there may be increased employment in those small businesses because the business has prospered?

Dawn Primarolo: Indeed, that is the hope and intention of all hon. Members in supporting the Bill, which was promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz). That echoes the point that the Member for Arundel and South Downs made about his direct experience in his company and his broad experience in the City. All the research demonstrates the contribution that these companies make to productivity and growth, and the Government place great value on that.

The broader question that hon. Members touched on earlier—*[Interruption.]* Bless you! I have just saved the soul of the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs. That is a superstition; I should say, for the benefit of those not watching the debate, that the hon. Gentleman has just sneezed, and it is an automatic reaction from my childhood to be polite and say such a thing. I am digging myself into a hole here. I hope that I have now converted him to socialism.

The campaigning and information provided by the Inland Revenue, including the roadshows that have been undertaken with those in the industry, are contributing to the successful take-up of share investment, and I hope that they will continue to do so.

Mr. Gareth Thomas: Does my hon. Friend not think that there will be a role for Members of Parliament in the campaign on the benefits of employee share ownership, following the passage of the Bill, to celebrate not only the benefits of the Bill but the wider benefits of employee share ownership? I am sure that she will have confidence that that could happen on this side of the House. I see the hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells (Mr. Norman) sitting behind the Conservative Front-Bench spokesman. I understand that he used to be a director of Asda. Perhaps he will want to intervene on the Minister to say how he thinks his side will champion employee share ownership.

Dawn Primarolo: I urge all hon. Members to view the Inland Revenue website, which lays out the details of the share incentive plans and the benefits that they can bring to companies. I am sure that the hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells is aware of those and plays his part already in encouraging companies to be productive, to grow and to employ more people; he already has a certain reputation for that.

In Committee, I offered to work with my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith to table a further beneficial amendment to the Bill. The new clause eliminates the possibility of share incentive plan trustees having to pay tax on shares secured with the benefit of the early corporation tax relief during the 10-year period they have to award the shares to employees.

Under the current share incentive plan rules, tax is charged on dividends received by trustees. In the case of shares that are readily convertible into cash, the trustees will be charged income tax if the shares have not been awarded to employees within two years. For shares that are not readily convertible into cash, tax will be charged if they have not been awarded within five years.

In the same way, trustees may also become liable to tax on capital gains when they award shares to their employees. Again, if the shares are readily convertible into cash, and they are not awarded within two years of their acquisition, capital gains tax may be charged. If the shares are not readily convertible into cash, the trustees may become liable if the award takes place after five years.

The new early corporation tax deduction allows the trustees 10 years in which to award to the employee beneficiaries the shares acquired with the benefit of the deduction. This would not work well with the existing charging rules, to put it mildly. Tax charges arising after two or five years would reduce the benefit of the corporation tax relief. Smaller companies trying to fund the transfer of shares into employee ownership would be particularly badly affected.

I think that it was my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Watson) who asked whether this provision was another way of ensuring greater take-up of share incentive plans. The amendment secures the benefit that the Bill seeks to provide, because it protects the interaction with the rest of the tax system.

I am pleased to support the amendment, because it will remove this awkwardness. In wishing to see the Bill progress, the House would be a little concerned—I put it no more strongly than that—if we passed the Bill, only to find that the capital gains tax system clawed back what had appeared to be an award of benefit to encourage share incentive plans. As soon as we realised that that was a possibility when we checked the Bill again, I suggested, in Committee, that we should table this amendment. I apologise that we were unable to deal with this in Committee, but it is important that we do so now. The amendment will extend the tax exemptions that share incentive plan trustees now have for two years or five years to 10 years, to match the period allowed for the distribution of shares acquired with the new relief.

The new clause makes three changes to the existing legislation. I apologise for the fact that it is a rather complex clause, but that is necessary to ensure that we deal with this matter properly. The first change is to the rules in paragraph 88 of schedule 8 to the Finance Act 2000, and concerns the exemption for dividend income. The new clause extends the period from two or five years to 10 years for all shares acquired with the new corporation tax relief.

The second change is to the rules in paragraph 98, exempting the trustees from capital gains tax on plan shares that they hold. Again, a change is required to extend the period from two or five years to 10 years in the case of all shares acquired with the benefit of the new corporation tax relief. These exemptions require rules for identifying the plan shares in respect of which the exemptions are to be claimed. So the third change requires plan shares acquired under the new corporation tax relief to be identified separately from all other plan shares.

We estimate that the cost of the new clause is likely to be negligible to the Government, although, as I have tried to explain, without it there might have been no cost because we would have recouped it, but that was not our intention. We believe very few share incentive plan trustees are likely to be holding shares beyond the two or five years which give rise to charges on capital gains and dividends under the normal rules.

Finally, it falls to me as the Minister to confirm to the House that the Bill, as amended, is compatible with the European convention on human rights. I therefore commend the new clause to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

Order for Third Reading read.

10.30 am

Mr. Lazarowicz: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

Today's proceedings are the end—or rather, this is the beginning of the end—of a very long process, stretching back to June of last year when I decided, in my enthusiasm after the general election, to enter the ballot for private Members' Bills. As a new Member, I did not fully appreciate the task that I had set myself when I drew a high place in the ballot, but it has been a rewarding experience and I have learned a lot about parliamentary procedure and the passage of legislation. It has also been illuminating for me to learn the degree to which Back Benchers can influence the legislative process—and the strict limits on their doing so.

The fact that the Bill has reached this stage is testament to the staunch support that I have received from a large number of organisations and individuals with an interest in promoting wider employee ownership in the United Kingdom. As we heard from the philosophical exchanges earlier, the approach to employee ownership comes fro[illegible] number of different perspectives and traditions. The wide interest is to be welcomed, and I am glad that, as well as being of value in itself, the Bill has been a useful way of highlighting the employee share ownership movement to a wider audience, as well as to Members of this House.

Although support for the Bill has been most evident among Labour and Co-operative Members, many of whom are present in the Chamber today, it exists also among some Opposition Members. I am glad to see the hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells (Mr. Norman) in his place; he has supported such a Bill in the past and was unable to be here on Second Reading. Hon. Members from other parties are also present.

Support for the Bill from Ministers and officials in the Treasury and the Inland Revenue has been crucial. I would have had to say, even if it were not true—but it is—that their support has been helpful and, indeed, essential in getting the Bill to this stage. It has been productive for me in so far as I was involved, and those advising me on the Bill have been in contact with the Revenue on many occasions.

Third Reading is not the time to go into great depth about the detail of the legislation—

Mr. Love: Oh, why not?

Mr. Lazarowicz: My hon. Friend tempts me to do so. In matters involving the complexities of tax law, it is not advisable to go into too much detail; otherwise hon. Members who have joined me in the Chamber might decide to take a short break from our proceedings.

Let me say a little in broad terms about the Bill's provisions, to bring hon. Members up to date with some of the developments in Committee and to paint the full picture of what the Bill seeks to do. I also want to set out the wider context in which the Bill has been introduced.

The Bill can be summarised as consisting of three main provisions. The first gives a clear pointer, in the share incentive plan, that employees can elect the trustees of the trust that holds the employee shares. It is not a compulsory requirement; no one is forcing companies, or employees, to have the trusts managed by employee representatives if they do not want to. However, the provision makes it possible for a number of the trustees to be employee representatives.

We debated whether the clause was absolutely necessary, and some officials believed that such an arrangement was possible under existing rules. However, the Bill's supporters felt that it was important to make it absolutely clear in legislation that such appointment of trustees by the employees was competent within the legislation, that it would not be challenged and that tax concessions would not be at risk. From their experience from talking to people who were interested in going along this route, businesses and even officials had responded that arrangements in which employees were involved in appointing trustees were at least questionable. If one is engaged in setting up a structure for a company that one wants to last for a long time, one does not want to risk a challenge at a later stage from the Inland Revenue; one wants to be sure of what one is doing from the start. That is why this provision was regarded as so important.

Mr. Love: Does my hon. Friend agree that a lot of evidence suggests that employee involvement in the non-financial as well as the financial aspects of share ownership brings benefits to the company and the employee?

Mr. Lazarowicz: My hon. Friend has the ability to foresee exactly the points that I am about to make. Once again, he has helped me to move on to my next point. I thank him for that assistance.

Numerous case studies have shown that the most successful results arising from employee share ownership are where employees have real involvement and participation in the non-financial as well as the financial aspects of share ownership and, as a result, feel a greater sense of ownership not just of the shares but of the whole company structure, ethos and direction. Appointing employee trustees can be an extremely effective way of achieving that. It is also to be hoped that, as a result of such involvement by employees in the culture of a company, the wider objective of increasing productivity, which is a main objective of the Government but one that

[Mr. Lazarowicz]

the whole House would endorse, is much more likely to be achieved, particularly when the non-financial aspects of ownership are supported and encouraged.

Mr. Gareth Thomas: Is not my hon. Friend being a tad too modest about the benefits of employee participation? There is considerable evidence to suggest that genuine employee participation in the running of a company brings much greater benefits, and those companies are more successful on average than companies that have no active employee participation.

Mr. Lazarowicz: My hon. Friend is right and in a moment I hope to come to some examples of concrete improvements in the performance of companies that have taken that route.

The clarification of rules that encourage the appointment of employees as trustees of the trusts that hold the employees' shares is one important provision of the Bill. The second, even more significant, provision is the way in which the Bill seeks to support the position of companies, and particularly the owners of businesses, that want to make a significant move towards employee ownership. The provision assists that change by allowing corporation tax relief to be made up front where a significant block of shares—10 per cent. or more—is transferred to an employee trust.

As we heard in our earlier debate, such relief is currently available only when the shares are transferred to the individual employees under the scheme. However, there is plenty of reason to believe that, in many cases, the requirement as provided for in legislation discourages businesses from going down that route. A few months ago, I attended an interesting conference organised by the Scott Bader company and a number of presentations were made by companies involved in that area.

It was pointed out, for example, that the owner of a business who wants to transfer ownership to his or her employees, and who recognises the value of involving employees in that way, might want to conduct the transfer gradually, perhaps to retain some interest in the running of the company in future years. After all, if the business had been built up over many years, it would be unsurprising if the owner did not want completely to let go of the reins of control on day one in the process. However, such a person would find that the gradual transfer of shares is not encouraged by the current regulations. If they took the route of transferring the shares initially to the employee trust, they would be hit by a large corporation tax bill at that stage of the process. Clearly, that is a great inhibitor to such transfer of business ownership.

In some cases, the transfer of shares from the current shareholders to an employee trust may require a certain degree of financing by the employees themselves. Employees are often asked to make a certain contribution towards the purchase of the shares. Again, they might not be able to provide the necessary finance from day one. The current provisions ensure that, if the shares are held in the trust for a period sufficient to allow them to accumulate the funds necessary for acquisition, the shares' transfer to the trust does not attract corporation tax relief at the start of the process. That can obviously inhibit the transfer of shares in the first place, so a very important aspect of the Bill is the way in which corporation tax relief is allowed up front.

The Bill also contains the important qualification that the shares must at some stage be transferred from the employee share trust and to the individual employees. There was some discussion about this matter among hon. Members, Ministers and officials. Views were expressed in some quarters about organisations in which it might be desirable to hold employee shares in the trust indefinitely and allow a block to be maintained in the trust's ownership all the time. A strong view was expressed to the contrary, and I can see its strength, which is why the Bill was amended in Committee. It was important to ensure that the shares are eventually distributed to employees, precisely to maintain the link between productivity and employee benefits.

In my view, the Bill makes the right compromise between those two factors. It allows the shares to be held by the employee trust for a considerable period, but also requires eventual transfer by providing that 30 per cent. of the shares acquired with a payment in respect of which deduction is made be distributed under the share incentive plan within five years. The balance should then be distributed within a further five years—10 from the initial acquisition—and the Bill also provides that if the distribution does not take place within those limits, the deduction will be withdrawn and a charge to corporation tax will follow.

I am grateful that the Revenue and the Government were happy for the Bill to provide that if all the shares in question are subsequently distributed, the deduction will be reinstated at that time. That provision allows the tax benefits to be reinserted if the transfer cannot for any reason be completed within 10 years of the initial acquisition. The Bill also contains provisions to prevent double relief and allows for the various concessions to be withdrawn if the Inland Revenue withdraws approval of the company's share investment plan. It also contains various formal and anti-avoidance provisions.

As hon. Members who have followed the Bill's progress are aware, it could have contained a little more. As the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) mentioned, concern was expressed in some quarters about the clause that has come to be known as the John Lewis clause, and which was removed in Committee at the Government's request. It was designed to enable companies controlled by an employee trust and/or a charitable trust on the employees' behalf to set up a share incentive plan from which ordinary shares could be distributed to individual employees. Unsurprisingly, there was considerable support for the provision among employees of the John Lewis Partnership, but it was also supported by hon. Members in all parts of the House.

I fully appreciated the Government's concerns about the way in which such a provision might operate in practice and their view that there would be tax-avoidance consequences that had not been fully appreciated by those who drafted the Bill on my behalf. For that reason, I was happy to accept their concerns as valid. As hon. Members will know, my hon. Friend the Paymaster General gave a helpful commitment on Second Reading to

> "continue actively to consider whether there are other ways of extending the share incentive plan to trust and employee-owned companies that wish to use the plan as conventional companies do.

in ways that preserve the aims of improved productivity and do not allow scope for abuse."—[*Official Report*, 18 January 2002; Vol. 378, c. 580.]

I welcome that commitment, and I am sure that it will be welcomed throughout the House. I know that it is welcomed by the John Lewis Partnership. Many of the organisations that are interested in this matter intend to follow up with the Government and the Revenue that commitment, which my hon. Friend was happy to make.

In some respects, the provisions in the Bill might be considered relatively limited, but in my view they are important none the less. They will give a clear boost to any company that seeks to establish the principle of employee share ownership firmly at the heart of its corporate ethos. They are also being introduced at a time of great cultural change for business. Traditional ownership structures are ripe for change and many businesses are now recognising the benefit in productivity terms of participation by employees in the ownership and running of firms.

The changes that the Bill seeks to introduce go alongside much other work that is taking place elsewhere. Some hon. Members may be aware of the excellent contribution to employee share ownership issues made by the work that the special share taskforce, consisting of various experts, has been undertaking along with the Revenue. I hope that measures such as those in the Bill will further encourage those working in this field.

The Bill should be seen not in isolation, therefore, but in its wider context of greater movement towards employee participation in both the ownership and management of firms. There is a wide range of types of financial participation by employees in the ownership of businesses. They include direct employee ownership, workers' co-operatives and simple profit-sharing schemes. Employee share ownership schemes themselves can also perhaps be divided into two types. The first is the narrow-based scheme that is limited to only a small percentage of the work force—typically the senior management. Secondly, the type of scheme that I want to promote and that the Bill is designed to encourage is the broad-based scheme that can be opened to 80 per cent. or more of employees, or indeed to the entire work force.

It is that type of broad-based involvement of employees in the ownership of businesses that presents an exciting opportunity for business in this country. That is why I hope that the Bill goes some way towards encouraging that trend. Notwithstanding the relatively limited take-up of some such schemes, in comparison with our European neighbours and partners, the UK is the leader in broad-based share schemes.

The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions recently carried out a study of 2,500 businesses in the European Union. It found that the United Kingdom was the leader in these schemes, followed by France, the Netherlands and Ireland. It also found that in the past decade there had been an increase in the number of schemes in those EU states, although profit-sharing schemes remained much more widespread.

Mr. Connarty: I am very buoyed up by my hon. Friend's comments about the position of the UK, but is he sure that that analysis of the share ownership spread is not similar to the analysis of wealth increases, in that because many people at the top have become richer it looks as though people have done much better across the spectrum?

Since the last Government's privatisation programme, large tranches of share options have been handed out to Members. One Member who is present was formerly a director of a company—in fact, she was the head of it—and probably benefited from the large tranches that went to the board. Could not such factors distort the proportion of shares going to the work force on the shop floor?

Mr. Lazarowicz: My hon. Friend is right to be sceptical about any over-simplistic statistical comparison, but I do not think his fears are justified. If he wants to pursue the matter I shall be happy to give him a copy of the comprehensive report, which will doubtless allay those fears.

Nevertheless, my hon. Friend may be right to express concern. The survey showed that, both in the UK and in other EU countries, it was often the larger companies—particularly those in the financial and service sectors with a large proportion of white-collar workers—that had implemented employee share ownership schemes. I hope that the Bill will go some way towards extending the benefits of the share incentive plan to smaller businesses.

Mr. Watson: Could not some of the older industries—I am thinking of small and medium-sized engineering firms in my Black country constituency, for instance—benefit as much as, dare I say, some of the greenfield newer technological companies in the information technology and communications sector? How can we promote the Bill to the more traditionally run companies?

Mr. Lazarowicz: My hon. Friend makes a good point. I know that he has contacts with business in his constituency. It is possible that, as others have suggested today, Members themselves could play a part in encouraging awareness of the Bill among businesses in their constituencies.

There is strong evidence that employee share ownership has a positive effect on business productivity. There are examples of that in both the EU and the United States. As the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs pointed out, the productivity of companies with such schemes is about double that of companies without them. For instance, a £100 investment on the FTSE index in 1992 would be worth only £186 today, while the same investment in a company in the employee ownership index, with more than 10 per cent. of capital held by employees other than directors, would be worth £370.

Another recent study, by Conyon and Freeman, shows that while UK companies giving shares only to directors or senior managers experienced an increase in productivity, companies that went further and spread share ownership to all their employees achieved a productivity boost of nearly 50 per cent. more. Similar studies conducted in the US show that the increase in sales, employment and total sales per employee in companies with employee share ownership schemes is between 2.3 and 2.4 per cent. per year above what would have been expected in the absence of such schemes. The US studies also confirm that the companies experiencing the highest productivity gains combine elements of both ownership and participative management. That bears out something said earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love).

Mr. Love: My hon. Friend made a comparison with other European countries. We could also make a

[Mr. Love]

comparison with the United States, where share ownership is much more widespread than it is here. I think that is partly due to widespread cynicism among ordinary UK employees, engendered in part by the privatisation programme of 1980s and 1990s. Does my hon. Friend agree that if we could convey the benefits of this kind of share ownership to employees rather than directors, we too would see a widening of share ownership?

Mr. Lazarowicz: Yes—and the benefits could extend to entire communities. They should certainly not be restricted to directors.

Let me now give an example that may answer a question put by my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Watson). Earlier this week I was contacted by David Erdal, executive director of the Baxi Partnership Limited, which is wholly owned by the Baxi Trust. The Baxi Trust has a substantial sum that it intends to use to encourage the growth of employee share ownership. Mr. Erdal told me that his organisation had recently invested £1.3 million in helping Woollard and Henry, a specialist engineering company in Aberdeen employing 26 people, to transfer shares from retiring owners to employees. He said that if the Bill had been in force, Baxi would have used the share incentive plan to buy a significant proportion of the shares, which would have greatly facilitated the financing of the buy-out.

If the buy-out had not gone ahead, the consequences for the company and indeed the area would have been dire. The only alternative to the proposal to finance an employee ownership scheme was a trade sale to a competitor who would have had no interest in maintaining the Aberdeen operation. That would probably have led to a rundown of the operation, and unemployment for the workers. The employee buy-out anchored the company in the local community, allowing it to generate extra wealth through the productivity improvements accompanying employee share ownership and to spread that wealth in the community. Over time, each employee will amass a significant amount of capital. Because of the financial strength of Woollard and Henry and the Baxi Trust, employees' savings are not put at risk.

There is a lesson to be learned from the success of the buy-out. The Baxi Trust has now been contacted by a number of companies interested in achieving a similar buy-out. In each case the aim is to use the share incentive plan as part of the financial structure. Mr. Erdal believes that the Bill will make partial transfers to employees, or complete buy-outs, much more likely. That will protect businesses and employees but also, crucially, will often help to support small and medium-sized enterprises that would otherwise be closed or run down. In so doing, the Bill may help smaller businesses, to which my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East referred, and the community as well.

It is useful to refer to the example of Wilkin and Sons, which hon. Members might recognise as the makers of Tiptree jams. The company is privately owned, has an annual turnover of about £10 million and employs about 170 people. It set up an employee benefit trust in 1989 to build up a substantial shareholding to be held on behalf of the employees. Indeed, that trust now holds 25 per cent. of the company's shares and it can benefit from the Bill's new, upfront tax reduction measures, which will make it easier for it to buy shares from any shareholders who want to sell. Many of its shares remain in the hands of the Wilkin family.

Those are examples of businesses that may benefit from the Bill and thereby help to spread the employee ownership model from larger companies to many smaller and medium-sized companies in the UK. However, the context of the Bill is more than just encouraging the growth of employee ownership and share ownership, important though they are. It reflects a year of work in which the co-operative movement, of which I am proud to be a member, has made a genuine impact on this legislative process.

The support of the co-operative movement has been vital, not only for the Bill, but for the success of the Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas), which makes important changes to the regulation of industrial and provident societies and which I understand has passed through the House of Lords.

The success of my hon. Friend's Bill and of mine is a tribute to the support and hard work of the wider co-operative movement. I pay particular tribute to Peter Hunt, national secretary of the Co-operative party, and Matt Ball, the party's parliamentary officer, who gave advice and assistance on each stage of the Bill's passage through the House.

Support for the Bill is extensive and it has been shown in sectors far beyond the co-operative movement. Important backing has come from those involved in the employee ownership movement, and I thank in particular Ann Tyler of Job Ownership Ltd. and Graeme Nuttall of Equity Incentives Ltd., a subsidiary of Field Fisher Waterhouse, for their tireless support during lobbying for and drafting of the Bill. That work went far beyond any obligations that might arise from their posts or duties, and they have helped me to understand the minutiae of the tax legislation provisions to which the Bill refers.

I thank also Peter Townsend of Cobbett's solicitors and, above all, I pay tribute to the broad coalition of people and organisations that have backed the Bill and its aims. Many hon. Members across the House received hundreds of letters from members of the John Lewis Partnership in support of the Bill, which it has continued to back, even though the measures that might have been of direct benefit to it were removed in Committee. The partnership has continued its support because it recognises that the Bill is important not just for what it does, but for what it says about Government and public backing for employee ownership and involvement.

The Baxi Trust has been very supportive, as has the Scott Bader Company Ltd. and many mutuals in the financial sector. Standard Life, which is a major company in my constituency, supports the Bill, as do the Industrial Society, the Trades Union Congress and many consumer and co-operative societies the length and breadth of the country. The Arup group, Tullis Russell and many others were also part of the wide coalition of support.

The Bill is particularly significant because it reflects a revival and, indeed, a realignment of the co-operative ideal and philosophy, which have inspired Labour and Co-operative Members in particular, although I accept that they can be shared, to a greater or a lesser degree, by many Members across the House. We have heard about the co-operative movement's history, which I thought went back to Rochdale in 1844, but my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Lepper) apparently makes a claim for Brighton in the 1820s.

Mr. Love: Do not forget the Fenwick weavers.

Mr. Lazarowicz: Indeed. My hon. Friend reminds me of the movement's Scottish history. I am also grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East (Mr. Luke) for explaining the derivation of the term "sosh" for a co-operative movement in Dundee. I was aware of the term, but not of the derivation, so I thank him for that illumination.

Although the co-operative movement has that long, proud history, it is hardly a secret and it must be admitted that success has not, in recent decades—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Third Reading debates are about the content of a Bill. Diverting though this history may be, the hon. Gentleman is straying outside the rules of order.

Mr. Lazarowicz: I apologise for straying from the subject, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I shall draw my remarks to a close.

The Bill seeks to link the employee share ownership movement and a host of other initiatives such as the profit motive, social commitment and consumer interest to encourage economic efficiency and support for business as well as support for building strong communities, especially in areas that have suffered from economic deprivation over the years. As was said many times on Second Reading, this is a movement whose time has come.

I congratulate the Government on responding to those calls by taking employee ownership further forward through their backing of the measure, and I thank those Members who are present today. I urge the House to support the Bill on Third Reading.

11.8 am

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I want to add a few words of support for the Bill and warmly congratulate the hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz), who introduced it, on getting so far. I am taking a private Member's Bill through the House and although I have not so far been troubled by amendments, let alone perilous negotiations with the Treasury, I know from my more limited experience how difficult it is.

I strongly support the principles underlying the Bill. It tends to be forgotten that the principles of employee share ownership are long-standing, but over the years it has been difficult for them to progress. I was born and brought up in the city of York, and my parents started their working lives on the shop floor—my father at Rowntree's and my mother at Terry's. Those liberal, Quaker-owned companies believed passionately in the principle of employee share ownership—getting the divvy was a major feature of the life of many working families in the city, as it often financed the annual holiday—and it created a distinctive approach to business.

There were few strikes, if any, despite the difficulties in changing manning systems and industrial structures, which would have created conflicts in other environments, and there was a wider impact in that the companies were much more socially responsible. We try to legislate for social responsibility, but it was embedded in those companies' values.

Sadly, many of those companies have found it difficult to progress. The two in York were taken over many years ago, as the families were unable to retain ownership. Much of the idealism was lost, and the system wound down. Relatively few companies—I think Clarks Shoes is one of the few that continues—have been able to maintain those values on the back of a committed family owner. One of the lessons to be learned is that, if employee share ownership is to be sustained and grow, it must be embedded much more securely and not depend on the enlightened attitudes of one or two owners. It must be embedded in the system of corporate governance and in the tax system.

Share options are widely used to incentivise senior management. Some big companies have operated share ownership schemes with some success. Before coming to the House I was with Shell, which offered one of the more imaginative schemes that worked. The fact that the shares outperformed the FTSE for many years was a major incentive for people to join the company and to stay with it. People in the company understood the problems of the accounts. When it got into some difficulties in the 1990s and needed major restructuring, there was probably more understanding of what management had to do than there would have been had the employees not had a stake in the ownership.

Such schemes do work, so it is frustrating and disappointing that employee share ownership has not spread more. I welcome the initiatives that have been taken, initially by Lord Lawson and then by this Government, whose recent share incentive plan is a positive step forward. However, those initiatives are limited, and the value of the Bill is that it takes a few extra steps in opening up the share incentive plan to a wider group of people and companies. I am sure that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith would acknowledge that the Bill is not revolutionary, because it does not make massive changes, but it represents a welcome increment.

As the hon. Gentleman said in his closing remarks, the Bill gives a small boost to mutuality. In the early and mid-1990s, the mutual movement was in retreat, but the position has been stabilised. The hon. Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love) has played a major part in that by pointing the way to practical initiatives that can be taken to strengthen mutual ownership. This Bill and the measure promoted by the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) are good, practical ways of making mutual ownership worth while.

Like the hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith, I am disappointed that the problems of the John Lewis Partnership have not been addressed. My constituency draws heavily on the John Lewis Partnership. Our big retail department store across the river in Kingston is John Lewis, and in the past three years the town centre of Twickenham has been transformed by Waitrose, which has made a success of a store that defeated all the other supermarkets chains that tried it. We have satisfied customers and committed employees, who have lobbied me to see whether we can break this problem with the share incentive plan and its relationship to trust-owned companies. I am disappointed that that has not happened,

[Dr. Vincent Cable]

but the language from Treasury Ministers gives some encouragement. I shall take that back in a positive spirit, and I hope that it is followed through.

I should like to register my strong support for the Bill, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith. I hope that the Bill completes its passage through the House.

11.13 am

Mr. Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich, West): My association with the co-operative movement has been declared on many occasions in this Chamber. I was employed by the co-operative movement for many years. I have long been an evangelist for the principles that are embodied in the Bill.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) on introducing the Bill, and on piloting it through the labyrinthine processes that are necessary for a private Member's Bill to be successful. In doing so, he has had to work with the Treasury and get its acceptance of the implications of some of the clauses. That is no mean achievement for any Back Bencher, but for a new Back Bencher it is a significant success. The Bill shows that, even in these so-called cynical times of business management, it is still possible for a Back-Bench Member of Parliament to introduce significant legislation.

The Bill is simple in principle, but complex in practice. When I read the explanatory notes on the clauses, I wished that there were explanatory notes to explain the explanatory notes. In spite of those complications, which were lucidly explained by my hon. Friend, parties have been signed up to this simple principle for a number of years; it is the recognition that, to get the best out of employees, they have to have a stake in their company. That stake should not be confined to the payment of wages for their weekly work, but should involve a mechanism that enables them to benefit from the capital growth in the company to which they are committed.

There is also considerable evidence to show that when that stake is extended and employees have some say in the management of the company, its productivity, output and growth are even better. I am old enough to remember the days in the 1960s and 1970s when industry was dominated by an "us and them" attitude—the underlying belief that the interests of ownership and labour were irreconcilable. We all know what impact that had on British industry, and the reputation that this country had for strikes, low productivity and low economic growth. The Bill reflects the change in culture that has taken place since then, and it promotes a change in culture that few of us would have dreamed of 10 or 15 years ago.

On Second Reading, it was interesting how many Members read out letters from employees of the John Lewis Partnership—a company oft cited in this debate—and other companies that have adopted such management structures, principles and ownership. There could not be a clearer demonstration of enhanced commitment than that shown by those employees to their company. Many employees of the John Lewis Partnership who wrote to us recognised that, even though the Bill may not in the end be relevant to their specific interests—and irrespective of their own self-interest—their work and experience in the company encourage them to believe that this practice is good for everyone and should be promoted.

The problem is that, for far too long, companies such as the John Lewis Partnership and Scott Bader have been regarded as little models of a different culture within industry, and looked upon almost as oddities and not part of the industrial norm in our economy. Too few owners of businesses, employees and trade unions have been prepared to consider the culture that has developed in those companies to see what relevance it has for other industries. That has been changing. I compliment the former Tory Government on beginning to adopt that process, and particularly the current Government on the way in which they have developed it. I see this legislation as—I was going to say the culmination but I hope that it will not be the culmination of the process. I hope that future legislation will do even more, but the Bill is certainly a major step towards improving the culture in industry and promoting democratic participation and management, with all the economic benefits that go with it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith went into some detail about the surveys on companies that adopt these particular principles and the economic benefits that have been derived. I will not go into them in detail, but in the United States, where employee share ownership is quite widespread, there has been a lot of research and all the indications are that there are marginal improvements in productivity when employees have just a capital stake in the company, and significant improvements in productivity when they have both a capital stake and some say in the management of that company. Studies both in Europe and in the United Kingdom substantiate the findings in the United States.

This is one of those rare Bills that benefits everyone. There are advantages for all. There are advantages for employers in gaining upfront tax incentives to put money into trusts for the purchase of shares for employees. I think that by now they can be confident that improved commitment, productivity and output will be generated as a result of this Bill.

The Bill provides an incentive for employees because they know that, by working within this structure and being part of it, their benefits from the company are not limited to the wages that they get at the end of the week. They know that if they do that little bit extra and come up with ideas that may be adopted, in the long term, they will share in the benefit to the company that will accrue. That is obviously part of the underlying reason why such companies have done so well.

The Bill also gives employees a share in the challenges that a company faces—the market—and the problems that have to be worked through in any successful company. It gives them confidence and an insight into investment. No longer will people regard themselves just as employees who spend their money and play no part in the capital wealth-creating process of industry. They will be part of it, and they can use the experience that they gain in other areas to invest in other ways.

Above all, the Government, the country and the economy will benefit from the surge in productivity which, on all the evidence that we have, should take place as a result of this measure. I am told that we are in advance of our European neighbours. I hope that, arising from this legislation, schemes will be adopted elsewhere, and we will see the benefit feeding through into our economic performance, which will benefit everyone.

I hope that the Bill marks a surge in this type of ownership. A number of people have raised the issue of how we advertise it and get companies to sign up to it. I was encouraged by the figures provided by the Minister, which show that 45 per cent. of share incentive plans were from small and medium-sized enterprises. In constituencies such as mine of West Bromwich, West, the huge major employers have disappeared. The backbone of the economy in West Bromwich is small and medium-sized enterprises. Indeed, if we look at the proportion of the national product generated by them, we realise that it is very high. With this legislation being so beneficial and relevant to smaller businesses, I hope that it will have a disproportionate effect on output in that particular sector.

There are big issues of how to enlighten local companies about the potential benefits that will accrue from the legislation. Members of Parliament have an important role to play in their day-to-day contact with companies. The Government have an important role to play in promoting it. Those among us with business contacts must also play their part.

I have campaigned for 20 years for the adoption of principles such as are embodied in the Bill. It is a major step forward. I am pleased that there appears to be a high degree of cross-party support for it. I hope that everyone will go out to ensure that it is translated into real benefits for our industrial structure, and that the whole economy benefits as a result.

11.26 am

Mr. Flight: I congratulate the hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) on steering this Bill through successfully, and pay tribute to the speech by the hon. Member for West Bromwich, West (Mr. Bailey). Most hon. Members share the same ground. I thank the hon. Gentleman for his efforts over the past 20 years in promoting wider employee share ownership, and for his kind giving of credit to the efforts of the last Conservative Government.

The hon. Gentleman made the point about small and medium-sized companies, which the Bill is really all about, and which are the economic backbone of the country. Its application is reasonably limited and there is a separate issue as to how to achieve employee share ownership in larger quoted companies, as my hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells (Mr. Norman) did in his stewardship of Asda. I hope that he may have something to say on that subject in due course.

While I was pleased to hear from the Minister that the number of companies that have applied for SIPs is up—to 330, I think she said—overall it has been a bit slow going. As I understand it, the number of employees covered by employee share ownership plans—ESOPs—has been fairly static for three years. The National Centre for Employee Ownership reported that about 8.5 million employees were beneficiaries of ESOPs and stock bonus plans in 2001, the same figure roughly as in 1998, so I hope that the Government will put their efforts where their mouth is and give employee share ownership a greater boost.

I am sorry that the Minister is not here. I would have hoped to hear her give a pledge that the John Lewis issue will be solved in another way. I am still not clear whether the Government's objection to the proposed provisions was a tax objection—that it could have been used more widely in potential tax-avoidance schemes—or whether their objection was to the potential use of inferior share classes. It seems wrong in the case of companies such as John Lewis, with employee share schemes set up by charitable trusts, for shares not to be eligible for distribution to individual employees under SIPs, with the resultant tax benefits for both the employees and the company.

I return to the theme of making it all succeed, so to speak. It is a powerful mixture of employees feeling part of the business, being involved in it, being involved in decision taking, having their hearts in it, feeling as if they are employee owners, which is my phrase; and businesses being well led.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith referred to the Baxi Trust. I remind hon. Members that the Baxi company, which is owned by an employee trust, has now become fairly commercial, having been somewhat unsuccessful as a result of fuzzy strategic thinking and not particularly good management. It is crucial for a company to have good, well-motivated management as well as involving the work force in the company.

Mr. Lazarowicz: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. Obviously, I am aware of the history of the Baxi Trust. Does he agree that although employee share ownership will not be suitable for all companies, it is more likely to produce the benefits that I highlighted in my speech.

Mr. Flight: Yes, that is axiomatic. However, there is a point to be made about employee share ownership. In my personal experience, we made widespread use of the approved share option scheme and it is quite mistaken that that remains limited to a maximum of £30,000, particularly for medium-sized companies that compete with large companies for top management, as we did. It afforded a way of paying regular salaries that were significantly below what top managers could obtain from a large competitor, but locking them into the business with the incentive of a significant equity upside if the business succeeded. It is well overdue that that figure should be reviewed and increased. I should point out that the last Conservative election manifesto included a commitment to increase it to £100,000 for companies with capitalisation up to £100 million. We are talking particularly about small and medium-sized companies that need to compete for good management but may not be able to pay for it on an ongoing basis—and for locking them in likewise.

Without causing offence, I should say that one of the saddest commercial non-successes in my lifetime has been the co-operative movement. When I was a boy, my grandparents and parents participated actively, but the movement faded away because it was not a commercial success. Success requires good management as well as the co-operative spirit.

Mr. Bailey: Does the hon. Gentleman agree, however, that although some sectors of the co-operative movement have withered away, it is still a major organisation? It is the largest farmer in the country, a major retailer, one of

[Mr. Bailey]

the largest funeral operators and a bank. Although there is an element of truth in what the hon. Gentleman said, he did not give the full picture.

Mr. Flight: I did not wish to cause offence. I grant that the co-operative movement still has the opportunity to become a big success in some sectors. However, the hon. Gentleman would agree that in food retailing, for example, commercial supermarkets dominate the market and the Co-op missed a great opportunity. The formula for success includes employees feeling that they are part of the business and able management who potentially have a larger ownership stake in it.

The hon. Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love) felt that employee share ownership had been damaged by privatisation. The majority of privatised utilities have been successful and their employees have shares in the business. Some have sold them, but a hell of a lot have not and are happy with the situation. However, recent events have been damaging. Hon. Members will recall that Railtrack employees used their dividends to invest in more shares just a few days before Railtrack was put into administration and it is increasingly apparent that the intent of the then Minister was to do just that. I have raised the matter with the Financial Services Authority because, under normal circumstances, that would have been an offence under the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000. The FSA is of the questionable legal view that Ministers have Crown immunity, but the Government should remember that in the privatised utilities sector huge numbers of staff are share owners as well as being involved in pension schemes and so on, and if there is no legal obligation to act in accordance with the Financial Services and Markets Act there is jolly well a moral obligation so to do.

Mr. Lazarowicz: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the real lesson of the Railtrack experience as far as employee share ownership is concerned is that had employees been given more shares earlier on and been able to deal on a collective basis, they might have had more influence on the management of Railtrack and therefore its direction, and life could have been very different?

Mr. Flight: I know that you will stop me very quickly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if I go on for more than a second in response to that question. There was significant employee share ownership. In essence, the problem with Railtrack affects the whole public-private partnership structure in which businesses have safety requirements and depend on subsidies from central Government, and there is sometimes a lack of clarity about their obligations. Time will tell, but the biggest issue about Railtrack was that the management responded to Hatfield with massive expenditure and effort which eventually led to the Government being able to put the company into administration. However, that is an aside.

My main point is that there is plenty of employee share ownership within the privatised utilities. Most of it has been successful and has made employees much more active participants in their operations. Would there were a way within the public sector to achieve the same participation that employee share ownership has brought and can bring within the private sector.

In conclusion, I welcome the Bill and repeat my request to the Government to say whether or not they will find a way of sorting out the Peter Jones, or rather John Lewis issue—hon. Members can tell which I prefer—which in part the Bill was about. In fairness, it would be a great pity if the Bill were on the statute book and the Peter Jones situation remained unresolved.

11.38 am

Mr. Iain Luke (Dundee, East): I rise as I did on Second Reading to support the Bill into which my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) has put a great deal of effort to get the provisions contained in this slim document into law. I pay tribute to the way in which he and his staff have handled the Bill. Having shared an office with him, I know that he has worked extremely hard. I also gained a unique insight into what goes into presenting, preparing and promoting a private Member's Bill. It is my fervent hope that there will be a successful conclusion to his efforts and that, when the Bill becomes law, it will benefit those to whom its clauses seek to extend the possibility of profiting from the share scheme option.

As a new Member, I found the process instructive, educational and profoundly satisfying. In observing the progress of this Bill, participating in its brief Committee stage and serving on the Standing Committee considering the Finance Bill, which will conclude next week, I have been privileged to participate in Treasury law making in detail and in the round, and I have benefited from being able to see the bigger picture. Although the proposals are detailed and technical, the Bill has underlined for me how Parliament can have a beneficial impact on the lives of the ordinary people throughout the country whom we represent, as has being able to view at close quarters the help that my hon. Friend received from officials of the Inland Revenue and the Treasury, and from Ministers.

It has been uplifting to witness the official Opposition playing such a constructive part in supporting the Bill's principles and making pertinent and sound comment on how the detailed proposals could be improved. I have seen more evidence of that attitude from the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) during his excellent contributions on the Finance Bill, although there is one point that I want to take up with him. He says that companies such as his aim for profit, but he will surely agree that companies can have a range of different objectives, which often means that companies give up profit to satisfy social objectives. The hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) mentioned his employment with Shell, a company that spends a lot of money on ensuring that the environmental issues that confront it are dealt with properly.

Mr. Flight: I am pleased to assure the hon. Member that capitalism is about a lot more than profit. As I see it, capitalism is about building wealth, and short-term profit often needs to be sacrificed. Building wealth is about many things, but the idea that capitalism is solely about profit is mistaken.

Mr. Luke: Perhaps we might describe the hon. Gentleman as the more acceptable face of capitalism in Parliament. Although some of the hon. Members who sit behind him might be less acceptable in that respect, I accept the tenor of his comments.

I am sure that this process will conclude successfully, with the Bill taking its rightful place on the statute book. It will extend the benefits, and encourage the spread, of employee share ownership to a much wider range of businesses. We must work to ensure that its provisions are well publicised and that there is greater take-up in the years ahead, building on the encouraging start since the improved concept was announced in the 2000 Budget. The useful and beneficial improvement to the SIP schemes introduced by the Government in that Budget has gone some way to encourage employees to hold shares in the company or group for which they work, and to use them for the collective benefit of all concerned.

The furtherance of the aims of the Bill has, I am glad to say, gained wide support that crosses the business and political divide, which fits well with the highly commendable aims of the Co-operative party and movement whose goals and activities acted as a catalyst for the Bill. The Bill is firmly anchored in the belief that it will help co-operative and mutual forms of economic organisation based on the principles of mutual ownership and democratic control. It represents another small step in the work of that excellent collaborative movement, which was formed as a party in 1917 to promote a stakeholder economy, a one-nation Britain, and to protect the rights of citizens as both consumers and employees.

The movement has a long history of consumer-employee involvement. Its example of co-operative effort here in the UK has been taken up by some 800 million co-operators worldwide. In a 1995 report, the UN estimated that the number of livelihoods throughout the world made secure by co-operative effort was approaching 3 billion—close to half the world's population.

The Bill fits well into the co-operative movement's work by promoting provisions that create fairer and more equal opportunities in the workplace for all employees. In a small but important way, it also supports a national economic strategy aimed at promoting worker co-operative action, and creates the potential for successful employee share ownership plans in future. That will, I hope, result in greater employee involvement in the running of the companies and businesses that employ them and provide them with the money—the wages—on which they and their families depend for a living.

The Bill would make it easier for employee trustees to gain a direct voice in the ownership and management of the business at which they work by facilitating the transfer of shares and allowing tax incentives for employee trusts set up by companies that want to take a significant step towards employee ownership. The new clause agreed this morning will help that process on its way to a significant extent.

Mr. Love: Does my hon. Friend agree that an important facet of the Bill is that the transfer of share ownership will be significant? Whereas under the ordinary SIP scheme the transfer can consist of any number—small or large—of shares, the Bill will facilitate the transfer of a significant number of shares to employees. I hope that all hon. Members support that aim.

Mr. Luke: I am happy to acknowledge that. Reference has been made to the involvement of small and medium-sized companies. I contend that in future, substantial share transfers will help to ensure that larger companies do not indulge in the sort of footloose decisions on location that have so often blighted many areas of the country.

Without being coercive, the Bill as amended will provide companies that set up SIPs with more coherent guidance that elected employees may become trustees. It will also encourage employees and their representatives, giving them confidence to request representation on the trust body without fear of legislative uncertainty. That is without doubt the way to give employees a stronger sense of ownership, which will lead to better productivity and employee-employer relationships. Benefits will accrue to both shop floor and boardroom in companies that take up that positive and progressive type of organisational structure. Ultimately, that will bring them far closer together than they have ever been in the past.

As well as small and medium-sized companies, we must look for ways to extend share ownership schemes through the whole range of companies. I believe that once a company gets involved in that way, the decisions made within it will become more collective in character, and the community of workers will have a bigger say. It will become less likely that a company will move out of a town, or even the country, to reduce costs; instead, decisions will be made according to what best suits the workers and efforts will be made to continue production at the company's existing location.

We have been talking about participation in management and a collaborative mode of running business concerns. I hope that they will be extended far more meaningfully to other organisations, such as football clubs. The Bill offers the model of employee representation on a SIP trust, and I hope that that model will be extended to groups of football supporters who, through trusts and co-operative action, seek greater influence on the way in which their local football team is run both as a business and as a sporting concern.

The work of supporter directors should be encouraged. Supporters Direct was the result of a Government initiative. The hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs mentioned his efforts to create different forms of mutualisation. When launching the Supporters Direct initiative in September 2000, when he was the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), said:

"football and sport in general offers a fertile ground for the development of mutualisation".

Let us hope that the example of big foreign teams such as Barcelona will be promoted as widely as possible in the United Kingdom. In Scotland, Glasgow Celtic, a team of national standing, has created a trust board on which my predecessor, John McAllion, sits. As well as encouraging more supporters to get more involved in clubs, perhaps the Bill will also help clubs that are companies to give players a stake by giving them shares rather than paying them vastly inflated salaries. That should increase players' productivity and give a better result at the end of the season for the money that the supporters have put in.

I hope that the House will forgive me for digressing into the sporting aspect of mutualisation. With the recent saturation coverage of football on the television, it is difficult to avoid the subject. I urged my fellow Scots to support England, in the hope that we would end up with an extra bank holiday—but without success.

[Mr. Luke]

I am happy to have made a modest contribution to the Bill's progress. My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith set out its aims clearly in January and said that he wanted to widen the application of tax relief on employee shareholdings in a greater range of companies. He said that he hoped to enable employee shareholders to play a greater role collectively in the management of the shares, and to make it easier for companies to transfer to employee share ownership schemes. Those are laudable aims and I believe that the Bill has gone a long way towards promoting them.

Ministers, the Treasury and the Inland Revenue have given a great deal of help, and it is clear that the Government are happy to support these efforts to give employees a greater stake in both their working lives and the way in which their workplace interacts with the community.

Although the provisions relate to the private sector, I believe that the Government can also do more to give a share to those in state employment in the running and management of the services that they deliver, as the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs said.

The concept is not new. On leaving school, I was employed as a civil servant in the Inland Revenue. I was a tax collector in London for some time. As a union rep, I was involved in the Whitley councils, which I believe have now disappeared. The principle was to bring workers face to face with management. If the better productivity and employment relations that we have talked about in the private sector could be brought into the public sector, that would be a positive benefit. However, one step at a time is a good motto in this context.

I am sure that my hon. Friend the promoter will be glad, at the end of this debate, to know that his Bill has become an Act. I would gladly join the Co-op party if a member of it would give me a membership form—and slip me the fee. Despite my non-membership, I can safely say, as a long-term trade union member, that there has been a spiritual home for me and many like me. I follow the Co-operative party in believing that people will achieve more by working together than they can by working alone. By increasing co-operation, we will achieve a sustainable future for our economy and the businesses in it. I support the Co-operative party's efforts and those of my hon. Friend the promoter to bring about the empowerment of individuals and communities through this move towards more co-operative self-help economic initiatives.

The Bill rests on three major foundations. The first is enterprise, ensuring that we can continue to build a sustainable economy. The second is that we continue to promote empowerment, with a culture of citizenship and involvement in business decision making. The third is accountability, ensuring that we create a society in which business acts in a socially responsible way. There has been a lot of talk about corporate responsibility in this Parliament. I believe that the Bill will promote that concept, and I commend it to the House.

11.55 am

Mr. Archie Norman (Tunbridge Wells): I cannot resist taking this opportunity to add my congratulations to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) on promoting the Bill and steering it through all its stages in the House. Unfortunately, I could not be here for Second Reading, but he has demonstrated an outstanding grasp of the subject, and it is no doubt largely because of his perseverance and skill that we have arrived at a highly satisfactory and consensual resolution today. I also congratulate the organisations that have contributed to the Bill's success, through skilful lobbying.

I want to place it on the record that I have been an active practitioner of wide-scale employee share ownership. I would like to think that, when the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. Luke) referred to me—I think it was me—as the less acceptable face of capitalism, he was doing me a minor injustice, but I shall take his remarks in the humorous way in which they were intended.

When I was chairman and chief executive of Asda, which is a much larger company than those that will benefit from the Bill but which provides an interesting example, we sought to change the whole ethos of the business, and one part of that process was creating a very large employee share ownership trust, which made shares available to more than 65,000 employees. I think that it ended up as the largest employee share ownership trust of its kind in Britain at that time. The benefits were substantial.

The effect of such share ownership schemes is entirely a function of the extent to which they rhyme with everything else that the management do and the way in which the company is run. Simply distributing share benefits to employees, particularly in an organisation such as Asda, which employs a very large number of part-time working women and so on, will have no effect whatever unless people are invited into the management process as well. One needs to create a culture in which ownership is part of the way of life and of the workplace community. We set out to achieve that, although this is not the time or place in which to say how that was done. However, we had the biggest employee suggestion scheme in Britain for five years—we received more than 40,000 suggestions—which suggests what sort of organisation has to be in place.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith on introducing a Bill that is part of a broader change in approach to management in this country, which, as many other hon. Members have said, is leading other countries in western Europe. It reflects the fact that most good employers recognise that employees no longer come to work simply to earn a daily crust but because they want to do something worthwhile and belong to a socially responsible organisation that is seeking to help them achieve that and is prepared to listen to what they say. Their contribution is far broader than their immediate job definition within the organisation and helps to create a single-status business culture in which everyone is equally valued regardless of their role. Obviously, we recognise that people are paid differently and perform different roles, but that does not mean that they are not equally valued and respected for their worth and contribution to the company.

That is a much broader set of changes than some hon. Members have acknowledged. I accept the points that they made about the co-operative movement, which in some respects is a forerunner of share schemes and parts of which remain successful. Hon. Members also referred to mutual organisations, one of which, the Tunbridge Wells

Equitable, started out successfully in my constituency. Mutual organisations, too, partly reflect the ethos of the Bill. Fundamentally, however, we are looking at a change in attitudes to management in the boardroom and share schemes are part and parcel of helping to facilitate that cultural change. The more that we can push those ideas and that management approach and encourage smaller companies, industrial companies and so on to adopt them, the better.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) said, there is no reason why share schemes should apply just to white collar employees in the financial services and so on. At Asda, most of the people whom we employ are part-time working women who have come back to work after bringing up a family; some of them are in their first job ever. Of course, we recognise that such employees are not well versed in the nature of the balance sheet, earnings per share and so on, but there is no reason why the company cannot make an effort to explain the relationship between financial performance and employee benefits. Such schemes require the company to do that and encourage that virtuous circle.

I welcome the idea that has been built into the Bill that employees can be trustees of share ownership trusts, which helps to bring employees into the management process and encourages feedback and involvement. The hon. Member for Dundee, East made a good point about public services. There is no reason why the idea behind share ownership cannot be extended to public service organisations. In fact, because they are often vocational in nature, they are susceptible to higher levels of employee ownership. A former colleague who is now chairman of the Royal Mail or Consignia has talked about introducing a shadow share scheme for Royal Mail employees, which may be a pioneering example of the way in which such schemes can be extended to the public services.

Finally, I welcome the Bill, which has tremendous support on both sides of the House and outside. However, a number of hon. Members believe that it should not be the final step in the process. I hope that, after today, the Minister will consider what more can be done to extend share ownership to accommodate the John Lewis point, which has been made on a number of occasions. It would be very sad after all the efforts that that organisation has made and its support for the process if it were left out in the cold. We also need to consider whether we can extend the benefits in the Bill to larger as well as smaller companies. Several hon. Members rightly said that small businesses are the backbone of their constituencies and, in many ways, the economy, but the 10 per cent. requirement effectively precludes such schemes from applying to larger companies with a high-value total shareholding.

There are changes to be made, but they are a matter for another time. We should extend the proposals so that large public companies in Britain such as Asda could benefit if encouraged to adopt such schemes. There would be other benefits too—not just employee motivation, but changes in attitude to boardroom pay. However, the Bill is welcome and the hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith has done terrific work. I support the Bill completely as does everyone in the House. I hope that we can go on to consider what further steps can be taken in the same spirit.

12.4 pm

Ann McKechin (Glasgow, Maryhill): I support my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) in his bid to secure this important Bill. The measure will play an important part in strengthening and extending the concept of mutual and co-operative ownership in all types of businesses, and will encourage a constructive partnership between employers and employees. The Bill shows the increasing sophistication of the mutual and co-operative principle.

Like many hon. Members, I am sure that our earliest memories of co-operative ownership are as children visiting co-op stores in our local towns and villages, and learning about the mysterious concept of the divi and, more importantly, the ability to quote one's divi number as readily as one's own date of birth. The basic principles and benefits of shared ownership could be readily understood by children barely of school age.

I was brought up in Paisley, a town steeped in the principles of co-operative ownership. We had co-op grocers, co-op butchers and co-op chemist shops, not forgetting the Co-op's ability to look after us from beyond the grave. In Paisley we even benefited from two full Co-op department stores, which both survived for a good number of years, even though they faced each other in the same street. One belonged to the Paisley Co-operative Wholesale Society and the other to the Paisley Co-operative Manufacturing Society. In a town famous for having a church to represent every schism of the Protestant faith, it is hardly surprising that for a very long time the community could support different retail co-operatives.

The reason those shops survived is that so many people, particularly the less well-off, depended on them and put their trust in them to assist in their basic requirements. No private organisation would ever be able to enjoy such a continued level of community support and trust. As the years have passed, the co-operative organisations have had to show increased management skills, innovation and technical expertise to allow them to survive in a complex and competitive environment. The remarkable transformation of the Co-operative bank in the past 10 years is just one example of how co-operatives can compete with large multinationals in the tough financial services market.

Despite those changes, the principle of shared ownership remains at the heart of co-operatives' enterprise. That concept of ownership deserves a strong and permanent place in our society, to ensure choice for consumers and to provide strong links with local communities and a different way of working which avoids the old-style class base.

For 10 years before I entered Parliament, I worked as a staff partner in a legal firm, which had about 40 employees when I left. Because of the specific nature of our work, no other form of ownership was available. There are obviously freedoms attached to partnership ownership, but there were also drawbacks. Many of our staff had skills that were in high demand, so staff retention was a permanent issue, particularly with a business growing year on year. We had no direct mechanism to offer them a real share in the business, which I believe would have acted as a substantial incentive to them to remain as long-term workers in the firm.

[Ann McKechin]

The use of annual salary increases or a one-off bonus does not have the same direct effect, when an employee is often not aware of the level of profit generated in a business. Shared ownership would also have changed the employer/employee relationship to allow a greater degree of consultation and a better spread of responsibility, making possible a greater appreciation on either side of the work of the other. The results would give a higher level of productivity, along with an improvement in staff retention and staff morale.

Even in today's world, with the increasing presence of powerful multinational companies that are often wealthier than entire nation states, many people are looking to the concept of mutuality and shared ownership to provide a new way forward that is more flexible and responsive to their wishes for a more satisfying form of work, allowing them to contribute, often in new and innovative ways, to the fortunes of the organisation for which they work, as well as having a direct share in the rewards.

For partnership to deliver, it must be genuine. We as parliamentarians need to put in place the appropriate structures to ensure that partnerships are demonstrably real and equal. Collective shareholder trusts could signify a shared interest in the long-term success of the enterprise, while providing a collective voice at boardroom level for the members of such a trust—namely, the employees who generate wealth for the company.

This small but important piece of legislation will, I hope, significantly increase the attractiveness of employee share schemes, particularly for smaller companies where the current heavy administrative costs in forming a mutual ownership structure can be a strong disincentive.

Figures from a recent EU study showed that the organisations most likely to have some form of financial participation by employees are larger companies, as the hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells (Mr. Norman) said, with more than 5,000 employees, usually through the narrow-based schemes open to only a relatively small minority of workers, and firms with a high proportion of white collar workers.

I am certain that the principles of mutual ownership could be extended further to reach small and medium-sized enterprises, which form the bulk of employment opportunities in Britain and which, in many instances, are ideally suited to this type of scheme.

Take, for example, the small family-owned firm whose owners wish to devote less time to the day-to-day running of the operation, perhaps because they are retiring or want to work part time. This type of scheme offers a method of retaining a strong interest in their original enterprise while handing over more of the control and responsibility to their staff, thereby giving the company the advantage of continuity and stability, both internally and to their market and financiers.

By providing corporation tax relief up front for share distribution into an employee share ownership trust, and making it easier for employee trusts to elect employees as trustees, thereby encouraging a direct say in management and ownership for employees, the Bill goes a substantial way towards achieving the Government's ambition to double shared ownership. As many are aware, employee shared ownership is widespread in the United States, in some cases involving large organisations with global markets, particularly in agriculture. A good example of that is Ocean Spray, the major exporter of cranberry juice. I believe that the cranberry is the United States only indigenous domestic fruit.

On a vacation a few years ago, I do not say that I was forced to, but I visited Ocean Spray's cranberry museum in New England where not only does one receive a full tour of the various agricultural methods used in harvesting the crop and its range of products, but one is made aware of its proud history of shared ownership and the success that that has brought the company. It is viewed as its strength and one of the main reasons why it has achieved a consistently high quality product, recognised throughout the world and able to compete in an aggressive market and to export world wide. Each of the farmer producers has a direct share in the future of the business.

Most of the recent research on such organisations in the United States has shown that this type of ownership, crucially combined with other means of active employee participation, has a positive impact on productivity and corporate performance. Such structures promote stability and encourage good working relationships by combating short-termism in management decision making.

As well as congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith—he has just left the Chamber, I am sure temporarily—on introducing the measure, the Government should also be commended on their support for the Bill and their encouragement of shared ownership, particularly in giving corporation tax relief up front and the share incentive plan introduced previously, providing important and essential financial assistance for greater flexibility in ownership structures. The new clause is accordingly welcome and I trust that the Bill will receive the support of the House today.

12.14 pm

Ms Munn: Like my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz), I entered Parliament just over one year ago, and although most hon. Members once they have been here a while might expect to have had some influence on legislation, those of us who were fortunate enough to have been elected in the 2001 election did not necessarily expect to be having such an impact so early on.

Unlike my hon. Friend, I hesitated before putting my name into the private Member's Bill ballot. I was a bit daunted by the prospect of what it might mean, but having found out a little more about it I too had a go. However, unlike him, I was not lucky enough—or perhaps I was lucky, depending on how he now views it—to be drawn in the top 20. In reality, that is where the luck runs out, because it is difficult for ideas from Back-Bench Members to reach the statute book. Having closely watched the progress of two such Bills—those of my hon. Friends the Members for Edinburgh, North and Leith and for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas)—there seem to be several key elements in ensuring that one's Bill has a better than average chance of reaching Third Reading and the statute book.

Choice of subject is important. My hon. Friend has had a long-term interest in this issue, and as we have seen today and during previous debates, he is supported in that by many hon. Members on both sides of the House. His attention to detail has also been important, as has the support of organisations such as the Co-operative party and other worker co-operative interests. The Treasury's helpful assistance was also crucial.

I welcome the Bill, whose overall purpose is to encourage wider employee share ownership. We have heard a lot today about how it will do that. Hon. Members emphasised the importance of promoting the schemes to organisations in our constituencies and others with which we have contact.

The Bill has two key elements—first, the move to have employee representatives on share incentive plan trusts, and, secondly, as my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Ann McKechin) said, allowing early corporation tax deduction on money provided by a company to a share incentive plan trust to buy a block of shares to transfer into employee ownership within 10 years. The first of those elements is crucial as regards how employee share ownership can help businesses to be more successful. In itself, the measure would not necessarily encourage wider employee share ownership. However, if employers look at what has happened in companies that have adopted such schemes—we have heard some excellent examples, not only from this country, but from the United States—they may be persuaded that giving their employees proper representation and an active voice can be beneficial to the business in many ways.

The second key element relates to allowing companies the financial incentives that they should rightly have, because the benefits of employee share ownership accrue not only to individuals and to the company, but to society at large, and it is right to have tax laws that support the development of such trusts.

Share incentive plans were introduced in 2000 after extensive consultation by officials working with an advisory group representing the whole range of interests that needed to be included. It included representatives of large and small businesses, the Trades Union Congress, share scheme experts and academics who are involved in designing the schemes. Perhaps that explains why some matters are difficult for some of us to understand. As we said earlier, the new clause initially appeared difficult; perhaps the involvement of academics explains that, or perhaps it is due to my being relatively new to this place.

The Bill means that take-up of share incentive plans will be more viable and attractive. We know that the measure has been well received, although perhaps take-up has not been as quick as we would like. However, I believe that the Bill will help matters to progress.

Hon. Members of all parties accept that the Bill is a good measure. We need to ensure that all types of businesses—co-operatives, mutuals or private organisations—have good corporate governance. To achieve that, it is important that shareholders take a long-term interest and do not look for short-term gains or benefits, perhaps from investments. Employee shareholder trusts can contribute significantly to the long-term vision that I advocate.

Many case studies show that most successful results arise from employee share ownership schemes whereby employee share owners are genuinely involved and participate in the non-financial elements as well as the financial aspects of share ownership. They thus feel a greater sense of ownership.

The Bill makes it easier for employee trusts that hold shares to elect employees as trustees of the shareholding. That crucial mechanism gives employees a direct voice in the business. They therefore do not benefit from simply having shares: they also have a voice.

It is appropriate for larger organisations to have employee share ownership, but it is easier for individuals in such organisations to believe that their voices cannot be heard. Giving trustees a voice changes their stake from an individual shareholding to a collective voice that can begin to achieve the results that everyone wants from employee share ownership schemes. The Bill ensures that employees' interests are represented, but it also convinces them that their individual shareholdings can give them a stake in the enterprise.

It is not only the company that benefits, as the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) said at the outset. The schemes help the company and improve the bottom line, but above all, they can enrich the experience of people's working lives. Different ownership structures may have different incentive structures and operational methods to achieve different levels of efficiency, but employee participation is important in generating company loyalty. As my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill said, at a time of skills shortage and problems with recruitment and retention, encouraging employer loyalty and a long-term commitment to an organisation should benefit it.

The Bill will help in ensuring and enhancing employees' competence. Employee share ownership affects their motivation and commitment. Having such a commitment to the organisation can lead people to get involved in designing work that encourages the fullest contribution from employees so that the processes and procedures benefit the company.

Employee share ownership is, in itself, important, but these measures build on the inherent advantages by providing a mechanism for employees to have a collective voice and for their stake to be recognised through the appointment of employee trustees. I particularly regret the fact that my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith is not in his place at the moment, because I want to add my warm congratulations to him on steering the Bill through to this stage. That is an incredible achievement for a Member in his first year in Parliament, and I think that he will look back on this with some pride in the years to come. *[Interruption.]* Here he comes now.

This is particularly important for me because, like my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith, I am a Labour and Co-operative Member. He and I are the two most recently elected such Members, and we brought the membership of the Labour and Co-operative group in Parliament up to 29 members—its largest number yet. Perhaps we should put in for some of the considerations for minority parties that we heard about the other night in the debate on the reform of the House of Lords. I shall not pursue that issue today, however. I am heartened by the support that we have heard today on both sides of the House, and I congratulate my hon. Friend on getting the Bill to this stage.

12.26 pm

Linda Gilroy: It is a great pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Ms Munn) again, having also followed her in the debate on new

[Linda Gilroy]

clause 1. It is also a great pleasure to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) who has steered his Bill to this stage with skill, thoughtfulness and the full understanding that his background as a Co-operative Member of Parliament gives him.

The Bill widens and deepens the provision for employee share owners. There has been cross-party support for measures of this kind for many years under Governments of all colours, and the Bill builds on that tradition, exploring and improving in Committee and on the Floor of the House today this important measure. It is good to have heard the commitment of hon. Members, including myself, to getting our heads round the technicalities that give life to some of the principles that we all understand.

The Bill widens existing provisions by making more companies eligible for tax reliefs in relation to any move that they may be considering to distribute shares to employees by means of an employee trust. It thereby makes that distribution more likely to happen, and stands a strong chance of extending employee share ownership to many more people over time.

Clause 1(2) of the Bill as amended in Standing Committee B gives encouragement to companies to involve employees on those trusts when drawing up a trust instrument. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith, I believe that it is important to bring about that clarification, as it will be an important part of ensuring that more companies take on board the measures that the Bill makes possible.

The Bill helps to ensure that, as years go by, employee share ownership becomes a more common experience for the many, not the few, which will make an important contribution to ensuring that wealth, power and opportunity are in the hands of the many and not the few. Some significant figures have been quoted during the debate to illustrate what employee share ownership means for the prosperity of companies, as measured through growth in share values. The hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) referred to the importance of this in the current climate, with regard to share value, which is not currently as benign as it has been in recent years. That is one reason why the Chancellor and his colleagues have been keen to increase the number of employees with access to such schemes in all their various forms.

The measure builds on the provisions of the 2000 and 2001 Budgets in a way that should increase the number of employees with access to such schemes. It contributes to the quality and added value that arise from employee share ownership schemes. It introduces greater choice in the forms of ownership available, and it certainly builds on co-operative traditions and principles. We have seen a growth in, for instance, the industrial common ownership movement and in industrial common finance models.

The creation of the social enterprise unit in the Department of Trade and Industry is a significant landmark in recognising the important contribution that mutually owned organisations have made, as we marked recently when the Industrial and Provident Societies Bill passed through the House.

There are a number of perspectives that one can bring to this measure. It has all-party support, but is underpinned by co-operative principles that sit comfortably with those of the Labour party. I shall quote a little more from those principles:

> "By the strength of our common endeavour, we achieve more than we achieve alone so as to create for each of us the means to realise our true potential and for all of us a community in which power, wealth and opportunity are in the hands of the many, not the few."

Employee share ownership schemes are good for employees, for their companies and for the economy. Let me take each of those in turn. They are good for employees because the important financial stake that the Bill underpins rewards employees if their company does well. After all, there is nothing more galling than when others benefit disproportionately from one's efforts as a worker in a company, and this measure is one way in which such an imbalance can be addressed.

Clause 1(2) is important in encouraging companies to involve employees when drawing up trust instruments. Equally, when the going gets tough, it gives employees a sense of having an integral stake in the company's well-being—perhaps even a sense of being an important part of any survival strategy that needs to be developed.

Employee share ownership schemes are good for companies, because the financial involvement leads to increased employee commitment. They allow employees to become more involved in the running of their company, which, as the hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells (Mr. Norman) said, is absolutely crucial.

If employees are more aware of any difficulties that arise within the company, it makes them more aware of the management processes and more likely to be able to help in heading off the problems and tackling them constructively. If employees are more aware of opportunities that arise within the company, those opportunities can be taken early and not missed altogether. Through that involvement, employees are more likely to act on their awareness. That results in a virtuous circle of commitment, which companies need if they are not only to survive but to thrive in an increasingly competitive world.

Drawing on that experience is especially important and beneficial to companies that rely for progress on research and development, or need to get their choices right first time. I refer to the Scott Bader company, which has given sterling support to my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith in developing the Bill. I think that I am right in saying that the company is at the cutting edge in the development of polymers and composites—exactly the sort of research and development that I am talking about.

The need to get choices right first time is especially important for the service industries. We have heard it suggested in a number of interesting contributions that there may be a need to extend the provisions to the public sector, especially because of the importance of public services, in which employees' sense of ownership of what they doing can be critical.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Watson) suggested that more traditional firms could also be encouraged to consider such issues. He mentioned the engineering firms in his constituency; my constituency also contains such firms. It was suggested to my hon.

Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith that he should look ahead, beyond the hoped-for successful passage of the Bill, to see what can be done to encourage take-up of employee share ownership proposals.

That is very important, and one good way of proceeding is to look at what works. Perhaps we should look within the co-operative movement, maybe with the support of the companies that have been so energetic in backing the Bill, to see whether we can find an annual way of celebrating what is being done in respect of employee share ownership proposals. Perhaps that could be done across the different sectors, so as to include engineering, services and research and development. My hon. Friend the Paymaster General might tell us that that is already happening, but unless it is, those of us who have developed an interest in employee ownership might look at what we could achieve through such an annual celebration of take-up by companies not only of the proposals in the Bill, but of the other various forms of employee share ownership that have been mentioned.

The provisions will be good not only for employees and their companies, but for the country. The more we can encourage their take-up, the better, in terms of developing a long-term approach to the companies' welfare, not only contributing to the economy at a survival level, but helping it to thrive. The Bill is also important for competitiveness, for the sort of reasons that I outlined, as employees will take a keener interest at an earlier stage in making progress on the threats or opportunities of which they are aware.

Employee ownership also encourages growth, plus the wider benefits of social cohesion and regeneration. Research in Italy and the USA has demonstrated that the benefits include not only economic ones of the sort that have been mentioned, but improvements in respect of education and health, reduced crime, greater social participation and better capacity to weather periods of unemployment in local economies.

As I mentioned on Second Reading, John Monks, in a foreword to the Mutuo publication "Employees Direct", said:

> "the shareholder voice of the employees could prove a powerful counterweight to the short-term horizons of other investors and create the conditions necessary for stable workplace partnerships to flourish".

Not many of the hon. Members who are present are not convinced of the arguments, but I recommend that document to them, as it contains a range of powerful arguments to show how important to the general economy of the country the principles that we are debating are.

The Bill, as refined and amended in Committee, will open up more opportunities for employee share ownership and add to the eligibility of a small but important sector of employees to participate in such schemes. It will help to obtain added value for people's interest and commitment to their work. Employees, their companies and the country will benefit. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith for involving me in the Bill through my membership of the Standing Committee. I wish it well in the other place, where it will go today, and look forward to its return to this House.

12.40 pm

Mr. Watson: The Bill gives a practical expression of partnership values. It will promote a new culture of work and innovation in the workplace. It represents a renaissance for the co-operative and mutual movement.

I support the Bill not just because it embodies the values of my party—values that gave me a reason to stand for Parliament—but because I admire the tenacity and determination that enabled my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) to steer a technical and complex Bill through nearly all its stages during his first year as a Member of Parliament. That gives hope to new Members and Back Benchers: it shows that we really can make a difference to the lives of those who elected us. I only hope that when, having dealt with seven items in two and a half hours, we reach the Organ Donation (Presumed Consent and Safeguards) Bill, my hon. Friend will be present to support it and me.

Members on both sides of the House have agreed that we should find a way of encouraging wider share ownership. I am pleased to note that there is also a consensus between us and our industrial partners the Confederation of British Industry and the Trades Union Congress. The Bill presents challenges to both organisations. It challenges trade unions to change the way in which they relate to their members and to employers. I am glad that it has had so much support not just from the TUC as a whole, but from leading unions.

The general secretary of my union, Sir Ken Jackson, has been at the forefront of changing TUC policy, introducing more innovative ways of working and providing an impetus for the TUC to change its view of employee share ownership. He has pressed for such developments for many years. Today is a big day for him: the ballot papers for the election are being posted. I am sure that union members will take account of a debate in the House of Commons in which his contribution has been recognised when deciding how to mark the papers that land in their letterboxes on Monday morning.

As I have said, the Bill is concerned with promoting a culture change, and with innovation. Those are key elements in the future of our economy. Productivity lies at the heart of the economic challenges with which we will be presented over the next five years. I was pleased to learn that more than half the current employee share ownership schemes are in small and medium-sized enterprises, because those are the companies that need to grow. Unless they embrace the productivity challenge they will face over those five years, such growth will not be possible. As hon. Members on both sides of the House have said, more employee participation in company decisions can really help productivity, and the Bill will provide that.

The Bill also challenges employers, however. My constituency contains excellent employers, but some use dated management practices. The Bill would allow them to embrace change so that their employees can have not just a greater economic say in their companies, but a louder voice in the boardroom—and in the sectors to which a number of companies in my constituency belong, engineering and manufacturing, the say of skilled people, many of whom still work with their hands, is very important. A slight refinement of a production method, a slight change in the distribution chain or a slight speeding up of the process can make a real difference to the bottom line on a balance sheet. In such areas, where returns are so small these days, the Bill might be the difference between success and failure.

The Bill may also provide the impetus to create new, innovative ways of working and organising companies. When the House debated the Industrial and Provident

[Mr. Watson]

Societies Bill, I suggested that pop groups might work as IPSs, and I understand that Dave Stewart, the former Eurythmics lead singer, has set up a co-operative company. It would be fantastic if his is the first company to take up the initiatives in this Bill.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East (Mr. Luke) described how player power might play a role in the direction of football clubs, just as supporter power has breathed new life and direction into lower-league clubs. As a result of the debate on the Industrial and Provident Societies Bill, my own club, Kidderminster Harriers, set up a Supporters Direct group, although I wish that this Bill had been in place six months ago. Had the players, manager and employees been able to take a stake, the then manager, former Liverpool player Jan Molby, might have dipped his hand in his pocket to make a financial injection to the club before deserting it to move to Hull. The Bill is a socially good innovation. Indeed, had it been in place previously, Wimbledon football club might still be in Wimbledon.

The law of unintended consequences might kick in when the Bill is introduced, as it will create new ways of working and new institutions. It will also contribute to job satisfaction in the workplace and improve company organisation. I shall take these measures to the black country chamber of commerce, which is always looking for support for its businesses from the Treasury and from this place, and they will be welcomed by small and medium-sized companies throughout the land.

My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith said that the Bill is a practical expression of these words:

> "By the strength of our common endeavour we achieve more than we achieve alone".

He has achieved something special today, because the Bill does more than make financial sense—it provides a good model to improve industrial relations in Britain and makes the rhetoric about partnership between workers and employers a reality. It will be welcomed by employers as well as by employees throughout the land, especially in my constituency.

12.48 pm

Mr. Love: Like other hon. Members, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) on so successfully piloting the Bill to this stage in his first year as a Member of the House. I also congratulate all those who have supported the Bill, such as the Co-operative party and Job Ownership—two diverse organisations that have given such effective back-up to that endeavour. Their success is the Bill that we have before us today.

I welcome the Treasury concession, which came in the amendment that we debated earlier. I shall take my hon. Friend aside afterwards to ask him how he achieved it, as it is a great success for a new Member to persuade the Treasury of the case for such a change. I also welcome the cross-party support for the Bill, which is crucial. The hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) spoke for the Liberal Democrats and the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) for the official Opposition. It was pleasing to see someone of the experience of the hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells (Mr. Norman) taking the time to support the Bill. No matter that we all have different perspectives; we have all reached the same conclusion, and it is important that we support these measures.

However, some things are missing from the Bill. A number of hon. Members referred to employee trusts, John Lewis and Peter Jones. That point still needs to be taken up. On Second Reading, I raised the issue of mutuals. I was approached by Nationwide, and I recognise the difficulty for such organisations. We need to establish a critical link between share ownership and corporate performance, because that is what lies at the heart of widening share ownership. We should extend the benefits of share ownership to people who work in successful sectors of the economy; otherwise they will not be able to work on a level playing field with competitors that can develop those benefits.

The Bill encourages wider share ownership and employee participation and representation in the share incentive plan. It does so by extending tax benefits to companies that want to make a significant move towards employee share ownership, and it is important to stress that. It extends the benefit of an upfront corporation tax relief. The Bill ensures that, in return for that tax relief, the shares must be distributed to individual employees within a certain time scale, in order to maintain the critical link between productivity and employee benefits.

The Bill also provides a safeguard, in that the shareholding being transferred must be significant. It sets that at a minimum of 10 per cent. of the ordinary share capital, which must be held by the trustees in one year. I accept what the hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells said about that excluding larger companies, but it is important that we set a benchmark. That distribution must take place within certain limits. Thirty per cent. of the shares must be transferred to employees within five years, and 100 per cent. within 10 years; otherwise the tax relief is taken back.

Almost as important, the Bill encourages representation and participation by allowing—it does not enforce this—elected employees to become trustees of the share incentive plan. We have not discussed how they should be elected, and I shall not begin that debate, but it is interesting that that issue was never raised. I believe that the person who sits on the trustee board should be a representative of the employees, who will help to foster trust and confidence in the company.

All the studies show that the non-financial aspects of share ownership are just as important as the financial ones in ensuring better results, improved performance and that we get the successful companies that this country needs.

Like other hon. Members, I do not want to overstate the effect of the Bill, which is a modest measure. However, it reinforces some of the effects of wider share ownership, and I should like to refer to one or two of them that it will help to promote.

The Bill will further employee participation. I mentioned trust earlier. As a result of the greater commitment that trust will engender, employees are much more likely to hold on to their shares. One of the great failures of the privatisations of the 1980s and 1990s was that employees got rid of their shares at the earliest opportunity, so they did not benefit from the major pluses of wider share ownership. It was no good for them as employees, and it did not assist the companies that were privatised.

The Bill will engage employees in the performance of their company. That is critical because employees bring specific skills. They bring specialist knowledge of the shop-floor. They have a different, perhaps unique perspective to offer. All those things will bring benefits to the company.

Employee engagement improves employees' motivation. They can support the aims of the company. They can foster innovation at local level. I was interested that the hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells mentioned in particular the role that shop-floor workers have played in the development of his company. There is a lot of evidence of all those things providing effective input towards greater productivity.

Participation reduces confrontation. We talk all the time in the House about confrontation on the shop-floor. Wider share ownership will develop a more co-operative ethos. We will have more partnership working between management and employee. All that will go to creating a more stable, better environment for the company to succeed.

I want to look at how increased share ownership will help. It gives employees a meaningful voice. Attitudes change when they are given such a voice. Behaviour changes and performance improves.

Increased share ownership aligns the interests of the two different groups: the owners, represented by the management, and the employees. They start to work towards the same goal: the success of the company. As someone mentioned earlier, it tends to reduce short-termism, which is a great problem in the British economy.

Employees have a longer-term perspective of what is happening in their company. They take not the two or three-year time scale that shareholders and the City take but a much longer time scale. They are likely to spend their life with the company and want effective investment decisions in terms of research and development and of capital employed in their industry. That can be brought home in the boardroom.

In the boardroom, we will get better corporate governance because there will be a wider group. It will not be the narrow group of shareholders alone who decide things. There will be a wider interest that takes into account the role of the employees. We talk a lot about shareholder value and the need to improve it, but there are other issues to be taken into account in the boardroom, and the employees will be able to assist with some of that.

I believe that this measure, although relatively limited, will go a long way to reinforcing some of the issues that were so important when the share incentive plan was first introduced. It is important to state here and now that the greatest benefit of the changes that were made in 2000 is to recognise that all employees must be included. One of the great failings and shortcomings of some of the previous measures was that certain groups in the company benefited from those measures, rather than everyone. All the studies show that, if we stand by that principle and involve everyone, company performance improves by far more than if wider share ownership is limited to specific groups in the company.

Performance is important because competitiveness is important. We talk continually about having a more competitive market. That is critical, not only in the United Kingdom but internationally, where we face considerable competitive pressures.

At the end of the day, what we are really in favour of is getting increased productivity. We hear a lot of criticisms about productivity. I notice that in recent months productivity has improved significantly. I welcome that and wish to see it enhanced. This Bill will go a long way to assisting that process.

I commend the Bill, a relatively small measure, but one that will reinforce all the issues that are so critical to the future of the company and of British industry. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith on bringing the measure before us.

1 pm

Dawn Primarolo: We have had an excellent debate on an important issue, with thoughtful contributions from hon. Members on both sides of the House. I start by thanking my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) for introducing the Employee Share Schemes Bill and for guiding us so expertly through the technicalities. I am pleased that my hon. Friend and his advisers have been able to work closely with the Inland Revenue so that we can agree on a set of provisions that can be supported.

Let me say to my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love) that, despite the Treasury's reputation, we do not always say no. We are capable of spotting good ideas and we are here to help, although hon. Members may not always feel that that is the case.

I join all hon. Members who have spoken in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith. As my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Watson) said, he is truly to be congratulated on his tenacity, skill, patience and perseverance in his first year in the House. Now that he is an expert in the procedures in the House, other hon. Members may consult him in future, although he may be more reluctant to have his name in the private Members' ballot. He should sleep easy tonight, as I am sure that the other place will look kindly on the Bill—I certainly hope so. It is a huge achievement for my hon. Friend to have developed his principles to this point.

The Government attach great importance to employee share ownership and participation. Increasing employee share ownership is at the heart of the Government's productivity agenda, which includes points that have been echoed repeatedly in today's debate. In our first term in government we put stability and employment creation first. Building on that, over the next decade we want to secure the fastest productivity growth of our competitors. To achieve this goal we must reform and modernise our product, capital and labour markets and create for the first time a truly entrepreneurial culture that is not confined to the few, but open to all, so that in every community people with ideas and initiative have the opportunity to develop.

We must ensure that business investment increases and we must do more to promote competition, innovation and entrepreneurship. Considerable progress has already been made, but our discussions with business have revealed that we can do more to remove the barriers to opportunity and ambition—the ambition not just to start and build a successful business, but to see the firm in which one works succeed and individuals succeed with it. As my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Ann McKechin) said, when those who work in a firm are able to be truly part of that firm, enormous benefits are derived in ensuring that it can develop.

[Dawn Primarolo]

The share incentive plan introduced in the Finance Act 2000 has made it easier not just for some but for all employees to become stakeholders in their companies. In their contributions today, my hon. Friends constantly returned to the importance of all employees being able to be stakeholders in their company.

The Bill represents a milestone in rewarding long-term commitment by employees and removing, once and for all—I hope, the old "them and us" culture in British industry—on which the hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells (Mr. Norman) commented. There is no better incentive and motivation for employees than for their work to be recognised and for them to share in their firm's success. The share incentive plan is an example of how each and every one of us—business, employees and Government—can contribute to achieving our productivity goals.

We want employee share schemes to appeal to all employers and employees, and to companies large and small, quoted and unquoted. There can be no doubt about the Government's commitment to employee share ownership in general, and to the share incentive plan in particular. There is a sound basis for that commitment. As my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East (Mr. Luke) said, research has shown that businesses with widespread employee share ownership outperform their rivals.

For the past 10 years, the stock market performance of companies with widespread employee share ownership has been monitored and compared with that of other comparable companies. The results are consistent over that period, showing that companies with widespread employee share ownership have regularly outperformed their competitors by a significant margin, and that has continued throughout the recent downturn in the market. That points to a clear link between employee share ownership and company performance.

We are of course not saying that an employee share plan will automatically lead to enhanced company performance. What the evidence points to is a link between the two, especially when other measures are adopted to enhance employee participation. Ultimately, a range of academic studies has concluded that companies with share schemes have higher productivity than those without.

It is the perceptions of the employers and employees that matter. The hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells spoke of the need for a culture change. Employees need to see and believe in the positive effects of employee share ownership schemes. A recent survey of employers by Proshare showed that 83 per cent. of employers who had introduced a share plan found that it had had, or had exceeded, the impact that they desired. Some interesting results also emerged from a survey of employee shareholders. Of those employees, 34 per cent. said that they were now more interested in the company and what it was doing; 28 per cent. said that the plan had improved their commitment to the company; and 25 per cent. said that it made them stay with their employer rather than change jobs.

Those are powerful results. One clear message from the research findings is that productivity improves where there is employee share ownership combined with wider employee participation. That illustrates the crucial point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Ms Munn) about loyalty, and relates to the comments of the hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells.

Throughout our time in government, we have placed great emphasis on the importance of people in any successful organisation, and we are right to do so. People are essential, but so too is the way in which we work together. Without good people a business cannot flourish, but without good management good people cannot flourish. Without maximising the potential of and listening to its employees an organisation is lucky to survive the present, let alone get to the future first. That is what good workplace relationships can achieve—the creation of an environment in which employees can work to the best of their abilities, where they feel empowered and involved and where they know they are listened to.

At the heart of good workplace relations must be partnership between employers and employees. An employee needs to know and understand what will make the business succeed, and the employer needs to know how to get the best from the staff. That is pretty basic science, and of course good partnership goes beyond that, but partnership is ultimately all about communicating. Unfortunately, with the challenges that we face in the global economy, there are all too many employers who do not appreciate that fundamental fact.

The benefits to business of successful workplace relationships speak volumes: productivity and performance; recruitment and retention; customer service; return on investment in training; diversity within the work force; morale, commitment and loyalty; reducing absenteeism, sickness and stress; and flexibility in staff attitudes, with an ability to deal with change. As my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Linda Gilroy) said, that is an impressive list. Why companies would not want to benefit from all that is a matter that we need to pursue. The links between partnership and those benefits is clear. That continues to be demonstrated in modern work practices.

Organisations adopting those principles can be flexible and adapt quickly to change, which is ever important in a global market. They can know the choices that they face, and seize on and develop them, moving employers and employees forward together. They will understand the need for change and react to it instead of fearing and resisting it. Share incentive plans offer share ownership to all employees in a company, and the Bill seeks to amend the provisions for such plans, to the benefit of all.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, West (Mr. Bailey) on his 20-year campaign. I am sure that he is delighted at this outcome, and I sincerely hope that it does not take him another 20 years to achieve his next goal—I hope that I will be able to play some part in that, if it falls to me as a Minister.

The hon. Members for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) and for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) referred to the John Lewis Partnership. John Lewis cannot take part in a share incentive plan because of its corporate structure. Its shares are not eligible under the SIP rules. They are not listed on the stock exchange, nor are they in an independent company. They are under the control of a corporate trustee, and the SIP rules are clear that shares used in the plan must be ordinary shares, with rights equal or superior to the company's other ordinary shares, and they must be either listed on a recognised stock exchange or in a company that is not under the control of another company—or, if they are under such control, the controlling company must itself be listed and must not be a close company.

The John Lewis corporate structure means that none of those tests is met. The shares are all under the control of one person—the corporate trustee—and the employees have a mediated ownership, not the kind of individual ownership that underlies the approved share relief. Those rules protect the interests of all employees and ensure that they have a direct stake in the company's real value. However, as I said on Second Reading, I am glad to report that Revenue officials met representatives of John Lewis at the end of April to discuss how the company could meet the requirements of SIP legislation. I cannot pretend that that will be easy or that we have found a way to achieve it, but I am prepared to consider the technical issues and try hard to resolve the outstanding issue, provided that the central principles of SIPs are not breached. In the past, other types of SIPs and share ownership could be used only by a small proportion of the work force, sometimes at considerable cost in tax revenue. I hope that I made clear the Government's belief that all employees should be able to benefit in the ways that we have proposed.

The hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs referred to the take-up of SIPs, which he believed had been rather slow. It has been faster than take-up of previous all-employee share plans. The Government have received more than 600 applications. The approved profit-sharing scheme, which SIPs are designed to replace, will not disappear until the end of the year. As everyone in the House acknowledged, there is still a great deal of work to be done proselytising for the benefits of SIPs.

The hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells spoke about its being difficult for larger companies to participate in the scheme because of the 10 per cent. requirement. The Bill allows an early corporation tax deduction for companies buying shares from owners. We want to assist share owners to pass substantial holdings to trusts for distribution to all employees. In that way, we move from a company with ownership concentrated in the hands of a small number of people—perhaps the founder shareholders of a company—to widespread employee ownership and involvement. Crucially, the same issues do not always arise in larger companies, where ownership is not generally concentrated in the hands of a small number of people. In addition, large companies are likely to pass shares on to their employees quickly and regularly, generating corporation tax relief anyway, assuming that that is done for a SIP.

My hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love) again raised the issue of mutuals and trusts. Rather like the John Lewis Partnership, mutuals, trusts and owned organisations cannot take part in a SIP or any approved employee share arrangements because they do not have a share structure based on individual ownership. Mutual organisations such as building societies do not have equity, so it is difficult to see how they can participate in a share ownership plan, where tax relief encourages alignment between employee share owners and other shareholders.

Mr. Love: The hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells (Mr. Norman) said that Consignia—or the Royal Mail or whatever it is now called—is considering introducing a shadow share ownership scheme. Can the Government look at that model for mutuals and employee trusts?

Dawn Primarolo: I was not aware of that possibility in relation to Consignia, but I am happy to confirm, as I did on Second Reading, that I am not against including mutuals or trust-owned businesses in the share incentive plan, if the right way of doing that can be found. I said that I would continue to consider proposals from trusts and employee-owned companies and from mutually owned organisations, but I return to the basic principle that I have maintained throughout our discussion of the Bill: those must be consistent with the provisions for a share incentive plan. Those provisions exist for good, solid reasons—to protect the employees in such an arrangement.

The Bill sets out to change the rules of share incentive plans to make them even more attractive to small and medium-sized enterprises. As approved in Committee, the Bill has two main objectives. First, it puts beyond doubt the ability of employee representatives to act as share incentive plan trustees. Secondly, it seeks to encourage the transfer of more shares into employee ownership. That will help with succession planning and in securing the future of small businesses.

The Bill does that by allowing a company an early corporation tax deduction on money that it gives to SIP trusts to buy a block of shares. The shares acquired in that way must be distributed to employees within 10 years. The new clause considered today is beneficial and now forms part of the amended Bill. It extends income tax and capital gains tax relief for SIP trustees from two or five years, under the current rule, to 10 years, to correspond with the time given in the Bill for shares to be distributed.

I am more than happy to support my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith in his aims of encouraging greater employee participation. As I said, research confirms that a combination of employee share ownership and employee participation yields the best results for everyone. The company benefits, the shareholders benefit and the employees benefit from the greater success of the company.

The proposal in clause 1(2) is that the deed of a share incentive plan trust must allow companies, if they so wish, to have at least one selected employee representative on the board of trustees. I am happy to support employee representation on the SIP trust. Strictly speaking, that can be done already, but I agree that, as many hon. Members pointed out in their contributions today, there is a case for that to be put beyond doubt.

As I said on Second Reading, I am happy for Inland Revenue officials to work with my hon. Friend's team on a trust deed that would provide for employee trustees. That could be offered on the Inland Revenue website alongside the existing model trust deed used by the Revenue. We are working on the draft model that has been provided by my hon. Friend's team and we look forward to offering both model deeds. We would like to make them known to companies and advisers in other ways.

The Bill provides for a corporation tax deduction to be given when a company contributes money to a share incentive plan trust to buy a large block of shares. That

[Dawn Primarolo]

might apply where an owner has a substantial shareholding and wishes to retire and ensure that the company stays in the hands of the employees.

At present, corporation tax deductions are given when shares in a SIP trust are distributed to employees. The Bill provides for the corporation tax deduction to be given earlier, when a company contributes money to a SIP trust to buy a block of shares. The trust must hold 10 per cent. of the ordinary share capital of the company before it qualifies for the deduction, and the shares must be distributed to employees through the share incentive plan within 10 years. That is designed to encourage the flow of shares from the trust to individual employees during the 10-year-period. The objective of the share incentive plan is to improve productivity by encouraging employees to take a long-term stake in their company and to share in the rewards of its success.

I share my hon. Friend's aim of encouraging employee participation and employee share ownership. As I said, my officials met my hon. Friend and his team on three separate occasions to discuss the Bill.

I am satisfied, as I have to inform the House, that the amended Bill is compatible with the European convention on human rights. We have also assessed that it is unlikely that there will be any additional regulatory impact. The risks and benefits in the original regulatory impact assessment for the share incentive plan remain unchanged and there is no need for a formal assessment.

I hope that the other place is as pleased to receive the Bill as this House is now to conclude the debate on it. I give my heartfelt congratulations to my hon. Friend on successfully piloting the Bill through the House and I am delighted to join him in supporting it today.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Copyright (Visually Impaired Persons) Bill

As amended in the Standing Committee, considered.

Order for Third Reading read.

1.27 pm

Rachel Squire (Dunfermline, West): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I thank hon. Members on both sides of the House for their support for the Bill. Without such support, good will and co-operation, the Bill would not now be receiving its Third Reading.

I cannot name all those who have given their support because it would take too long, but I should like to give a special mention to the Government for their support, especially the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Miss Johnson); the Royal National Institute for the Blind, and particularly Caroline Ellis and her team whose help and expertise have been magnificent; the copyright directorate, particularly Judith Sullivan; and the Public Bill Office. I should also like to thank my noble Friend Lord Morris in the other place.

I am pleased to say that the Bill has the support of the Disability Rights Commission, Scope, Sense, and Deafblind UK. It is supported by producers of alternative format materials, particularly the National Library for the Blind, the Calibre Cassette Library, the Talking Newspaper Association of the United Kingdom, the Torch Trust for the Blind, the Confederation of Transcribed Information Services, Share the Vision and the Scottish Braille Press.

I believe that the RNIB has received strong messages of support for the Bill from famous authors, including Philip Pullman, Jilly Cooper, Margaret Forster, Nick Hornby, Joanna Lumley, David Malouf, Rosamund Pilcher, Elizabeth Berridge, Harold Pinter, Claire Rayner, Michele Roberts, Eric Sykes and Joanna Trollope. Authors have been shocked if they have found that their agents had denied an organisation, such as the RNIB, permission to make accessible copies of their work. Those authors want their writing to reach as wide an audience as possible and appreciate that that can be achieved without compromising their moral rights or their livelihoods.

I am pleased to say that rights holders are now generally supportive of the Bill. They have been privy to drafts of the Bill, and it has been substantially rewritten since last autumn to reflect their concerns. The aim has been to achieve consensus about exactly what the exceptions should say. For example, I and other hon. Members supported amendments tabled in Committee that would require anyone acting under either of the two exceptions made in the Bill to put a note on accessible copies saying that they have been made under the exception and would require bodies making multiple copies to keep records and to make them available for inspection by rights holders.

All hon. Members have a direct interest in the contents of the Bill. We all have constituents who are visually impaired—there are around 3,000 in every constituency. Many of us also have friends, family members and colleagues who will directly benefit from the Bill. Throughout my life, I have had contact with children and adults with visual impairment, and that has been of great value to me. They have often stood out from the crowd—not because of their disability, but rather because of their achievements and their abilities. In my constituency, there is an excellent mainstream primary school, Touch primary school, which has a visually impaired learning centre that is used by 150 children from a wide geographical area—children with a visual impairment who can combine mainstream education with learning specialist skills such as Braille. Children at the school who have no visual impairment are given the benefit of working with and learning from those who do. The school thus promotes mutual respect and understanding.

Touch primary school is an excellent example of the high standards and deep commitment of teachers, parents, children and the community, and the Bill will directly benefit all that they strive to achieve. In the kingdom of Fife, we are fortunate to have the innovative and impressive Fife sensory impairment centre, which represents a partnership between the health board, Fife council, the voluntary sector and those with sensory impairment. It provides an open door of opportunity that will be opened even wider if the Bill is given its Third Reading. The Bill is about opening the door of opportunity to those with a visual impairment by removing the barriers created by copyright law to their access to books and other reading material, while seeking to safeguard the rights of authors and publishers.

The reality is that there is an acute shortage of books, magazines, sheet music and other materials available to visually impaired people in a format that they can access. Only 5 per cent. of all the books published in one year are available in an accessible format one year on. Nearly half—47 per cent.—of blind and partially-sighted students in university and higher education do not usually get books in their preferred formats, and 33 per cent. of visually impaired children do not always get their textbooks in an accessible format when they need them. Some publishers have joined or set up licensing schemes to facilitate the production of accessible formats, but at the present rate of progress it would take 20 years to get most works covered by such schemes, and still many authors may not join. If the Bill is not successful, current problems will ensure that visually impaired people cannot gain full benefit from the information revolution.

In Committee on 1 May, there was a good and balanced discussion on a range of issues and interests. The Bill, as amended in Committee, provides a fair and proper balance between the interests of visually impaired people and copyright owners. Several hon. Members asked some detailed questions about that and I assure them that I have reflected on them carefully. Further consideration has been especially helped by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. Further meetings have been held—the most recent was last week—with representatives of publishers' and authors' organisations.

I have always maintained that the Bill should take account of the legitimate interests of rights holders as well as visually impaired people, and that we must be sure that it has been properly drafted to achieve that. We all agree that copyright is a just concept and it is more than understandable that copyright owners view any new exception with extreme caution because it erodes a little the rights that copyright granted them. I am grateful that rights owners have not gone so far as to suggest that there should be no exceptions for the benefit of visually impaired people.

Copyright owners have properly lobbied us on points of detail and I shall try to cover them. First, briefly to recap the Bill's purpose, it introduces two new exceptions to copyright for the benefit of visually impaired people. The first is the one-for-one exception in clause 1. Its essential feature is that a visually impaired person cannot have an accessible copy made under the exception unless he also lawfully possesses or can lawfully use what the Bill calls "the master copy" of the copyright material.

The exception does not make legal the production of accessible copies for differently visually impaired people when only one visually impaired person has a master copy. Transferring an accessible copy to a visually impaired person who does not have a master copy will immediately make the accessible copy an infringing copy. Those important points were raised at an earlier stage of our proceedings. Apart from the more general point about scope of the material that the one-for-one exception covers, I do not believe that hon. Members have other concerns.

Clause 1 will be invaluable to visually impaired people in many circumstances. For example, it will allow a neighbour who can read a book bought by a visually impaired person to put it on a tape for that person. It will allow a parent to put a few chapters of a school textbook loaned to a visually impaired pupil on a photocopier to produce an enlarged version. It will allow a book to which a visually impaired person needs to refer in a library to be scanned in a machine that will read out the pages to that person. I believe that we all accept that that is fair and reasonable.

Before I turn to the second exception in the Bill—the exception to copyright to be inserted by clause 2 into the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, part I of which provides UK copyright law—I would like to say something about the scope of the copyright material covered by the Bill. The Bill refers to

"a literary, dramatic, musical or artistic work"

and to "a published edition".

These terms are the ones used in the 1988 Act, and, to the extent that it is necessary, are defined in that Act. The term "literary work", for example, is very broadly defined, and is not limited to material of great literary merit. Scientific essays and articles can count as literary works, as can instruction manuals, information sheets and textbooks. Works of fiction, poetry, and so on, that are of great literary merit are, of course, also included.

Unfortunately, for the Bill not to contravene the EC database directive, it has been necessary to exclude any activity that would involve the infringement of copyright in a database. There are some very complicated issues to consider in that respect, and I am again grateful for my hon. Friend the Minister's advice on this point, which has helped me to ensure that my Bill is technically correct. I hope that, at some point in the future, there will be a change to the European legislation in this respect.

I appreciate that there could be confusion about whether only some of the contents of a database are being copied—it might still be all right to do that under the exception in the Bill—or whether too much is being taken from the database, and copyright is being infringed.

[Rachel Squire]

I cannot believe that one of the purposes of the European legislation was to rule out any possibility of making accessible copies of all the material in a database for the personal use of visually impaired people.

The second new exception to copyright is provided by clause 2, and subject also to provisions in clauses 3, 4 and 5. Hon. Members have expressed a number of concerns about that, which I shall mention briefly. Of most concern seems to be the concept of an "approved body" being able to act under the second exception to make multiple copies of copyright material in accessible formats. Such bodies, however, are neither subjected to an approval process nor restricted to ones that have as one of their main purposes the provision of accessible copies for other services for visually impaired people.

For the benefit of hon. Members who were not present in Committee, I repeat that it is essential that the Bill allow a wide range of bodies to assist visually impaired people. A number of bodies acting at local level, such as a local women's institute or church group, might wish to help visually impaired people in their area by reading local newspapers, for example, on to tapes. The Bill now provides that flexibility. It is inconceivable that it would not be one of the purposes of such organisations to help visually impaired people, if they are to understand and meet the rigorous conditions applying to activity under the second exception.

Churches are a good example, because they are not bodies devoted primarily to providing accessible information to visually impaired people, but they might want to create more than one alternative format copy of a hymn book for visually impaired members of their congregation. Indeed, the RNIB has given me an example in which a blind choir member is still waiting for her Braille copy of "Complete Anglican Hymns Old and New". The RNIB is still waiting for copyright permission, because there are numerous contributors to that hymn book, and chasing them all up is proving extremely expensive. Yet until that blind choir member gets her Braille hymn book, she cannot participate as fully as she would wish in church activities. That is one small example of why we must be flexible in defining approved bodies.

I emphasise that, although education establishments and not-for-profit bodies that fall within the scope of the term "approved body" may not be approved, such a process could be very regulatory with little or no benefit. Any approved body must notify rights holders of its activity under the second exception and must keep records that rights holders are entitled to inspect on reasonable notice, so that the approved body cannot act without rights holders knowing ultimately which bodies are acting.

Moreover, clause 5 allows the Secretary of State to make an order to "disapprove", as we might term it, an approved body or type of approved body if its activity, under the second copyright exception, leads to levels of copyright infringement that are damaging to rights holders. The latter will of course provide a considerable incentive for approved bodies to adhere carefully to all the conditions that apply.

I am aware that time is passing and that other hon. Members wish to speak, so I shall make just a couple more points about the efforts that have been made in the Bill to satisfy concerns that have been raised. I particularly welcomed the decision of the Joint Committee on Human Rights in its 16th report of 29 April 2002. In relation to the Bill, it said:

> "As copyright is a form of property protected by ECHR Protocol 1, Article 1, this could potentially engage the right to property of the owner of the copyright. However, the Bill contains extensive safeguards to ensure that the provision of accessible copies does not damage the commercial or moral rights of the owner of the copyright, and the purpose of the Bill advances the public interest in enhancing the lives of visually impaired people. That being so, there is little doubt that any possible interference with rights under ECHR Protocol 1, Article 1 by provisions of the Bill, would be held to be justifiable."

That was extremely helpful.

An education establishment that uses the second exception in the Bill is required to demonstrate that it is doing so for educational purposes, so it comes under a much narrower definition. I was concerned that the Bill should not restrict exceptions to copyright only to educational use, but allow individuals to obtain reading material for personal and other use.

The fairly complicated subject of copyright protection technology was raised in Committee. I hope that, when it comes to implementing the copyright directive, that will provide adequate coverage and agreements between rights holders and approved bodies on the whole issue, affecting a much greater area than that covered by the Bill.

I apologise for going into technical details, but it is important for all hon. Members to feel that we have given proper consideration to the concerns raised. I trust that all hon. Members believe that there has been considerable debate and much careful thought on a Bill that will help a particularly disadvantaged group enormously, but that will not be detrimental to copyright owners' legitimate interests.

The Bill's passage to the other place will give all hon. Members a sense of achievement and a cause to celebrate. It will provide an excellent example of our determination to offer 2 million people of this nation the opportunities to develop their potential. It will open the doors of the information revolution to them and make a real difference to their lives. I ask all hon. Members to support the Bill at its Third Reading.

1.50 pm

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): I should like to congratulate the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Rachel Squire) not only on coming high up the ballot for private Members' Bills, but on not taking the easy option. There are always two choices on these occasions. One can either choose a high-profile passing bandwagon and go down in a blaze of glory and—it is to be hoped—publicity, or do what she has done. She has taken pains to deal with a highly technical—and, from one point of view, narrow—issue in order to deliver enormous benefits to a large number of our constituents. Some 3,000 or more people in each of our constituencies will benefit, and I pay tribute her for what she has done. It is not easy to keep track of a Bill of this sort.

As I made clear on Second Reading, and as my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) said in Committee, the Bill is an excellent measure that has the wholehearted support of the official Opposition. The principle that it involves could not be clearer: our visually impaired constituents should have unnecessary obstacles [illegible]ed from their lives, whether it be in their leisure [illegible]ities or their studies. They face quite enough obstacles in their lives already.

Another principle that the hon. Lady mentioned is also at stake. This country is a world beater in intellectual property. It is absolutely right that intellectual property should be fully protected in all its forms—hence the issue of safeguards was mentioned on Second Reading. The hon. Lady has dealt with it in some detail and it was discussed in depth in Committee. It is fair to say that those two principles have been entirely reconciled in the Bill in its current form, not least by the amendments made in Committee.

It is important to mention some of the issues that have been addressed, as the hon. Lady has done. Perhaps the most important condition or safeguard in many respects is the so-called one-for-one exception, which goes a long way to reassure those who might have had concerns about the Bill's effect on intellectual property. I take on board what she said about the database issue, which may have to be revisited on a future occasion. The new provision—I think it was introduced in Committee—enabling schools, libraries and voluntary organisations to make and distribute multiple accessible copies is also important, as are the provisions relating to so-called intermediate copies. It seems to me that, in Committee, the genuine concerns of a number of people and organisations were addressed as fully as they can be in the practical world. That is a very good thing.

The hon. Lady also reminded us of the reasons for introducing the Bill. It can take years to obtain the necessary copyright permissions, even with the best will in the world, simply because of the time that these things can take. The key statistic, which was also discussed on Second Reading, is that only 5 per cent. of all the books published in one year are available in an accessible format one year later. Some 47 per cent. of blind and partially sighted students do not usually get books in their preferred formats. It beggars belief that they can continue their studies in those circumstances, given all the other difficulties that they face.

We are also told in the RNIB briefing—I pay tribute, as the hon. Lady did, to the RNIB's excellent work in preparing some meaty and useful briefing material on the Bill—that that organisation spends about £60,000 a year chasing authors, agents and publishers for permission. The position is ludicrous, in that authors who would be helpful and supportive if they knew of the problem are unaware of it because of the number of intermediaries in the chain. There have also been many examples of people who have refused point blank to give permission. I shall not give their names, but it is rather surprising that major authors who have made millions of pounds or dollars from their works have behaved in that way.

On Second Reading I mentioned the Talking Newspapers Association, which is based at Heathfield, just up the road from Eastbourne and in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Mr. Hendry). It does excellent work, taping and transcribing the contents of some 1,100 regional and local newspapers as well as the nationals with which it deals. Although its task is easier than that of those who must deal with books, it is very sympathetic to the Bill. I have received support not just from my local branch of the association, but from the Eastbourne Blind Society.

As I have said, an average of at least 3,000 people in each of our constituencies have no access to reading material because of copyright restrictions. Talking to those people, we cannot but be struck by how much they rely on talking books and talking newspapers to remain in touch not just with specific interests or even studies, but with the world in general. The Bill would make it much easier for them to do so.

I do not want to detain the House, given the 2.30 pm cut-off. It seems that the Bill still has cross-party support, and I am delighted to reiterate my party's support for it. I wish it a swift passage.

1.59 pm

Ms Meg Munn (Sheffield, Heeley): I too support the Bill, whose benefits are obvious. I agree with the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) that this is an ideal subject for a private Member's Bill, and I warmly congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West (Rachel Squire).

As my hon. Friend said, the RNIB estimates that more than 3,000 people in the average constituency are visually impaired. Yesterday, the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association was in the Houses of Parliament raising awareness of issues relating to vision, and offering eye tests. I asked what percentage of people were found to be short-sighted or suffering from other eye problems as a result of the tests. Apparently, almost everyone over 45 needs assistance with eyesight, usually when it comes to reading. I am not quite there yet, but having been short-sighted since the age of seven I know how important it is to be helped to see properly.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West pointed out that people we know often bring to life the problems experienced by those who cannot read what they want or need to read. Late in life my father could not read very well, and found books with larger print very helpful. Some people at the church I attend also need assistance of this kind. My hon. Friend mentioned churchgoers as well. On Sundays, I usually sit next to Hilda and Ray Horbury, members of my church who are in their 80s. Unfortunately, Ray's sight has deteriorated over the past couple of years. At our church, he benefits from a large-print book, but I see at close range the distress that is caused in a central part of his life when material that is not large print is used. It means that he cannot access information, take part in activities or be part of a service when he wants to be. In these days of technology and despite the array of assistance that is available, it is a dreadful shame that there are barriers that prevent people from participating fully in life for as long as they can.

I particularly welcome the Bill's definition of a visually impaired person and the fact that it is drawn widely to ensure maximum benefit to all those who cannot access copyright material in the form in which it has been published. There is no doubt that the Bill has wide support, and when the issue is discussed outside the Chamber it seems straightforward. However, although my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West has shown that to be true, introducing legislation is not without its problems. The longer I spend here, the more I realise how difficult it is to produce good legislation that works, so I pay tribute to her for having overcome the problems and technicalities of introducing legislation that, on the face of it, seems simple.

[Ms Meg Munn]

Other Members want to take part and to put their views, so I end by saying that the Bill has my full support. I hope that it commands the support of the House and of the other place.

2.2 pm

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I add my full support for the Bill, partly on behalf of my party and partly on a personal basis. I am introducing another private Member's Bill on copyright law, which has led to confusion on two levels. First, I am occasionally showered with approval from institutions involved with the visually impaired. Although I am tempted to lap up their applause, I must acknowledge that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Rachel Squire) should receive it.

Secondly, and more substantially, people say, "You are introducing legislation that would increase the criminal penalties against those who seriously abuse copyright law. How can you favour legislation that widens access to material?" Of course, the two are not incompatible. I agree with the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson), who rightly emphasised that we must properly protect intellectual property—the purpose of my Bill is to increase criminal penalties in line with the trademark provision—but there must be exceptions.

It has always been understood that personal copying is not a problem, although the Bill goes slightly further by addressing multiple copying and copying without the author's permission, but for an entirely necessary and desirable public good. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, West painstakingly explained how she has created through the legislative process a series of safeguards that protect copyright holders. I am entirely satisfied that that meets their purposes as well as those of the visually impaired, and it strikes me that the balance has been well preserved. I fully support the legislation.

I have two final points to make. First, we are all receiving a lot of submissions from different groups, so I acknowledge the work of the universities. The Bill will contribute substantially to the work of higher education. People have been severely inhibited by copyright problems in universities, which have publicly acknowledged that the legislation will be an excellent help to them in making it possible to assist their visually impaired students without fear of legal comeback.

Secondly, the Bill will also help many voluntary organisations. Like many constituencies, mine has a talking newspaper, which has expressed full support, and I hope that the legislation proceeds rapidly.

2.4 pm

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): I am delighted to welcome the Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West (Rachel Squire), and to add my thanks to the disability campaign organisations on the long list that she read out, to the Disability Rights Commission, the Talking Newspaper Association and others, and to the many authors who have been outraged by the fact that visually impaired people have been prevented from accessing books and printed material by the operation of copyright law. May I add to that list the name of Fran Hibbert, who is the manager of the Merton Voluntary Association for the Blind and the Guardian centre in Merton? My office has been in contact with her again this morning, and she is delighted, as are the many visually impaired people in Merton who depend on the centre's services, that the Bill will make excellent progress again today.

The Guardian centre was founded in 1965 by a visionary visually impaired man, Eric Walford MBE, and is funded by the local education authority and through donations. It has also received a £115,000 lottery grant to provide services to the many hundreds of visually impaired people in Merton. More than 800 people in Merton receive the Merton Talking Newspaper every week from the Guardian centre, which provides many other services. With such support from lottery money, the local education authority and charitable donations, it is absurd that the operation of copyright law should thwart the centre in providing the service on which so many people depend.

We spoke to Ms Hibbert this morning, and she feels angry that organisations such as the Merton Voluntary Association for the Blind and the Guardian centre are put in an invidious position when people ask them for help with photocopying any document or printed material to put it in larger print, or with translating it into Braille or Moon. It receives many such requests, but it cannot respond to them without breaking the law. By assisting visually impaired people in that way, it would infringe copyright law.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West on using the opportunity of her private Member's Bill to bring the law in this area into line with common sense. I do not think that any reasonable person would believe that the operation of copyright law should come between organisations such as the Guardian centre and the visually impaired people whom it was set up to serve and who depend on its services.

It is important that the Bill should not undermine the work done by many businesses that publish material in Braille and in Moon. We want that industry to expand. I am delighted that I shall be able to go back to my constituency and perhaps report on the Bill's excellent progress in the Merton Talking Newspaper, and to tell the Guardian centre and the many people who depend on its services that it will soon be able to fulfil its mission to assist visually impaired people without the operation of copyright law getting in the way.

I congratulate my hon. Friend once again, and wish the Bill good speed. I hope that it makes further progress in the other place.

2.9 pm

Ms Dari Taylor (Stockton, South): This is a small, complex, technical but important Bill, and I compliment my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West (Rachel Squire) on it. It is an excellent Bill, because it begins to provide a workable relationship between royalties, copyright and accessible copy. "It is timely," I said to myself and then realised that we have had the written word and books for centuries. It is outrageous that in the 21st century we should be considering such a large part of our community for the first time in a real way. The Bill will benefit millions. I am absolutely delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West has kept the Government on side. She has worked extremely hard and I compliment her.

The Bill establishes a workable legislative framework. It has achieved widespread recognition throughout our communities. It has got many authors, agents and publishers, whether they be involved in dramatic, music or artistic work, to agree that accessible copies for people with impaired vision are an absolute necessity and a requirement. In fact, many have been shocked that their books have not been available to date.

I cannot imagine what it is like not to be able to pick up a book and read, or to go along a shelf and choose. It is totally inconceivable. Reading is one of the finest pleasures in my life. It is time out and, goodness me, we all need time out. The fact that we have excluded so many people from that is wrong.

Reading is not just time out. As many hon. Members have said, there are the benefits of higher education, or education per se. Reading opens doors, thereby ensuring that people with aspirations can develop their intellectual potential. The Bill gives educational establishments the opportunity to support visually impaired people.

In a complex and technical world, my hon. Friend has achieved a clear and concise Bill that I believe will be successful. I am delightful—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I am sorry, I take that back. I am delighted with the whole idea of one for one. It seems so logical, if someone owns a book, needs to make a copy of it and to change it so that they can access it, to allow them to do so—it seems so jolly obvious. I am delighted with the whole idea of educational establishments having that right if they are not run for profit. That should ensure that there is an open door. I am mortified that the Churches are struggling to ensure that they have copies for all their—I cannot think of the word—

Roger Casale: Congregations.

Ms Taylor: What a good word. The hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) and I are great singers. We would want copies to be available. We hope that the Churches get that together speedily.

I have so little time and I know that another colleague wants to speak. I am an enthusiast of the Bill. I have spoken to members of the Teesside and District Society for the Blind about it; they are enthusiasts. The chairman of that organisation is completely blind. He is a local radio producer, and he is delighted that the Bill has been introduced.

Many blind people and people who are visually impaired believe that they are Cinderellas. They are unconfident. They think that we do not care about them. They will begin to see today that they are not a forgotten group, that there are many champions and that the Bill truly begins that process for all of them. I compliment my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West on what is a very good Bill. It opens doors for many people, many of whom we will, I hope, get to know in the near future.

2.13 pm

Linda Gilroy (Plymouth, Sutton): It is a great pleasure to be here to support my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West (Rachel Squire). I have been tracking the progress of the Bill on the Royal National Institute for the Blind website. It described it as a fundamental question of social inclusion, which other hon. Members with their enthusiasm obviously appreciate.

I come to the Third Reading debate to support my hon. Friend, having been present on 10 May and on Second Reading on 15 March, although I did not have the benefit of serving on the Standing Committee that scrutinised the Bill. I have had the benefit of listening to my hon. Friend's report on that. I also took the opportunity yesterday evening to read the *Hansard* record of that stage of the Bill. It records the care with which she and others have refined and improved the Bill. I am impressed with that care and with the range of expertise that a number of hon. Members on both sides of the House have brought to it—there was the usual legal and technical experience that one hopes to have available—including the chair of the all-party group on eye health, which I had not realised existed until I read the *Hansard* of the Standing Committee.

The Bill and its consideration have drawn on a range of expertise to which my hon. Friend and others have referred. The care taken has resulted in a measure that meets the high expectations expressed in the policy statement on the RNIB website, which states:

> "We seek legislation which:
>
> a) asserts visually impaired people's rights to equitable access to all published information;
>
> b) enshrines rights, and does not merely create vehicles for permission;
>
> c) is not tied to particular formats of particular technologies;
>
> d) is future proof;
>
> e) focuses on the individual end-user, not the format".

It also refers to a number of other factors. My hon. Friend's Bill lives up to those high standards. It is a tall order, but my hon. Friend and those working with her have produced a measure that looks as though it will stand the test of time. I hear what she said about databases and we shall certainly follow the issue with interest. Perhaps the House will give it further consideration in future.

The Bill consolidates previous voluntary agreements with sound and comprehensive provisions; the principles that it lays down will become increasingly necessary as technology brings even more diversity to the means of production, distribution and access to creative works. The Bill will overcome some of the dreadful delays and refusals to grant permission that, as debates on this Bill today and previously have illustrated, remain far too common despite the goodwill of many authors and publishers. It will also give people with visual impairment opportunities to fulfil their potential to read, to learn, to work and to participate fully in society. It has received careful consideration and scrutiny and represents a fair balance between the rights of people with visual impairment to access material in the format of their choice, and the ability of copyright owners to monitor what is happening and obtain copyright royalties in circumstances where their interests might otherwise be prejudiced.

In her letter urging us to attend today's debate and support the Bill my hon. Friend told us that the RNIB estimates suggest that more than 3,000 people in the average parliamentary constituency have some visual impairment. I am pleased to be here today to thank my hon. Friend and support her endeavours to help her constituents, mine and those of every hon. Member here today or otherwise serving their constituents in the various activities that usually occupy us on Fridays. I hope that the Bill receives the same reception in the other place as it has here.

2.18 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Miss Melanie Johnson): I add my congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West (Rachel Squire) on introducing the Bill and my thanks to the impressive list of people who have contributed to the Bill being in the shape it is and being considered in the House today.

We have heard once again how the Bill will considerably assist visually impaired people who are currently unable to read so much of the material that we all take for granted, ranging from books, magazines and newspapers to maps, washing machine instructions and knitting or cross-stitch patterns. However, the Bill must also take into account the legitimate interests of copyright owners. Government support has therefore been conditional on maintaining an appropriate balance between copyright owners and visually impaired people.

As hon. Members—and sometimes delightful ones—know, the Government have helped with the drafting of the Bill to remove certain technical deficiencies and build in some additional safeguards for copyright owners. My hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West has already reviewed a number of important points, but it might be helpful if I comment on concerns that I have discussed recently with rights holders.

Those concerns relate to the multiple copy exception to copyright, which applies only when accessible copies are made and supplied by an approved body to visually impaired people for their personal use. Rights holders have expressed a desire for a narrower definition of approved body because of the difficulty of identifying which bodies might seek to rely on that exception. However, the making of accessible copies must be notified to rights holders within a reasonable time; copyright owners will therefore be well placed to learn what activity occurs under the copyright exception and which bodies are involved.

We have already promised guidance so that approved bodies will understand their obligations should they choose to help visually impaired people by activity under the exception. I have recently promised some of the organisations representing rights holders that we shall consult them as we draft guidance, but we must also make sure that organisations such as the RNIB play a part both by helping us to make the guidance as clear as possible, and by helping to disseminate the guidance to those bodies that are able to act under the second exception.

We do not feel that it would be right to narrow further the definition of an approved body so as to limit the potential range of bodies that could help visually impaired people. Much of the work of transcription into alternative formats is likely to be done by national organisations that help visually impaired people in particular, but given the range of material—much of which we have heard about during the debate—that might need to be put into an alternative format, and the cost of doing that, it would be unhelpful to visually impaired people to choose a narrow definition of approved body. That could prevent many other not-for-profit bodies that may occasionally want to act from being able to do so under the Bill.

Clause 5, which inserts new section 31E into the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, gives the Secretary of State the power to vary the scope of the multiple copy exception to copyright where there has been an infringement of copyright as a result of activity under the Bill on a scale that would not otherwise have arisen. That provision is extremely important given that there is no restriction on the type of accessible copy that can be made, or on the type of not-for-profit body that can act under the exception.

The order-making power applies either where certain, or certain types, of approved bodies have behaved irresponsibly to the extent that copyright infringement has had a serious impact on copyright owners, or where the making of certain types of accessible copy has had a similar effect. For the record, I state categorically that we are prepared to use that power as a matter of urgency to disapply the exception from a particular body that is claiming to act under the exception if it is involved in activity that seriously undermines rights holders' interests. We are also ready to introduce an order with a more general effect should the exception lead to serious harm of a more general nature. The process for dealing with complaints from rights holders about abuse of that exception can be set out in more detail in the guidance.

Approved bodies that decide to act under the legislation to make much-needed accessible copies for visually impaired people must appreciate that they have a responsibility to observe all the conditions in the legislation or in a licence provided under the licensing scheme. If they do so, they will be able to give real assistance to visually impaired people who cannot currently access copyright material, and the Bill will represent a major step forward in reducing the social exclusion of visually impaired people. If they do not, those bodies must understand that we shall be prepared to use the order-making power in appropriate cases.

The other matter about which copyright owners are especially concerned is the meaning of the phrase "reasonably practicable" in new section 31B(8). In determining whether it is reasonably practicable to re-apply copyright protection technology, the cost of doing so is not intended to be a relevant factor, and the guidance we have promised can certainly cover that point as well. The test is really one of whether re-applying it is technically possible: for example, there would be no point in insisting that copy protection that made the copyright work inaccessible in the first place should be put back on.

Advances in technology do, however, provide an opportunity to ensure that an original lack of access due to incompatibility between copy protection and visually impaired people's access technology does not even arise. If the original digital copy is accessible to all, it will not be possible to act under this exception. Technology can help only if everyone understands each other's problem and is willing to help find the solution, so it will be necessary for the organisations representing the rights holders and those representing visually impaired people to work with those who develop the relevant technologies to ensure that lack of access does not inadvertently arise in the first place.

The multiple copy exception is rightly overridden where copyright owners have set up a licensing scheme, because it must not totally remove the copyright owners' ability to seek remuneration by way of a copyright royalty. Of course, licensing under a licensing scheme can also be used to give copyright owners a valuable closer relationship with approved bodies.

New section 31D does not allow a licensing scheme to be "unreasonably restrictive", and that is defined in subsection (2) to rule out in general any terms or conditions that would restrict the doing of anything that would be possible under section 31B or 31C. Clearly, that makes sense, but I would like to comment on which body can decide what is unreasonably restrictive. The Copyright Tribunal is an independent body already established by copyright law to decide more generally whether terms and conditions of licensing schemes are "reasonable in the circumstances".

For licensing schemes set up in this new area, part of the Copyright Tribunal's judgment of what is reasonable in the circumstances could concern whether the scheme is unreasonably restrictive, but we have been encouraging those setting up or changing licensing schemes in any area to consult fully the representatives of those who will be affected by the schemes: the users of the copyright material.

We are ready to facilitate any discussions about licensing schemes in this area, if necessary, so that concerns about opposed schemes that might be unreasonably restrictive can be addressed at an early stage. That should give all concerned greater certainty that a scheme is not one that can be challenged as unreasonably restrictive.

New section 31C permits an approved body to keep intermediate copies against their future use to make more accessible copies. An approved body can also lend or transfer an intermediate copy, but only to another approved body that is entitled to make accessible copies of the copyright work itself under section 31B. It would be wrong to permit the transfer of an intermediate copy to a body that could not use it under the exception, as there would be a high risk that it would use it for an illegal purpose. Moreover, that limitation means that an intermediate copy can be transferred only to another approved body in the UK, as section 31B will be inserted in UK copyright law and cannot apply to what people do in other countries.

I, too, am concerned that the Bill will not allow databases to be copied without infringing copyright. As I said in Committee, we are taking up the matter with the Commission, including in the context of the current review of the database directive.

The Bill provides all the necessary checks and balances, while offering the prospect of real help for visually impaired people. Several hon. Members have explained just how important that help is, and just how much it will be valued. I am delighted to reaffirm the Government's continuing support for the Bill.

I offer my hon. Friend my warmest congratulations on having brought the Bill so far through so much hard work, and I share other hon. Members' admiration for all her efforts. I hope that it will continue to receive the widespread support in the other place that it has rightly enjoyed thus far in the House of Commons. I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Firearms (Replica Weapons) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. David Atkinson (Bournemouth, East): I beg to move, That the Bill be read a Second Time.

In moving Second Reading—

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed on Friday 19 July.

Remaining Private Members' Bills

SEX DISCRIMINATION (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

To be read a Second time on Friday 28 June.

CONTROL OF FIREWORKS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Not moved.

BROADCASTING ACT 1990 (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

To be read a Second time on Friday 19 July.

FOOD LABELLING BILL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Second Reading [2 November 2001].

Hon. Members: Object.

Debate further adjourned till Friday 19 July.

ORGAN DONATION (PRESUMED CONSENT AND SAFEGUARDS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT (EMPLOYMENT DISQUALIFICATION) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved

TELECOMMUNICATIONS TRANSMITTERS (RESTRICTIONS ON PLANNING APPLICATIONS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

VACCINATION OF CHILDREN (PARENTAL CHOICE) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

To be read a Second time on Friday 19 July.

PATIENTS WITHOUT LEGAL CAPACITY (SAFEGUARDS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

To be read a Second time on Friday 19 July.

COMPULSORY VOTING BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved

DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION (AMENDMENT) BILL [*LORDS*]

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

REGULATION OF CHILD CARE PROVIDERS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

To be read a Second time on Friday 19 July.

AREA CHILD PROTECTION COMMITTEES BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

To be read a Second time on Friday 19 July.

DATA PROTECTION (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

To be read a Second time on Friday 19 July.

SEX DISCRIMINATION (AMENDMENT) (No. 2) BILL [*LORDS*]

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

To be read a Second time on Friday 28 June.

Social Exclusion (Edmonton)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Jim Fitzpatrick.]*

2.33 pm

Mr. Andrew Love (Edmonton): I want to highlight the level of deprivation and social exclusion in my constituency, which is characterised by a weakened economic base resulting in concentrated unemployment and consequently social disadvantage and a poor physical environment. I shall illustrate that with reference to two recent residents' surveys in the area, the first by MORI, which was carried out in our neighbourhood renewal area. The neighbourhood renewal scheme covers the 10 per cent. of most deprived wards in the country, including four wards in my constituency; 30 per cent. of my constituents or 24,000 people live in those wards. Just over 1,000 respondents were interviewed by MORI, which gives the study a reasonably good statistical reliability of plus or minus 3 per cent. A small area study was also carried out in one of my neighbourhood renewal wards, which has about 1,500 residents. Two hundred people responded, so reliability is not as good—plus or minus 7 per cent.

The findings of both studies are interesting. For example, there is a high incidence of households with children—43 per cent., compared with a national figure of about 29 per cent. There is a high incidence of one-parent families locally—17 per cent., against a national figure of 7 per cent. Perhaps not so surprisingly, the studies showed a large ethnic minority population—about 43 per cent. If we include the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities, that rises to 50 per cent.

The area shows all the classic signs of deprivation and disadvantage, such as low skills—35 per cent. have no qualifications at all; poverty—the average weekly income in the area is £294, which does not compare well with the London average of £492; low self-esteem—only 26 per cent. of local people think that the area has community spirit, compared with 49 per cent. at national level.

Like many other local authorities, Enfield has a wide variety of area-based initiatives. I mentioned my neighbourhood renewal area, covering four of the most deprived wards. There is also a sure start initiative, involving 67,000 local residents; an objective 2 area for European structural funding, which runs up the eastern side of my constituency; and an education action zone, which stands out a little from all the other initiatives.

The problem is that all the various initiatives overlap in a way that is confusing to local people. There are separate departmental objectives and priorities. Some are driven locally through the local authority, some regionally and some at the departmental level. For example, economic regeneration has become the responsibility of the London Development Agency, but social regeneration is still locally driven.

We often speak of neighbourhoods, but everyone has a different definition of the term. Recently in the London borough of Enfield, the ward level, which has been the traditional proxy for the neighbourhood, has just increased in size by 50 per cent. because of boundary changes.

All that leads to additional complexity, greater fragmentation and bureaucratic overload. When are we going to reduce the number of separate area-based initiatives? How can we reduce and, we hope, eliminate overlap at local level, which is so confusing to people? What impetus is being given at departmental level to prioritising greater coherence, focus and targeting in our most deprived areas?

Last year, following the national consultation exercise carried out by the social exclusion unit, the national strategy action plan entitled "A new commitment to neighbourhood renewal" was produced. That outlined the need for a long-term comprehensive approach to deprivation and tried to address that on the basis that

> "No one should be seriously disadvantaged by where they live".

The plan set a time scale of 10 to 20 years for achieving that.

A neighbourhood renewal fund was created to narrow the gap between the most deprived 10 per cent. of areas and the rest of the country. In Enfield we received £4 million, which was allocated to the four wards that I mentioned over a three-year period. The local authority has chosen—rightly, in my view—to include a fifth ward that was not designated, because of the severe disadvantage experienced by people living there.

Within the neighbourhood renewal function, the local authority retains the flexibility to use some of those funds for disadvantaged areas across the entire local authority. As a result, neighbourhood renewal must address health, crime, housing and the environment, and try to narrow the gap between the level of all those services locally and the average across the country.

I accept that that cannot be done without the bending or re-allocation of mainstream services discussed in the report, but I believe that the target is ambitious and the time scale tight. It is important to recognise the pump-priming role of neighbourhood renewal funding in creating new and innovative services and changing the way in which mainstream services are provided in the locality. We need to give careful consideration to the level of resources that will be needed in our neighbourhood renewal function if we are to achieve the objectives that we have set for it.

Similarly, we need to look carefully at and address the significant erosion that there has been in social capital in deprived areas, and my study contained some alarming conclusions. Only 17 per cent. of the population are actively involved in any way in the community, and in the past year, only 15 per cent. have done any voluntary work, and that is against a backdrop nationally of 24 per cent. But perhaps the most surprising finding was that 70 per cent. of people said that they did not want to be involved in any way.

If regeneration is to be successful in such an area, the first thing that we must do is to create a sense of ownership for what is happening in the community, and people must feel involved and empowered through the process. The only way in which that can be achieved is to build capacity locally. That was traditionally a service that was provided through the single regeneration budget, but as the Minister will know, that ended with round 6. Those budgets have now been absorbed into the regional development agencies, and they are given flexibility to pursue their own objectives. The RDAs recently issued a statement saying that they will continue to prioritise social regeneration, but people question how much of a priority will be given to that capacity building.

Last year Enfield received £59,000 in neighbourhood renewal funding. If that is the only source of capacity building, frankly, we will not be able to achieve much, so, again, I should like those budgets to be expanded so that we can address the real decline in social capital locally.

The action plan that was brought forward highlights the need to co-ordinate services and to address the needs of each locality, and it does that through what is called a local strategic partnership. One was set up in each of the 88 designated districts throughout the country. After a pretty sticky start, I have to admit that Enfield's strategic partnership is now up and running and, I believe, functioning effectively. It is certainly bringing together the public, private and voluntary sectors, as was intended.

But the strategic partnership has not yet achieved any links with the local communities that it is supposed to serve. Although a forum that brings together the police, the local authority, the NHS and the education department is a good thing in itself, it will not necessarily end up being accountable to the community. It could just as easily, like many of those services themselves, become remote and unresponsive. We need to create links with the community and to inspire people to become involved, to participate and to support the objectives that we are trying to achieve.

That can best be done through neighbourhood management, and there have been some pathfinders. Sadly, last year, because the view was taken that the local strategic partnership had not developed to the proper extent, Enfield was not included. But if we are to overcome the problems that I think exist in my local neighbourhood renewal area, it is critical that we have one of those neighbourhood management pathfinders in order to carry out our work.

Much of the neighbourhood decline can be traced back to the rise in unemployment that comes when industries move away and, classically, that is what happened in my neighbourhood renewal area, where unemployment levels are significant. I want to illustrate that by drawing a comparison with two other areas, not in Enfield but in the authority next door, which the Minister will know well. One is a new deal for communities area in Seven Sisters and the other is a single regeneration budget area in Northumberland Park. I choose Northumberland Park because it lies immediately adjacent to my neighbourhood renewal area. Both those areas cover a significant population of between 12,000 to 15,000 people.

Unemployment in the ward immediately adjacent to Northumberland Park stands at about 11 per cent. In Northumberland Park, unemployment is 13 per cent. In Seven Sisters, it is 14 per cent. Of the long-term unemployed in my area, one in four have been unemployed for more than a year. Perhaps surprisingly, the study shows that there is a significant lack of motivation among the unemployed—84 per cent. are not looking for work. The Government introduced an employment zone to deal with that deep-seated unemployment in the Northumberland Park and Seven Sisters area. That has been a good development. Their evaluation of the past two years of employment zones shows that more than 17,000 jobs have been created in the 15 zones around the country—at no cost to the Government. Extension of employment zones is long overdue. As I am immediately adjacent to the Haringey

[Mr. Andrew Love]

employment zone, where there are high levels of deep-seated unemployment, it is important that Enfield should be given some consideration when that happens.

Finally, I want to talk about the levels of deprivation and poverty in my area. As I said earlier, the gross weekly wage in the neighbourhood renewal area is around £294 per week, but in the most deprived ward it is as low as £218. If one compares that with Northumberland Park, at £228, or the new deal for communities area, at £239, one realises that the area is very deprived. Thirty per cent. of local people are on housing benefit and 23 per cent. are on income support. One in three people find it extremely difficult to cope on their income.

We have to deal with the multiple problems of deprivation that my constituents face. To do that, we need a range of different programmes—a strengthened neighbourhood renewal process, a neighbourhood management pathfinder to link into the community to involve and mobilise it to support what we are trying to achieve, and, perhaps most importantly, an extended employment zone.

Taking forward the neighbourhood renewal objectives is a laudable aim that I wholeheartedly support, but we can achieve the major objective of bringing the 10 per cent. who are most deprived up to the average only by targeting investment and support at the most deprived communities.

2.47 pm

The Minister for Social Exclusion and Deputy Minister for Women (Mrs. Barbara Roche): I begin by warmly congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love) on his success in securing the debate, and on the cogent and thorough way in which he advanced his arguments. I am delighted to be able to respond both as Minister for Social Exclusion and as the Member of Parliament for a neighbouring constituency.

As my hon. Friend said, social exclusion covers a wide range of issues. The Government's social exclusion unit has carried out projects on subjects such as truancy and school exclusions, rough sleepers and teenage pregnancies. However, I shall concentrate on neighbourhood renewal.

Edmonton suffers from many of the characteristics of the inner city, which were well described by my hon. Friend. The local neighbourhood renewal strategy identifies local people's key concerns as fear of crime, poor local environment, high unemployment, low incomes and poor access to health care. Those concerns perfectly reflect the linked problems that often combine to socially exclude individuals and communities. However, I know that my hon. Friend would agree that for many communities such as Edmonton, disadvantage is not their defining feature. There is another side to Edmonton. Despite its problems, it remains a vibrant, friendly and multicultural area with enormous potential. It also benefits from a strong and active local community. My hon. Friend was right to say that local buy-in is necessary for the initiatives and the neighbourhood renewal to succeed. That is crucial to the success of the neighbourhood renewal programmes that are happening in Edmonton now.

As my hon. Friend said, Enfield, in which Edmonton falls, was identified by the national strategy for neighbourhood renewal as one of the 88 areas to receive additional funding for regeneration. The community in Edmonton has embraced the new opportunities that the funding provides, but I accept that we have responsibilities, too.

For more than 20 years, under-investment in areas such as Edmonton has meant that places with the most need often receive the worst services. We have witnessed the problems that poor services can store up—unemployment, disaffection, deteriorating environment, vandalism and crime. That is why, in 1997, the Prime Minister set up the social exclusion unit and established tackling social exclusion as a key priority for the Government.

Eighteen months ago, the social exclusion unit published the national strategy for neighbourhood renewal. That is now being taken forward by the neighbourhood renewal unit. It is a long-term strategy that aims to make postcode poverty a thing of the past, and to ensure that in 10 to 20 years, no one should be seriously disadvantaged by where they live.

The principle at the core of the strategy, and all our programmes to tackle social exclusion, is to make mainstream services work properly for everyone. My hon. Friend rightly highlighted that. We are pumping extra money—some further £43 million in total—into public services in the next three years. My priority is to make sure that that money helps those communities that need it most. That is why Departments are being measured on where they are doing well, not on the average. We have introduced floor targets—the minimum standard that every area in the country should reach—for, for example, health, education, crime and housing. "Floor targets" is a bureaucratic term for action that is incredibly exciting. They are the social equivalent of the minimum wage. For deprived communities, they will mean better schools, improved health care, safer streets and better housing. All sectors must work together to make sure that that happens.

I was pleased to hear my hon. Friend's remarks about Enfield's local strategic partnership. It has brought together the local authority, local businesses, the voluntary sector and community groups to provide new initiatives and services on crime, health, employment, housing, the environment, and education and skills training. Their draft neighbourhood renewal strategy outlines how the partnership will spend the £4.2 million Enfield has been allocated through the neighbourhood renewal fund.

The national £900 million neighbourhood renewal fund was established by the Government to help local authorities and their partners improve core public services. They can spend the funding not only on their services, but on community groups and the services of providers such as the national health service. To achieve those challenging targets, all providers must ensure that they own the services that they want to provide. I know that that is important in the Enfield area, where access to primary health care is a concern. In Enfield, neighbourhood renewal funding is currently contributing to the Fit for Life programme at the Healthy Living centre.

Further funding for neighbourhood renewal has been allocated to Enfield through the community empowerment fund—more than £300,000 for three years. Enfield Voluntary Action is now co-ordinating the development of the community empowerment network.

What else are we doing? Nearly £200,000 has been allocated to Enfield through the neighbourhood renewal community chest for the first two years. These were established by the Government to provide easily accessible small grants of between £50 and £5,000 to community groups. In Enfield, the Scarman trust administered awarding the grants in the first year, with the community empowerment network participating on the decision-making panel. So far the response has been encouraging. Edmonton has also developed its own regeneration projects. The Edmonton partnership initiative is a major scheme aimed at improving the local area, and all sections of the community are working together on it.

We are currently working across government to ensure that the outcomes of the spending review continue to support the aims of neighbourhood renewal funding. My hon. Friend will forgive me if I do not comment on the outcome of the review, but my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will be making an announcement in due course.

I understand the disappointment that the people of Edmonton felt at not being successful in their bid to be a neighbourhood management pathfinder in the first round. We will be considering whether there should be a second pathfinder round, and what form it should take. I understand my hon. Friend's comments on that matter.

I am also aware that unemployment is a significant problem in Edmonton, with nearly 70 per cent. of the population receiving some form of benefit. Running alongside the new deal, employment zones are one of the initiatives that the Government are testing to tackle long-term unemployment. Between April 2000 and the end of February 2002, they helped more than 22,000 people into work.

My hon. Friend is right to talk about the success of what has happened in Haringey. The employment zone there has been performing particularly well. In the first year of its operation, 55 per cent. of the jobseekers in the zone found work, of whom more than 80 per cent. were still in employment after 13 weeks. Decisions on the future development of employment zones will be made in the light of emerging evaluation findings. We expect initial results to become available in December 2002.

We should also applaud the good work that is already going on to help people in Edmonton find work. For example, the New Direction training centre is providing vocational training in road safety, communication skills and business start-up, to enable local people to become self-employed. The technology centre is supporting new and existing community and micro-businesses owned or managed by women, and the Enfield Employment Network is delivering projects targeting individuals and—very importantly—building links with local employers. The New Direction training centre is also attracting people into the copywriting and design business in the Paper Project. There are, therefore, important things going on.

My hon. Friend rightly mentioned the importance of capacity building, and I absolutely agree with what he said. There is a vital role to be played by the regional development agencies in tackling unemployment and supporting local economies through the local strategic partnerships. As part of the 2000 spending review, regional development agencies were given an expanded role as strategic drivers of regional economic development, and they will benefit from a larger and more flexible budget of around £500 million more per year by 2003–04.

The Government's approach—giving communities the opportunity to set their own priorities and the support to develop their own initiatives—represents a fundamental change. I say frankly to my hon. Friend that I recognise that these new ways of working have inevitably led to some stresses and strains, especially over shared decision making with community groups, and over local priorities and their financing. I am sure he would agree that "partnership" is an extremely easy word to use, but it requires a great deal of time and effort to make it work.

I appreciate what my hon. Friend said about the number of area-based initiatives. That matter has been brought to the Government's attention and we are looking closely at it. The Government's regional co-ordination unit is carrying out a review of area-based initiatives, which aims to tackle the problems of variety and complexity that my hon. Friend mentioned, and improve the way in which they interact with other local activity.

It is important that the local strategic partnerships work well and have a role that is understood by everybody and that seeks to knit some of those issues together. It is absolutely right that the Enfield local strategic partnership is now emerging as a key player in the regeneration of the area. I wish it all the best and look forward to seeing it go from strength to strength.

What emerged very clearly from my hon. Friend's speech is that strong leadership at all levels is absolutely necessary. I know that he never misses an opportunity vigorously to put the case for Edmonton, and the potential exists for that community to move forward. We must develop local people's skills by building on those that they already have but, importantly, by building on their confidence. I was struck by the survey figures that my hon. Friend gave the House at the beginning of his speech.

These communities need the confidence to break the cycle of deprivation in their neighbourhoods, and the only way that they can do that is by having initiatives of this kind, which are not led at the top but driven by local communities and local people. I feel absolutely sure that, with my hon. Friend's leadership, his community will succeed.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at two minutes past Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 24 June 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Regional Theatres

1. **Paul Farrelly** (Newcastle-under-Lyme): What steps the Government are taking to support theatre in the regions. [61216]

The Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting (Dr. Kim Howells): Following an extensive review of the needs of regional theatre throughout England, the Arts Council of England is, from 1 April this year, investing an additional £12 million in supporting nearly 200 theatre organisations. This figure will rise to £25 million in 2003–04 and after, bringing the total grant-in-aid figure for theatre to £70 million a year.

Paul Farrelly: I thank the Minister for his reply. Perhaps he is aware that the New Victoria theatre in my constituency, a magnificent theatre-in-the-round, is one of the regional organisations to benefit from the largesse of the Arts Council and the Government, with an increase of 50 per cent. over the next three years. Can we expect that commitment to regional arts to continue into the future, silencing those miserable moaners who say that we are doing nothing for the arts outside London?

Dr. Howells: As my hon. Friend points out, the figures represent considerable increases in support for the arts, in particular for theatres. I assure him that the need to continue to support the arts, which is such an important part of investment in this country, will continue.

Ms Dari Taylor (Stockton, South): In warmly welcoming the Minister's statement, may I ask whether the Arc, Stockton is included in the announcement? Arc was closed last autumn in a most unfortunate way. Will the Arts Council and my right hon. Friend's Department offer safety-net options for theatres that are closed in such an untimely way?

Dr. Howells: I understand that the theatre in question is receiving a considerable increase in funding and a good deal of financial help. I am certain that if the case is put to the Arts Council, it will receive sympathetic consideration.

Euro 2008

2. **Angus Robertson** (Moray): What recent discussions she has had with the Scottish Executive regarding the Euro 2008 bid. [61217]

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Richard Caborn): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I discussed the bid with interested Scottish Ministers at the devolved Administrations sports cabinet on 18 June last week. My right hon. Friend had previously met the Scottish Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport on 18 March to discuss how the Department for Culture, Media and Sport may best support the bid. Officials in my Department have been working closely since then with the Scottish Executive.

Angus Robertson: I thank the Minister for his reply. I am sure he will join me in welcoming the England football team home following their excellent performances in the World cup in Korea and Japan. Does he agree with me and the majority of people in Scotland that the hosting of a major football competition would have enormous benefits for sport and tourism in Scotland and throughout the rest of these islands? If so, can he assure the House that his Department will give its full and unqualified support for Scotland's joint bid with the Republic of Ireland for the European championships in 2008?

Mr. Caborn: My right hon. Friend confirmed our support to UEFA in April this year, giving a clear indication that the Government gave the guarantees expected by UEFA. We fully support that bid and Ministers have discussed it, but at the end of the day it is a decision for the devolved Administration.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): May I offer my more sincere condolences on England's premature exit from the World cup? Is it not the case that the World cup is a marvellous benefit for the host countries? I thank my right hon. Friend for all that he has done for the joint bid, which has been greatly enhanced by the way in which Ireland performed in the World cup. Does that not show that it was a wise decision for Scotland to go for a joint bid, rather than a sole bid?

Mr. Caborn: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. We will support the joint bid, but as I said, it is a decision for the devolved Administration. The British Government have given a commitment to UEFA, but the decision rests with the Scottish Executive.

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): Has there been a single achievement or action of the Labour Government in the past five years that makes it likely that any part of the United Kingdom will attract a big international sporting event? Last year, Britain became the first developed country in the world to suffer the humiliation of having to renege on its commitment to host the world athletics championships. Last week, the Secretary of State showed her expertise on football by claiming to have kept in touch via text messages with what was happening in England's World cup match against Nigeria, on the day when everyone else in the country knew that we were playing

Denmark. Is not the most helpful thing that Ministers could do to assist the Euro 2008 bid to keep their mouths firmly shut?

Mr. Caborn: The hon. Gentleman's comments about my right hon. Friend are uncharacteristic.

In the next two or three weeks, one of the largest sporting events in the world, involving 17 disciplines, will be taking place—the Commonwealth games. I think that it will be a huge success for the north-west and for the entire country. A little later this year, the Ryder cup will be taking place. It will be the first team event after the tragic events of 11 September in which we have been involved. We have been helping the organisers of the Ryder cup. Many events are taking place, and it is unfortunate that the hon. Gentleman keeps harking back to a decision that I believe was taken correctly. It has been acknowledged by international committees that we took the right decision. It has also been acknowledged that it was a courageous decision.

Mr. Derek Wyatt (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): Has my right hon. Friend had any discussions with the Scottish Executive about England's bid for the rugby World cup in 2007? We shall need Scotland's vote to win that bid.

Mr. Caborn: My hon. Friend raised the issue with me in the Lobby last week. I have made contact and we are exploring how support can be given.

Ofcom Office (Scotland)

3. **Pete Wishart** (North Tayside): What recent discussions she has had with the Scottish Executive regarding the establishment of an Ofcom office in Scotland. [61219]

The Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting (Dr. Kim Howells): The Scottish Executive, along with other devolved Administrations, are aware of our proposals for ensuring that the interests of the different parts of the UK are represented within Ofcom, and we have exchanged correspondence on this issue. This includes the proposal that Ofcom should have an office in Scotland.

Pete Wishart: I am grateful to the Minister for that response. I am not surprised that he is being selective in his account of his recent dealings with the Scottish Executive. Will he confirm that the Scottish First Minister has written twice recently describing his concerns about the lack of representation on the Ofcom board? It seems that there has not been a reply to the second letter for four weeks. Following what can only be described as an unseemly and embarrassing squabble between the Minister's Department and the Scottish Executive, with the Scotland Office also getting involved, we find that what we have in Scotland is some small sub-committee that goes no way to satisfying the concerns of the broadcasting community in Scotland. Will the Minister confirm that Scotland is still deprived of a place on the Ofcom board? Does he agree that this can only disadvantage the broadcasting community within Scotland?

Dr. Howells: As someone who in the right mood will cross a road for a row, I can usually pick them up when they are around, and I have noticed no squabble between the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and anyone in Scotland. The idea is that a small board for Ofcom will react quickly and with energy. The nations and regions of the country will have their interests well represented on the content board.

Mr. Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith): Is my hon. Friend aware that at the weekend the managing director of Scottish Television said that he thought that

> "the way the bill is written at the moment is a very, very good"

solution

> "for regional broadcasting in the future",

and that it

> "clearly protects quality and diversity"?

Is not that the real voice of those in Scotland who are concerned about broadcasting in Scotland? I suggest that my hon. Friend listens to that voice rather than to the negative voices that we have heard from Opposition Members this afternoon.

Dr. Howells: I could not agree more. I am glad that I did not answer the hon. Member for North Tayside (Pete Wishart) with the words, "Never believe anything you read in the press."

Mr. Boris Johnson (Henley): Is Ofcom, whether in England or Scotland, expected in its competition mode to offer any hope to small educational software firms, such as one in my constituency, which are about to find their markets swamped by £150 million worth of BBC educational software? Can anything be done to allay their fears that unfair competition will be practised by the BBC?

Dr. Howells: Competition issues are important and fair trade, as it has come to be known in the sector, should properly be practised and policed. I believe that the Office of Comunications Bill, or at least the Communications Bill, when it becomes law, will provide the means to ensure that there is fair competition for everyone who wants to take part in the sector.

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): As the purpose of establishing an Ofcom office in Scotland would presumably be to serve Scottish consumers, will the Minister say whether he considers that those consumers would benefit more if digital terrestrial television offered only free-to-air channels or a mix of free-to-air and pay television channels?

Dr. Howells: That is a matter for the regulator, not for Ministers.

Motor Sport

4. **Richard Burden** (Birmingham, Northfield): If she will make a statement on her Department's efforts to promote motor sport in the UK. [61220]

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Richard Caborn): The promotion of motor sport in the UK is a matter for the Motor Sports Association, the sport's governing body. However, the Government fully support motor sport.

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport is working closely with the MSA, the Department of Trade and Industry and other sporting organisations to raise the profile of motor sport in this country.

Richard Burden: As my right hon. Friend knows, I work with him on motor sport matters. He also knows that within the past week or so, the governing body of motor sport, the FIA, has confirmed that the roadworks and other improvements around Silverstone secure the future for the grand prix this year and, let us hope, for future years as well. I thank my right hon. Friend, other members of the Government and constituency Members on both sides of the House for their efforts to secure that important sporting event in the UK. However, we cannot be complacent about the future. Formula 1 is important, but motor sport goes beyond Formula 1. We all need to do everything we can to nurture a sport in which Britain excels and an industry that is a multi-million-pound showcase for British engineering, high tech and innovation.

Mr. Caborn: My hon. Friend is right. The industry is worth £4.8 billion and directly employs some 40,000 people, so it is very important. As my hon. Friend knows, we have been trying to bring the industry and the sport together, which will make the industry a more potent force on the international scene. I thank my hon. Friend for the work that he did to make sure that the grand prix takes place at Silverstone. There were some doubts a few months ago, but they have been resolved and, as a result of co-operation across the House and with the motoring organisations, the grand prix will take place at Silverstone on 7 July.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): As the constituency Member for Silverstone, I associate myself entirely with the questioner and, in this case, with the Minister's response on a matter of great importance for employment in my constituency and the locality and, indeed, the United Kingdom as a whole. Does the Minister agree that the emphasis now should be not on recrimination for anything that went wrong in the past, but on a celebration of the fact that we have got through a difficult time and are determined together to provide an excellent experience in just under a fortnight, on 7 July? We will then use it as the basis not merely for—we hope—a sporting success, but to strengthen an industry which is of great importance in the locality and much more widely across the country.

Mr. Caborn: I welcome those remarks and reinforce them by saying that seven of the top 11 Formula 1 teams operate out of the UK, which is extremely important for the supply chain going into that. It is pleasing—even though it came out of a crisis—that the sport and the industry are now meeting. The strength of the totality of sport and industry coming together can only bode well for the future. I hope that in the near future the DTI, the DCMS and others will work closely together in a more formal way to promote the industry internationally as effectively as we can.

Mr. James Plaskitt (Warwick and Leamington): There are a number of very successful motor sport companies in Warwickshre, and one or two in my constituency. The industry makes an important contribution to the development of automotive technology, but to secure its future it needs to attract young people into it. Colleges of further education have a significant role to play in that respect. May I impress on my right hon. Friend the bid coming forward from Warwickshire college to have such a centre of excellence based there?

Mr. Caborn: I have no doubt that many will be saying that. The old saying in engineering is that what happens in Formula 1 today happens in the luxury car market tomorrow and in the volume car market the day after. The Motor Industry Association plays an important role in trying to attract young people into the industry. I know that the MIA works with both higher and further education, and I hope that through the sport we can maximise the industry.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): May I, too, pay tribute to motor sports in the United Kingdom? Motor sport is the third most watched sport after the World cup and the summer Olympics. Some 5 million television viewers watched last year's grand prix. The Minister ominously referred to a joint role for his Department and the DTI. Will he be more specific about what role his Department will play and what precisely the Government intend to do to keep the British grand prix going?

Mr. Caborn: I hope that what we will demonstrate on 7 July will compel the FIA to ensure that future grands prix will be held in the UK. In terms of the development of the industry, as I said, out of the little crisis that arose, the MSA and the MIA have been working together. The MSA has produced an ambitious development plan that clearly links in with that. We are reflecting on it, and it will then be for the Government to respond and see how we can interface with the industry.

Sport (Young People)

5. **Mr. David Heath** (Somerton and Frome): What plans she has to encourage involvement in sport by young people in the south-west. [61221]

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Richard Caborn): The Government are committed to increasing participation by young people throughout the country. My Department is working with the Department for Education and Skills to improve access to and quality of PE, school sport and club links for five to 16-year-olds in all parts of the country. A number of excellent projects are under way in the south-west.

Mr. Heath: I am grateful to the Minister for that reply, but does he accept that it is often felt that the priorities of his Department do not entirely recognise the difficulties of access in predominantly rural counties such as those in the west country? Facilities, where there are any, are located further apart and travel can be a real problem. The smaller communities desperately need help to provide equipment, pitches and the wherewithal for sport. In particular, the right hon. Gentleman mentioned school sport. Will he encourage inter-school sport, which is so desperately important in developing sport, by helping to find curricular time, helping with transport and simply encouraging schools to engage in what used to be a normal part of the school week?

Mr. Caborn: We are putting investment into sports colleges and school sports co-ordinators, but it will be the practitioners on the ground who reflect that. I should like to quote Marie Hunter, head teacher of Penryn college and community school:

> "Our schools sports co-ordinator partnership covers 7 secondary and 67 primary schools in the West of Cornwall. It is making a tremendous impact in encouraging young people to get involved in sport and in the delivery of PE in primary schools. Programme has had a marked effect on sport in the local community and has encouraged partnership working with other agencies".

I rest my case.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): I am sure that the Minister will agree that many young people in rural areas such as the south-west benefit from the community and amateur sports clubs in their areas, as they provide the opportunity of playing team games, which are not always so easily available through schools. Does he agree that the clubs that provide such help and support could do an even better job if they enjoyed mandatory rate relief? Why do the Government think that that welcome help should be available only if clubs become fully fledged charities? If Ministers really believe in them, why cannot rate relief be included in the Government's tax package, as they originally said it would be?

Mr. Caborn: On the first step towards bringing charitable status to many clubs, we submitted to every hon. Member the leaflet "Charitable Status and Amateur Sports Clubs". Some 100,000 leaflets were published in the first print a few weeks ago, and we are now having to go into a second print because of the demand. There is real appetite for community and charitable status for amateur sports clubs, and we are working on the issue. Indeed, the performance and innovation unit is considering whether sport should be provided by charity as of right with regard to amateur sports clubs, and we are exploring that possibility. I remind the hon. Gentleman, who is distinguished in the world of sport, that his Government were in power for many years, but did not explore the matter at all during their tenure.

Sport (National Lottery Funding)

6. **Dr. Vincent Cable** (Twickenham): What contributions the sports lottery is making to increasing the community use of schools for sport. [61222]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell): The national lottery is providing £581 million in England through the new opportunities fund and £55 million to the space for sport and the arts scheme for the provision at schools of sports facilities, all of which are available to the community. In addition, the national lottery has awarded £153.5 million to fund 293 school sports facilities in England, all of which are available to the community. Lottery funding for school sports facilities is conditional on community use of those facilities.

Dr. Cable: I welcome the programme, especially the £800,000 that was indicatively allocated to my borough. However, the fact that the money goes through the lottery rather than the Government means that primary schools in particular find it impossible to get access to the money because they have to demonstrate 40 hours a week of community use. Will the Secretary of State try to ensure that that rule is applied flexibly, so that in future more children under 11 have access to sport in their schools?

Tessa Jowell: Because of the inflexibility to which the hon. Gentleman refers, the 40-hours-a-week rule has been waived in recognition of the difficulties that can face small primary schools, but that does not detract from the overriding principle that investment in school sports facilities should also extend and open up opportunities to the community.

Mr. Bill O'Brien (Normanton): I thank my right hon. Friend for her contribution to the provision of resources for sports in schools. Will she take particular note of the former mining areas where the Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation used to provide substantial resources and help for schools as regards sports? That has now gone, so resources are needed to maintain the link between communities and sport. The lottery fund could fill that void. Will the Secretary of State give attention to that and help the mining villages to maintain their sports facilities?

Tessa Jowell: I take my hon. Friend's point very seriously. He is right in two respects. It is important to ensure, first, that coalfield communities get their fair share of lottery funds and, secondly, that children in those communities are able to benefit from opportunities to participate in sport. For the first time ever, we have a major programme of investment in sport facilities, amounting to more than £1.1 billion across the United Kingdom, which is linked to the introduction of school sport co-ordinators and primary liaison teachers. That will ensure that every child has the opportunity to enjoy sport both in and out of school. That is good for their academic achievement, improves their health and reduces crime. It is also good for the well-being of communities and the ambitions of the nation as whole.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): Will the Secretary of State join me in praising the England and Wales Cricket Board for the various innovative measures that it has introduced to increase participation in cricket, not only by those in school, but by those in clubs who have left school but are using school facilities? Does she recognise that one of the problems involved in community use of school sports facilities is that although she and her predecessor promised many times to stop the sale of school sports fields, a report for her own Department has shown that the increase in sales of school sports fields, many by Labour-controlled local authorities, increased by 60 per cent. last year? If she could stop that and put sport back into the core curriculum, sports facilities would improve across the board.

Tessa Jowell: First, I pay tribute to the governing bodies that are taking seriously their role in introducing young people to sport and in providing high-quality coaching, so that the great cricketers, great rugby players and, especially at this time, great footballers of today, who are role models for young people, provide the basis of children's aspirations to do as well as they have done.

Secondly, the hon. Gentleman is, frankly, way wide of the mark. As my predecessor, the right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), has made clear, under the previous Tory Government the sale of playing fields was running at about 40 a month, and the only way in which many schools could raise the necessary assets to build laboratories or new classrooms was to sell their playing fields. For the past five years, since 1997, we have tried to reverse that trend, and we have done so with great success. The £1.1 billion going from the lottery into improved facilities is evidence of that.

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford): On the first day of Wimbledon, does my right hon. Friend accept that when I recently launched the new out-of-school-hours courses at Rising Brook high school in Stafford, there was widespread interest by students in the school and youngsters in the surrounding community? *[Interruption.]* Very good; I shall return the shot later. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the way forward is through partnership between the schools, the lottery and the various sports associations if we are to achieve more smash hits in the future?

Tessa Jowell: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. As my right hon. Friend the Minister for Sport said, the Commonwealth games are only weeks away in this summer of sport. The governing bodies, including the Lawn Tennis Association, have a vital role in ensuring that they recruit the next generation of young champions for the future.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): Let us return to the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) made about playing fields. Does not the Secretary of State agree that although most schools are good at making their facilities more widely available in the community, especially in West Sussex, they can do little about it if the playing fields are sold from under their feet? Despite her protestations, the sale of school playing fields has recently reached record levels. Will she speak to Ministers in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and ensure that school playing fields can be sold for housing development only in the most exceptional circumstances, given their importance to the wider community?

Tessa Jowell: It is a pleasure to hold exchanges with the hon. Gentleman across the Floor, but he is talking rubbish about the Government's record. He is trying to conceal the Conservative Government's guilty past, which the Government are trying to rectify for the benefit of children by unprecedented investment in improved sports facilities, including £15 million to improve and upgrade playing field facilities.

Film Industry

7. **Barbara Follett** (Stevenage): What measures her Department is taking to support the British film industry. [61223]

The Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting (Dr. Kim Howells): In April 2000, we established the Film Council as the Government's strategic lead body for film which, for the first time, brought together responsibility for the film industry, culture and education.

Barbara Follett: What discussions has my hon. Friend held with the Department for Education and Skills about encouraging young people to acquire the skills that they need in today's high-technology film industry?

Dr. Howells: We regularly discuss creativity in the classroom with the Department for Education and Skills. We fund the national film and television school directly. Skillset, the sector skills council for the audiovisual industries, and the Film Council are undertaking a joint research project to develop a comprehensive skills strategy for the British film industry. The Film Council's innovative £1 million-a-year "first light" scheme already gives many young people from all social backgrounds the opportunity to make short films.

Nick Harvey (North Devon): What assessment has the Minister made of the likely impact of the changes in this year's Budget on film tax relief? Although I acknowledge that there was abuse by people who were producing for television on tiny budgets but claiming large amounts of relief, does the Minister share my anxiety that the effect may be to drive big projects away to eastern European countries and elsewhere? Does he know that the Film Council believes that approximately £250 million-worth of planned projects will move to other countries because of the changes? Will he discuss with the Treasury some other method of directing relief to big, high-value projects? What will be the position of projects that were already on the stocks of studios if they are not allowed to continue under the tax arrangements that were in place when they were agreed and when the contracts were signed?

Dr. Howells: The decision as to what is eligible for tax relief is, of course, one for the Inland Revenue and the Treasury, and they must also decide on the implementation of the announcements in the Budget. The Department has been very concerned, however, about the likely effect on future investment in the film industry in this country, and particularly on big inward investment from America. The hon. Gentleman is right to point out that there was serious abuse of the existing system. Something has certainly gone wrong when episodes of soap operas and even weather forecasts are put forward for tax relief.

Kali Mountford (Colne Valley): Does my hon. Friend agree that, although the British Film Commission and local authorities have made great strides towards working together recently, more could be done to show local authorities the benefits of attracting the film industry into local communities? Should not the film and television industries also do more themselves to make clearer the contribution that they can make to local communities?

Dr. Howells: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. It is quite clear from working with the tourist sector, for example, that people want to visit film locations. That has become big business, not only in this country but in

America and elsewhere. The importance of film, television and the communications media in general is understood by some but not all local authorities, and it can be a big creator of jobs and revenue. I should be interested to hear any suggestions that my hon. Friend has about how we might take that agenda forward.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): What extra support does the Minister intend to give to film-making in Liverpool? Does he agree that film-making is an important part of economic regeneration, and does he consider that Liverpool's fine track record in filming is a good reason why Liverpool should become the European capital of culture in 2008?

Dr. Howells: I certainly cannot comment on my hon. Friend's last suggestion. Responsibility for deciding what part of the money allocated to the Film Council is to be spent in different parts of the country lies, of course, with the Film Council. God forbid that Ministers should start deciding where film money should to be spent, and on what projects.

Arts (National Lottery Funding)

8. **Mr. Peter Pike** (Burnley): What discussions she has had with the Arts Council about the distribution of lottery funds for arts projects in the north-west. [61224]

The Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting (Dr. Kim Howells): None. The north-west has received more than £175 million in arts lottery funding to date, and it is the second-highest recipient of arts lottery funding of all the British regions.

Mr. Pike: My hon. Friend will recognise that it is a year ago today that Burnley had disturbances on its streets. I am sure that he will agree that art is one means of bringing communities together, as was shown by Artspeak at Burnley Mechanics on Thursday and Friday last week. Does he recognise that Burnley youth theatre has done tremendous work locally to bring the community together? Will he urge members of the Arts Council to go to Burnley, meet members of Burnley youth theatre and ensure that action is taken at an early date to sort out the final few snags in its lottery grant?

Dr. Howells: Yes; I do not think that my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Arts would have any problem agreeing to my hon. Friend's suggestions. My hon. Friend will be aware that Burnley has received more than £670,000 of lottery funding, which is largely consistent with other districts when considered in terms of per capita spend. I agree entirely with him that spending on the arts is one way of trying to capture the anger and frustration that appear to have expressed themselves in his constituency, and to channel them more constructively.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): For the sake of the north-west, as well as the rest of the country, when will the Minister consider reducing the bureaucracy and increasing the common sense in awarding lottery grants?

Dr. Howells: I understand that a number of initiatives are under way to try to reduce the red tape, bureaucracy and time involved in awarding lottery grants. That is a huge task, as I am sure the hon. Gentleman knows. Unprecedented amounts of money have been awarded, not least in the north-west, and they have to be spent properly. The last thing we need is lottery grants being put into projects that prove to be unsustainable and subsequently fail.

Ian Stewart (Eccles): The recent White Paper "Your Region, Your Choice: Revitalising the English Regions" has been well received in the north-west. It proposes that elected regional assemblies devise and fund strategies for the arts, tourism and sport. Surely the Arts Council's recent centralisation flies in the face of that. Will my hon. Friend consider the issue again?

Dr. Howells: I do not agree with my hon. Friend. Anyway, as the proposal will not be implemented for at least five years, if any fine tuning is needed we have plenty of time in which to do it.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): How much of the money awarded to the north-west is underspent?

Dr. Howells: I have no idea, but I shall try to find out, and will write to the hon. Gentleman.

Public Parks (Sport)

9. **Caroline Flint** (Don Valley): If she will make a statement on the use of public parks as a location for open access sports activity. [61225]

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Richard Caborn): Public parks provide an excellent environment for both formal and informal sport and recreation.

We recognise the broad range of benefits to be gained from open spaces in terms of health, education and many other parts of our lives. We therefore want to ensure that they are preserved and indeed upgraded, especially for people living in urban areas.

Caroline Flint: Venus and Serena Williams learned tennis on the public courts in their neighbourhood. Given the world of leisure in which we live, I suggest that our parks will be in decline unless we do something. Has the Department taken account of the fact that many parks run by local authorities have no access to funds such as those available to private sports clubs, schools and other bodies mentioned today in answers to questions?

Mr. Caborn: That is why the urban White Paper considered the whole question of open spaces. Following the report of the working party on green spaces and sustainable communities, we will incorporate its proposals in the development of sports facilities. I hope they will be reflected in planning policy statement 17, and that there will be a firm link with the £500 million invested in localities through the new opportunities fund. Although it has been given to local education authorities, a precondition of its release is that the facilities it will provide are used by the community.

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): As the right hon. Gentleman may know, the royal parks will remain part of his Department's responsibility for a few more months. Will he try to ensure that the interests of local people are put first when it comes to use of the royal parks, particularly Hyde park, for the increasingly large number of sporting and other events that have beset that public asset in recent years?

Mr. Caborn: The royal parks have been used by the public, demonstrably, during the recent jubilee celebrations. Musical events have taken place there. I will, however, reflect on what the hon. Gentleman has said when there are discussions about the royal parks.

Mr. Andy Reed (Loughborough): Does my right hon. Friend agree that parks play a crucial role in ensuring that young people in particular have access to low-level, non-coaching types of physical activity—that they can simply walk to a local park and play? Is he aware that parish councils play a key role in rural and semi-rural areas such as mine, where many such facilities have declined during the past 15 or 20 years? Has he had discussions with parish councils to ensure that they can provide the money that is needed to improve the facilities enough for most people to be able to use them much more regularly?

Mr. Caborn: As I have said, a working party has just reported, and we have produced an urban White Paper. We are now trying to bring together open spaces and more formal sports facilities. The fact that they have been kept apart is a weakness in our sport and recreation infrastructure. We need a proper synergy of activity and development, and we shall bring that about in the months ahead. The first step will be the provision of PPS 17 by the Deputy Prime Minister's Department. It will give local authorities directions on planning for sports and open-space facilities.

Wembley National Stadium

11. **Gregory Barker** (Bexhill and Battle): When she expects the new national stadium at Wembley will be able to stage its first football match. [61228]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell): The Football Association, whose project this is, has made it clear that the construction contract lasts for 39 months. Construction can start as soon as the financing deal is in place. There has been no change to the FA's estimate, which I set out in my statement to the House on 23 May, that it would take up to 10 weeks from signing heads of agreement to reach financial close.

My officials remain in close contact with the FA and Wembley National Stadium Ltd. and good progress is being made by the FA on its commercial negotiations. We will continue to give the FA all the support that it needs to deliver the national stadium at Wembley and to ensure that the public interest in the project is suitably protected.

Gregory Barker: Sadly, on this occasion, despite the heroic efforts of our team, the World cup will not be coming home. However, if the same level of risible skill and effort had been displayed by our England team that has been characteristic of the Government's handling of the national stadium, it would not have made it even to Japan. Can the Secretary of State give the House a firm commitment that we will be in a position for London to bid for the 2014 World cup? Indeed, what comfort can she give the House that this supposedly athletics-capable stadium will be able next year to bid for the 2012 Olympics?

Tessa Jowell: While our team was away competing in the World cup, the heads of agreement on the Wembley deal were signed, evidence that the Wembley project is closer to reality than at any other time in its history, which has lasted about eight years. That is an achievement. Hon. Members on both sides of the House should recognise that progress has been made and that the project has made more progress in the past year than it made in the previous six years.

In relation to decisions on an Olympic bid, that is a matter for separate discussion with the key interests and governing bodies, as the hon. Gentleman well knows.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—

Parish Priests (Recruitment and Retention)

29. **Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham): What financial measures the Commissioners have recently taken to improve recruitment and retention of parish priests. [61202]

Mr. Stuart Bell (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): In terms of recruiting, the ministry division of the Archbishops' Council supports a nationwide network of vocation advisers, who encourage people to consider their vocation to priesthood and other ministries. In terms of retention, in 1999, the Archbishops' Council set up a group to review clergy stipends. Its recommendations include increasing the clergy stipend from its national stipend benchmark of £17,042 to £20,000 from April 2002.

Tim Loughton: Perhaps I should declare an interest as the son of a semi-retired rector. I have attended about six induction services in the past couple of years in my constituency and the interregnums between clergy seem to be getting longer and longer, so clearly we need to do more to encourage more people to come into that office. Can the hon. Gentleman specifically comment on reports that with an annual £11 million shortfall, the Church of England is considering scrapping the final salary pension scheme for clergy as the latest victims of the pension crisis? Can he also comment on the Department of Trade and Industry proposals, apparently reported in the paper last week, to replace God as the employer of clergy and make them subject instead to employment tribunals on earth?

Mr. Bell: On the second question, I am not responsible for the DTI, but we are always interested in looking at the conditions of employment of clergy in relation to trade unions and the rest. It is a matter that the Church keeps constantly under review.

On pensions, the Church seeks to balance the stipends that are paid to the clergy and the pensions that accrue to them. That is always based on actuarial figures. Comments as to loss or shortfall are mostly speculation and I would not be able to comment.

Mr. Andy Reed (Loughborough): Is my hon. Friend aware of the pressure placed on existing priests, vicars and rectors when individuals leave and the work load is spread? In my own constituency—and my own parish in particular—we have one vicar covering three parishes, where previously there were two. Do not those increased pressures cause difficulties? What measures can be put in place to ensure that the vast majority of the country is covered, resourced and staffed adequately?

Mr. Bell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who will be interested to know that the number of men and women ordained as deacons and serving in the stipendiary ministry was 295 in 2001 and 313 in 2002. In relation to his question as to how parishes cope, my hon. Friend will be interested to know that the lay ministry grows in strength and that there are now 10,000 lay readers serving the Church. That helps to ease the burden on the parishes and the parish priests.

Church Repairs

30. **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York): What recent representations he has received on VAT on church repairs. [61203]

Mr. Stuart Bell (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): I have received no specific representations recently on the subject of VAT on church repairs.

Miss McIntosh: The hon. Gentleman will be aware of my ongoing campaign in this regard and, in my view, the totally unsatisfactory response of the Chancellor of the Exchequer in simply making available a grant in lieu of the VAT that churches would be otherwise able to reclaim. Will he confirm that he continues to put pressure on the Treasury to make sure that the administrative burden on the churches is not more than the value of the grant coming back, and that he will continue to campaign for a VAT reduction?

Mr. Bell: I am always grateful for the hon. Lady's assistance in campaigning on the issue. She will know that the Church of England VAT group has worked closely with other faith groups and is represented by the Church's main committee. We have maintained especially close links with the Treasury and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. We will be making strong representations to the Treasury and, through the Treasury, to the EU to ensure that VAT is reduced to 5 per cent. during 2003. We will make all our efforts co-ordinated with Members of Parliament who have an interest and with Members of the European Parliament.

Alan Howarth (Newport, East): It seems to many of us that with his temporary grant scheme to offset the cost of VAT, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has provided a splendid opportunity to enable repairs to be made to listed places of worship. What steps are being taken by the Church Commissioners—presumably in conjunction with the heritage lottery fund and English Heritage—to ensure that these repairs are carried out to appropriately high standards in terms of materials and workmanship? After all, in the last great phase of repairs to English parish churches, our Victorian forebears—for all their piety and energy—all too often undertook the work in a spirit that subsequent generations have judged to be too clumsy and unfortunate. We do not want to make similar mistakes in our own generation.

Mr. Bell: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. In fact, most of the infrastructure of our churches goes back over 100 years, which is why many of them are in disrepair and why repairs are now urgently needed. He will be aware that the setting up of the listed places of worship grant scheme has resulted in a number of payments being made directly to parishes engaged in vital repairs to their listed church buildings. They are grateful for that and I am sure that the standard of workmanship will be higher than in the Victorian era.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Does the hon. Gentleman recognise that the right hon. Member for Newport, East (Alan Howarth) has made an important point? Far too often the liturgical fads and fancies of the moment are responsible for a re-ordering of church fabrics that does not exactly enhance them. There seem to be an awful lot of incumbents who are immunised against beauty at birth. Will he bear in mind that it is important that the fabrics that we have inherited are properly safeguarded and maintained?

Mr. Bell: We are going an awful long way from the subject of VAT on church repairs being reduced from 17.5 per cent. to 5 per cent. I am sure that DCMS Ministers sitting on the Front Bench will be most interested in the comments that have been made. It always occurs to me that when we deal with the fabric of our churches and the national heritage, there is a lack of collective spirit. There is great desire to ensure that repairs are done; there is not a great desire to provide the wherewithal. Somehow we must link the two to maintain our national heritage.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, was asked—

Compulsory Voting

31. **Mr. James Plaskitt** (Warwick and Leamington): If the Commission has commissioned research into the effects of introducing compulsory voting. [61204]

Mr. A. J. Beith (representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission): I understand that the Commission intends to carry out research into the operation of compulsory voting in other countries. This research project is expected to begin later this year and the results will be published in 2003.

Mr. Plaskitt: Although it is worth conducting research into compulsory voting, will the right hon. Gentleman bear in mind that it is probably not the solution to falling turnout, because it is incompatible with freedom of choice? Will he concentrate instead on investigating increasing turnout through voluntary processes?

Mr. Beith: The commission has said that the main responsibility for increasing turnout in elections must lie with the politicians and parties themselves. It does not regard compulsory voting as the answer to this problem, but it considers it appropriate to carry out research. I have a lot of sympathy with the hon. Gentleman's views on this subject.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): It is encouraging to hear that response, but will the right hon. Gentleman go further and say that the franchise implies a degree of responsibility and consideration on the part of the person exercising it? If someone cannot be bothered to vote, they should not be forced to do so.

Mr. Beith: I have a similar view, but we probe voters' motives at our peril.

Mr. Derek Wyatt (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): Has the right hon. Gentleman considered compulsory postal voting, and moving polling day from a Thursday to the weekend?

Mr. Beith: I have never before heard the suggestion that compulsory voting and postal voting be combined, but I suppose that might follow if compulsory voting were introduced. Changing polling day is precisely the sort of issue that the Electoral Commission considers from time to time, and on which it might at some point make recommendations to Government.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): Does my right hon. Friend agree that one obvious disadvantage of compulsory voting is that it would be not nearly as easy to judge how happy the electorate are with politicians as it is under a system that allows them to choose whether to vote? Is not a bigger priority to concentrate first on making registration—which is already compulsory—work effectively, given that, in many parts of the country, it does not? Should we not also consider providing a financial incentive to vote? Such an incentive might encourage many more people to vote, but it would still leave them the freedom not to do so.

Mr. Beith: Later this afternoon, the Electoral Commission Committee will consider increasing the commission's expenditure on raising awareness of the need to register to vote, which the commission regards as particularly important.

National Assembly for Wales Elections

32. **Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff, West): What discussions the Committee has had with the Electoral Commission on introducing an all-postal ballot for elections to the National Assembly for Wales. [61205]

Mr. A. J. Beith (representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission): There have been no such discussions, but I understand that the commissioners have discussed with the First Minister and his colleagues a range of options for increasing turnout at the Assembly elections in 2003.

Kevin Brennan: Do we not want to encourage maximum possible turnout for elections to a new institution such as the National Assembly? Is it not particularly suited to an all-postal vote, and would not extending that idea to next year's elections ensure a high turnout and thus increase the credibility of the results?

Mr. Beith: All-postal voting in the National Assembly elections would require primary legislation. The commission is evaluating the use of all-postal voting in recent local elections, but because of the time needed to make that evaluation, and to introduce primary legislation, it is fairly unlikely that all-postal voting could be introduced in time for the Assembly elections.

33. **Mr. Chris Bryant** (Rhondda): What special measures the Electoral Commission is considering to ensure access to polling stations in the Welsh Assembly elections. [61206]

Mr. A. J. Beith (representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission): The Commission will fund the development and delivery of training for electoral services staff in Wales in advance of the 2003 National Assembly elections. The training programme will address how to ensure access to the electoral process for people with disabilities. Later this year, the Commission will also publish a series of "good practice" handbooks, which will include advice to returning officers on this matter.

Mr. Bryant: Are the right hon. Gentleman and the commission aware that many electoral registration officers in Wales are already worried that literally hundreds of polling stations will not meet the legal requirements for disabled access next year? Thousands of people could be disfranchised because of the absence of a local polling station. If the commission will not consider all-postal ballots, will it at least consider requiring local authorities to write to every constituent, suggesting that they might none the less have a postal vote?

Mr. Beith: I shall certainly put the hon. Gentleman's suggestion to the commission, but it should be borne in mind that a long-standing legal requirement exists that, so far as is practical, all electors should have reasonable facilities for voting, and, in particular, that local authorities should designate as polling stations only places that are accessible to disabled voters. Indeed, there is a widespread feeling in the House that every polling station should, if possible, be fully accessible to the disabled. However, when a polling station is changed or removed, local electors can petition against that development, and the Electoral Commission has the power to require the local authority concerned to reinstate the polling station. However, to date no such petitions have been received.

Election Material (Imprints)

34. **Mike Gapes** (Ilford, South): When the Electoral Commission plan to discuss enforcement of the law relating to imprints on material circulated during election campaigns. [61208]

Mr. A. J. Beith (representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission): I understand from the chairman of the commission that it has no such plans. The Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 does not give the commission an enforcement role as regards imprints on election material, although the Government are required to consult the commission before making regulations relating to imprints. In that context, the commission has encouraged the Government to bring in the new requirements for imprints contained in the Act that were suspended by the Election Publications Act 2001.

Mike Gapes: I am disappointed by that reply. Those of us who have been subjected to the distribution of literature without imprint, have complained and had the matter investigated by the police, have found—as in my case—that the Director of Public Prosecutions says that it is

"not in the public interest to prosecute".

That is even though the people responsible have been warned about their future conduct. How can we enforce the law to protect democracy if people can distribute literature with impunity?

Mr. Beith: I can well understand the hon. Gentleman's concern about the experience that he had in his constituency, but such matters of law enforcement are matters for the Director of Public Prosecutions, who will—I am sure—be made aware of these exchanges. It is the job of the commission merely to monitor compliance, and it may make recommendations arising from that monitoring.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—

Conservation

35. **Mr. Robert Key** (Salisbury): What responsibilities the Church Commissioners have for the *(a)* Church Heritage Forum, *(b)* Cathedrals Fabric Commission and *(c)* Council for the Care of Churches. [61209]

Mr. Stuart Bell (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): I thank the hon. Gentleman for that question and I look forward with great interest to his supplementary.

Mr. Key: Given that the Department for Culture, Media and Sport has halved the cathedral grants this coming year, what representations have the Church Commissioners made to the Chancellor in the public spending round to maintain the cathedral grants at least at their previous level?

Mr. Bell: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising that issue with me. We will make a submission to the Chancellor on that subject. I hope that it will become a Budget submission for consideration at the next Budget.

European Council (Seville)

3.32 pm

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I shall make a statement about the European Council in Seville on 21 and 22 June. This was the last summit of the successful and very professional Spanish presidency—although, thanks to the World cup, the Spanish President and I unfortunately had more in common than we had originally intended.

By 2004, the European Union will have welcomed up to 10 new member countries, with more to follow. This is an historic opportunity that the Government welcome. Excellent progress on the timetable has been made under the Spanish presidency, and at Seville we reaffirmed our commitment to complete the negotiations by the end of the year.

In preparing for a union of 25 member states we need to reform the way we operate. We have agreed a series of measures that will allow us to streamline the Council agenda in order to shorten Council meetings and to make sure that issues decided by specialist Councils are only, exceptionally, put before the European Council.

We have set a limit on the size of delegations. In order to prepare meetings of the European Council, the General Affairs Council will become a General Affairs and External Relations Council, split into two separate parts with separate meetings, separate agendas and, if member states desire it, different Ministers taking part. We have now opened up Council legislative meetings to the public.

We have further reduced the number of specialist Councils. There were more than 20 three years ago, and there are 16 now. We will further reduce them to nine, concentrating in one Council the whole of the European Union's agenda of competitiveness, which is at the heart of the economic reform agenda. Our campaign for simpler, better regulation, with proper consultation with business and industry, was endorsed.

The European Council itself will henceforth set a multi-annual strategic programme for the whole of the European Union for the following three years, with the annual work programme set by the General Affairs Council. This is a significant evolution in the role of member Governments in setting the EU's agenda.

In a letter to Prime Minister Aznar a month ago, I proposed that at Seville we should give a remit for action to strengthen the EU's borders, including Community funding; make progress on returns to Afghanistan now that normal government is being restored; and benchmark the performance of third countries and use our network of agreements to improve co-operation in handling migration issues.

Since the Tampere summit we have, across the European Union, introduced tough penalties for people smuggling and people trafficking, and agreed visa security rules and a Europe-wide database for identifying illegal immigrants. We are setting minimum reception conditions for asylum seekers and have established a European refugee fund to help countries, including our own, deal with this problem.

At Seville, we decided, first, on measures to combat illegal migration, including action on visas, readmission agreements and a repatriation programme, including early returns to Afghanistan. Secondly, this year we agreed to take steps to achieve co-ordinated management of external borders, including joint operations at those borders.

Legal migration can and does bring real and substantial benefits to countries, including Britain. Our aim is not to prevent legal migration; on the contrary, subject to proper rules, we welcome it. It is to stop illegal immigration and asylum seeking that is not genuine, because that debases the system and harms the interests of the legal immigrant.

Our aim is also to ensure that the people traffickers, who trade in human misery, cannot exploit weaknesses. We need only look at the success of the joint Anglo-Italian operation in Bosnia to see what can be achieved. There, an airport was being used to transit illegal immigrants into the European Union. Unaccounted arrivals have now been cut by 90 per cent., but we are dealing with clever, organised criminal gangs. If we shut down one route, they come looking for the next. So the third element is about the integration of immigration policy into the Union's relations with third countries based on the following: all new co-operation or association agreements with third countries will have a migration clause and a commitment to readmission; readmission agreements with all relevant countries will be completed as soon as possible; and there will be a systematic review of relations with third countries to gauge the extent of their co-operation in migration issues.

A majority of states, including Britain, wanted to go further in hardening the language on third country returns. A minority were concerned that this looked as though we were prepared to harm our development objectives. In the end, the compromise was that, in respect of any new agreement, returns to third countries would be an integral part of the negotiation on all aspects of the agreement.

In respect of existing agreements, where there is non-co-operation, we reserved the right to adopt any measures or positions in respect of a third country that we decide upon, provided that they are consistent with our contractual commitments and development objectives. I have no doubt that this will now form a key part of our relations with third countries, although the test, of course, will be the practical effect of the measures proposed.

The world summit on sustainable development meets in Johannesburg in two months' time. We have made clear for the last year our strong commitment to the aims of the summit. Many leaders, including me, will be there. The European Council gave a strong message of support for the policies of sustainable development. We reaffirmed our commitment to breaking down trade barriers, including on agriculture. We called for initiatives at Johannesburg on water, sanitation, energy and health—all top United Kingdom priorities. I urge the House to give this programme its full support.

The conclusions of the summit have been placed in the Library of the House. I draw the House's attention to the declaration that we issued on India and Pakistan and to the statement of the Council, which takes note of a national statement by Ireland.

Finally, we discussed the grave crisis in the middle east. We agreed that there must be an end to the violence so that the Israelis and Palestinians can relaunch the peace process as rapidly as possible. As I have said many times, this must result in a secure Israel recognised by its Arab neighbours and in a viable Palestinian state.

[The Prime Minister]

I repeat my praise of the six months of the Spanish presidency. On economic reform, reform of the Council and the sensitive issues of illegal immigration and asylum, it has made substantial progress. The direction of policy is clear—it is the pace that we need to quicken. However, that is a far cry from where the agenda of reform stood five years ago. For Britain, the policy of constructive engagement is right, it proves itself consistently and, under this Government, it will be maintained.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): I thank the Prime Minister for his statement and join him in condemning the bombings in Spain over the weekend. Violence is no way to advance a political agenda, be it in Europe or the middle east.

We support the Council's declaration that a lasting solution to the conflict in the middle east must be based on Israel being recognised by its Arab neighbours, feeling secure within its borders and living peacefully alongside a Palestinian state. Does the Prime Minister agree that now is the time for members of the European Union to lend their full support to American efforts to bring about negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians?

We also welcome the Council declaration on India and Pakistan and the progress that it has made on sustainable development, although the latter message would carry greater conviction if the EU gave more aid to developing countries rather than to aspirant member states.

None of those things, however, can obscure the underlying message from Seville: that for all the Prime Minister's talk of leading in Europe and winning the argument, he has once again lost the argument and been left behind. He went to Seville seeking an agreement that would penalise countries that failed to co-operate with the fight against illegal immigration—as he and his Foreign Secretary put it. He was supremely confident. Only last week, he stood next to the Prime Minister of Spain and said:

> "I have no doubt . . . we will reach agreement."

Will the Prime Minister confirm not only that his plan was rebuffed but that the Swedish Prime Minister referred to the idea as stupid, unworkable and "an historic mistake"? Perhaps he had been speaking to the Secretary of State for International Development. The Prime Minister not only failed to carry the rest of Europe with him—he could not even carry his own Cabinet to Europe with him.

Instead, the Prime Minister has returned with an agreement that supports the principle of setting up an EU border police. Only last Friday, the Foreign Secretary boasted that

> "such is the opposition to the principle of a European Union border police that it will not feature".

However, yesterday, after the welcome in the final declaration, the EU's Justice Commissioner said that he expected the border force to become a reality within five years. Is that what the Minister for Europe meant when he said yesterday that

> "the truth is we got everything we wanted"?

I thought that this was supposed to be the post-spin era of the Government.

I am also sure that the House would be grateful to hear what discussions the Prime Minister held with the Spanish Government on the Gibraltarians' right to a referendum to decide their legal status.

The Prime Minister tells us that Seville made progress on enlargement of the European Union, but it did not deal with the structural funding issue, and discussions on reform of the common agricultural policy have yet again been postponed. Given that his Minister for Europe maintains that quick reform of the CAP is imperative for enlargement to take place, can the Prime Minister seriously guarantee that negotiations with applicant countries will be completed by the end of this year?

Does the Prime Minister agree with NATO's supreme commander in Europe when he says that NATO should have primacy over the Euro army and that his deputy should have strategic control over EU-led operations? If the Prime Minister agrees—he has never made that clear—why has he allowed the Euro army to be described as operational when, again, no agreement has been reached on the sharing of military assets with NATO.

Like all summits, the meeting at Seville will be judged not by the spin of the Prime Minister and the Minister for Europe, but by what it actually delivers. The reality belies the Prime Minister's usual rhetoric and all the padding that came out of his statement today. For the past five years, he has constantly maintained that he alone could get things done and that he could get things from Europe that it did not want to give—a modern, outward-looking and decentralised Europe and an EU in which Britain maintains control over its own destiny.

Seville has shown that that is just another piece of shallow spin. The Prime Minister has been isolated on his own asylum proposals. He has been bounced into accepting EU border patrols. Once again, he has failed to get CAP reform on the agenda and he has stood by impotently as NATO's future has yet again been drawn into question. The

> "Government can no longer advance Britain's interests abroad, nor look after them properly at home".—[*Official Report*, 31 October 1996; Vol. 284, c. 781.]

Those were the Prime Minister's own words in opposition. After last weekend, that is the one prime ministerial soundbite with which the whole country can agree.

The Prime Minister: It is in the nature of the position in which the right hon. Gentleman has put the Conservative party that Conservatives have to say that Britain fails in Europe the whole time. That is their position.

The big difference between now and five years ago is simply this: when we came to power five years ago and went to our first European summit, the agenda was set by somebody else. It is true that we could block certain things, but the general direction of Europe was set by others. The difference now is that the agenda at Seville and at the earlier summit that the Spanish held was set by us. Of course there will be countries that block certain parts of that agenda—that is bound to happen—but the idea that we would now be in a better position if we had pursued the policies of isolation that we had five years ago is absurd.

The right hon. Gentleman has to say that we achieved none of our objectives at Seville. Let me take the two points that Seville was about. On asylum and immigration policy, the agenda conclusions say that

> "any future cooperation, association or equivalent agreement which the European Union or the European Community concludes with any country should include a clause on joint management of migration flows and on compulsory readmission in the event of illegal immigration."

With respect, that is precisely what we asked for and what was achieved. It is correct to say that we would have gone further in respect of existing agreements, but it is also the case that, in respect of those agreements that we now conclude with any third country, this is at the heart of the agenda—and that, with respect, is a substantial step forward.

The right hon. Gentleman said nothing about Council reform, which, again, is hugely important. The fact that the agenda for the EU will now be set by the European Council at intergovernmental level is extremely important for the future of Europe.

The right hon. Gentleman's comments on the EU border police are, quite simply, wrong. A study has been going on for months in the EU—nothing new was decided on this at Seville—about whether it is right to have European border police, but what he forgets is that, as a result of the protocol negotiated by this Government at Amsterdam, none of that applies to Britain at all, so his point, which is that somehow our police will be supplanted at Dover by European police, is factually wrong. In any event, even those things—

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): Are you against the European border police?

The Prime Minister: I will explain exactly what I believe. As a result of what we negotiated at Amsterdam, Britain has a complete veto on this. In any event, the proposal on the European border police can be agreed only by unanimity. I am not against such a study being conducted because, when we take new countries into the EU, I do not think it foolish to consider the idea of Europe giving help to countries on our eastern frontier, where a large number of people are coming in illegally as the result of the activities of organised criminal gangs. The only reason why the right hon. Gentleman is against even discussing the idea is that it has the word "European" in it.

Finally, the right hon. Gentleman fails, again, to understand that European defence can be undertaken only where we have agreement between the EU and NATO. That is clearly stated in the conclusions, and I believe that, if possible, it is sensible for Europe to try to improve its defence capabilities. Unlike the right hon. Gentleman, who believes that we should not even engage in European defence, I think the fact that Britain is able to make European defence compatible with NATO is essential for the future best interests of this country.

Whether it be on economic reform, the euro, asylum and immigration policy or defence, Labour Members believe in engaging constructively, whereas Conservative Members would opt out of the argument altogether. We remember where we were five years ago—opted out of every major debate in Europe, unable to set the agenda and completely isolated—and from what the right hon. Gentleman has just said, it seems that, if he ever got the chance, he would return us to precisely that position. As I have said on many occasions, that is not the satisfaction of the national interest; it is the betrayal of the national interest.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): I think that the Prime Minister would wish to acknowledge that there is a bit of salutary sense in the process leading up to the summit and in its eventual outcome. Among the salutary messages and lessons that emerge are, first, that attempts that advance bilateral fixes between individual member states do not necessarily work, far less deliver; and, secondly, that imposing sanctions and punishments on the poorest nations is not a tenable way forward. In many respects, the language is modified when one compares the vocabulary used by the Government in this country in the run-up to the summit, as opposed to the agreed statement on the outcome of the summit, which pledged

> "a systematic review of relations with third countries to gauge the extent of their cooperation in migration issues."

That is a considerably more balanced and tolerant presentation of a serious and complicated issue, which can be adequately addressed, far less resolved, only at a European level. Liberal Democrats certainly subscribe to the view of the Secretary of State for International Development that the earlier approach that was outlined by the Government would be morally repugnant.

Is this not a good opportunity to make the positive case, in our domestic politics, for long-term, planned immigration? It is economically essential to Britain. We need look only at the demography of our country, for decades and generations ahead, to see that we can learn a lot from the past and that we must plan better for the future. We must not give in to some of the more strident voices on this issue. Over the course of this weekend, Europe has—to coin a phrase—been something of a candid friend to the British Government, and that should be welcomed.

On the issue of enlargement, which we strongly support, and the intended progress, which is also very much to be welcomed, can the Prime Minister explain how that can be squared when no meaningful decisions have yet been arrived at and, apparently, no substantial discussions have taken place on reform of the common agricultural policy. Surely one must predate the other.

Greater transparency in the international institutions that govern the European Union is, of course, welcome. On the central issue of the single European currency, however, does the Prime Minister agree that the debate needs to be led in this country? It can be led only by the Prime Minister and the Government, and the absence of a positive lead leaves us in the weakened position in which we saw ourselves as an EU member state last weekend in Spain.

The Prime Minister: On the latter point, I am afraid that I simply do not accept what the right hon. Gentleman says. It is absolutely correct that we would have gone somewhat further in Seville than other countries, but we were probably in the majority in wanting to do so.

The point that I was making earlier to Opposition Members was that the difference now is that we set the agenda on economic reform, defence or asylum and immigration—*[Interruption.]* No, we do not lose it.

[The Prime Minister]

Of course, one never gets all that one wants, because unanimity applies at European Councils, but each new EU agreement must now contain a migration clause and a readmission clause. In respect of existing agreements, we have a proposal to assess whether those countries are co-operating. If they are not co-operating, we reserve entirely the right to act.

We made it clear from the very outset, if I may quote from what my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary said at the Justice and Home Affairs Council, that we should take measures

> "without undermining the need to better focus aid on the reduction of poverty in low income countries".

We never thought that it was sensible to penalise poor countries and make them poorer, because that would operate against the policy of encouraging them to take action against migration flows. We are saying, however, as we do now in relation to the Cotonou agreement with African and Caribbean countries, and as we have just done in relation to Balkan countries, that the totality of our relationship with those countries whom we are assisting must also include the issue of trafficking in illegal immigrants. That is entirely sensible—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry, but that is precisely the proposition that we put.

In the end, of course, that is not the only thing that we need to do. It is important that we co-operate at the external borders of Europe and also take our own measures here in respect of asylum, because we cannot make those measures count simply through the European Council. The fact is that that agenda now exists. We have made substantial progress on it, and the fact that we do not get everything that we desire does not mean that we get nothing. That is the truth, whether on that issue, on Council reform, or on the other issues.

People must ask themselves whether we are in a better position trying to set the agenda, as we have done on economic reform, Council reform and asylum and immigration, or whether we should be in the Conservative party's position, which is next door to the exit sign. The idea that we would be in a better position if we were sitting there resolutely hostile to absolutely everything that Europe proposes is absolutely ridiculous.

On the right hon. Gentleman's point about the euro, we have the right and sensible position. The economic tests have to be passed and, if they are passed, we will put the matter before the British people in a referendum. That is the right position and it distinguishes itself from those people who say that we should join irrespective of the economic conditions—I never know whether that is the right hon. Gentleman's position but, if it is, I disagree with it—and it certainly distinguishes itself from the position of the Conservative party, which is against joining the euro under any circumstances. Conservatives Members may nod their heads at that, but it is a foolish and futile position that is not in the best interests of the country.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): My right hon. Friend mentioned the middle east. Are not the terror organisations that mastermind the suicide bombing of civilians totally opposed to any form of peace process, and do they not use religion and politics to carry out those monstrous crimes? Would it not be useful for the Israeli Government to understand—if only from the colonial history of European countries such as ours—that people, such as those in the occupied territories, cannot be ruled against their overwhelming wishes? Israel must understand that it is Israel proper that needs to be defended and not land that it holds on to illegally.

The Prime Minister: I understand that, but I also think that we must be aware of the fact that Israel has been subject to terrorist attacks on its civilians in the heart of Israel. Some of those terrorist attacks were undoubtedly organised from the occupied territories, so the problem that Israel has is how to take action against a terrorist threat that comes from the occupied territories without it going into the occupied territories. That is why I think that, in the end, Israel will take security measures and that we must be at least reasonably sympathetic to the fact that any country faced with this number of its citizens being butchered in terrorist attacks would take action. We must be sympathetic to that while saying that the only long-term solution to the problem is to ensure that we have a political process capable of resolving it.

That political process must be based on the security of Israel and a viable Palestinian state. I continue to think that if, each time there is a terrorist outrage, we scrap all thought of a political process, we hand the keys of the process to the terrorists. That is why we need to understand that Israel will take reprisals, and to condemn totally the terrorist outrages that are happening. However, we also need to do everything that we can—and we will—to try to make sure that a political process gets under way.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): Does the Prime Minister agree with those EU Governments who say that a country has to introduce compulsory ID cards if it wishes to be successful in dealing with illegal immigration?

The Prime Minister: No, I do not agree with that. The issue of ID cards must obviously be decided by each country according to its merits. People sometimes say that the reason for the pressure on asylum here is the absence of compulsory ID cards, but let us get some facts straight. First, this country, if we consider it proportionately in terms of population, is in the middle of the pack on asylum applications, and not at the top. Indeed, I think that in terms of overall applications Germany has now outstripped us again. Secondly, the pull factors here are often to do with the strength of the economy, particularly in the south-east.

The other point that I would make to the right hon. Gentleman is that our asylum applications declined by 11 per cent. in 2001, whereas those in France increased, I think, by 22 per cent. and in Germany by 12 per cent. It is a common European problem. Although ID cards may form part of the solution—he knows the discussions that are going on about them—I do not think that they provide a full answer. One part of the answer is undoubtedly to work with third countries so that—as with Afghanistan, for example—if there is a change in their circumstances, we make sure that the third country illegal nationals are taken back.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): I commend the Prime Minister for his work on tackling illegal immigration, especially the appalling commercial trafficking in human beings. Will he consider seeking a ministerial meeting of the cross-channel commission with France, so that we can speed up the security arrangements at Frethun, which allow illegal immigration to continue and play havoc with our freight exports?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right: it is important to address the problem at a bilateral level with France. That is why the Home Secretary is meeting his opposite number in France—tomorrow, I think—and obviously he will discuss such issues, including security at Frethun.

Sir Peter Tapsell (Louth and Horncastle): Did the Prime Minister agree with the leader of the Liberal party when he said that enlargement would be impractical unless there were major changes to the common agricultural policy? Was there agreement at Seville on the major changes in the common agricultural policy necessary to enable countries in central and eastern Europe to join the European Union? If not, why not?

The Prime Minister: Because it never was the case that we were going to discuss the common agricultural policy in detail in Seville. It is being discussed by the Agriculture Council, and in the context of the accession negotiations with individual applicant countries. It is very important that we get reform of the common agricultural policy. Indeed, it will be unsustainable without reform, which is the position of this country and many others, including Germany.

We are under the particular difficulty that any agreement has to be agreed unanimously. Although there is qualified majority voting in the Agriculture Council, that is not the case at the European Council, which is why it is extremely important that we continue to put every pressure we can on other countries, a minority of which are standing out against that reform. However, I would not want to send out a contrary signal on enlargement. The enlargement process has been a big success. We pushed for it, and it would be unfortunate to send out a signal to any applicant country that we intended to hold up the process. At the same time as we pursue the accession negotiations, we have to pursue reform of the common agricultural policy, which is vital.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): In the discussions on migration and asylum seeking, did the conference discuss why people seek political asylum, what poverty and forms of political oppression they are fleeing from, and what support can be given to the poorest countries in west and east Africa to assist people to have a better standard of life there? Did it also consider the large volume of arms sales by western European countries to many of the poorest and most oppressive regimes around the world, which cause people to flee to Europe in the first place?

The Prime Minister: In respect of the latter point, we are making a big push towards conflict resolution in different forums. Part of that is a responsible arms sale policy. On the first part of the question, the Council drew a clear distinction between legal migration and help for genuine asylum seekers, which we support totally and should do more to help, and support for development aid. This country is increasing its development aid budget significantly, and the purpose of part of that money is to reduce the pressures of poverty that cause the migration flows.

However, it is not inconsistent with that position to be wholly opposed to illegal immigration, and in particular to what comes with it—the trafficking in human beings and the organised crime, and the people who come into the country not on the basis of proper rules and a proper system, but on the basis of who can pay the organised criminal most. That is why it is important for those of us who believe in the potential of legal migration to take the initiative on illegal migration; otherwise, we vacate the field and leave it to extremists who adopt a hard ultra right-wing agenda that is against any form of immigration, as we have seen in certain parts of Europe. That is not right and does not help. It is important to take action on the illegal side so that we can better present the case for legal migration.

Sir Michael Spicer (West Worcestershire): The Prime Minister told us that there would be no Euro army, and there will be; he told us that there would be no corpus juris, and there will be. Why should we believe what he says about border control and Euro border guards?

The Prime Minister: The Conservative party is wrong about the so-called Euro army. Let me explain it again. There is a proposal for Europe to have the capability, where it decides to do so and where NATO is not engaged, to undertake European defence operations for peacekeeping, humanitarian and other limited purposes. That is important, because we cannot be in the position where we are not able to act unless America acts. The proposal is not anti-American. On the contrary, it applies where America, for various reasons—for example, in Macedonia today—decides that it may not want to act. In those circumstances, we should have the capability to act, but in respect of each operation there is a sovereign decision of each country whether to participate.

There is no question of Britain committing its armed forces to a standing European army. That has never been the proposal. The idea is to have the capability, if we want to use it, for Europe to undertake operations where America does not want to be engaged. I think that that will add a string to our bow, not take one away.

As for the European border police, if we were the previous Government we would probably have said, "We are not having any discussion of this whatever." Instead, we have entirely secured our own position, because of the protocol at Amsterdam. No one can impose anything on us. We have a complete veto on anything that is agreed. However, I do not think that it is foolish to consider the feasibility—*[Interruption.]* People should listen to what I am saying instead of shouting out. When we take 10 extra countries into the European Union and when we extend the border of Europe many miles eastward—that is precisely the point, with some of these countries, where illegal people trafficking is happening—I do not think that it is foolish for Europe at least to ask the question whether—*[Interruption.]* It is not foolish to ask the question whether it is not better that Europe can do something together.

None of that imposes any obligation on us, but it makes sense. In the end, that is the difference between the attitudes of the two political parties. The Conservative

[The Prime Minister]

party is in the position where, basically, it wants to oppose what Europe does. We are in the position, for sensible reasons, of taking a completely different approach. That is why there is a difference between us. We believe that it is important to engage constructively, and in that way we are better able to get our own way.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): Given that France, Portugal and Italy have been given more time to eliminate their budget deficits, is there not a need for us to examine the stability and growth pact with more flexibility? Is it not a good thing to have small public deficits sometimes, if they lead to investment?

The Prime Minister: It is necessary to keep the basic principles of the pact because that is important for the stability of the euro. What my hon. Friend says about necessary flexibility to take account of different circumstances is right, and that is our position too.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): As the Council unanimously accepted the proposal for the European border police, will the Prime Minister confirm that it was agreed by the members taking part, or spelled out in the conclusions, that Britain's exemption was there, and was legal? Secondly, what was agreed about Gibraltar, which is part of the EU? Will the European police force operate in Gibraltar?

The Prime Minister: First, in respect of the position on our protocol agreed at Amsterdam, that is in the treaty. I point out once again that nothing new was agreed on European border police at the Seville summit. A study has been ongoing for about eight months, and that study was referred to in the conclusions. No new position was taken at Seville. For the reasons that I have just described, I think that it is entirely acceptable that a study be undertaken. It imposes no obligation on us. As I have said many times, perhaps especially because of our European relations, it is important for Gibraltar as well as Spain and Britain that we try to reach agreement.

Mr. Bill Rammell (Harlow): I welcome the changes to the workings of the European Council of Ministers, which I think can help to ensure the primacy of elected governments over the unelected Commission. Should we go further and appoint a president of the European Council for a period of up to five years? What progress was made on that issue?

The Prime Minister: There are many interesting ongoing discussions, and that is something that will form part of the agenda of the European convention. It is clear that with 25 members it would be foolish for us to continue with the existing rotating six-monthly presidency. I cannot see that that would be in the interests of Europe. It cannot be efficient and it cannot be right. There is increasing recognition in Europe that that is the case.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher and Walton): If the Prime Minister had a setback in Seville last weekend, it was because in anticipation, he had over-hyped the claim that he was setting the agenda. Does he accept that it is unlikely that we will really set the agenda until we have joined Europe's biggest project, the euro? Does he accept that unless he goes out and explains to the British people, and some of the journalists who write editorials, it will not be understood that some issues are now European issues that can be solved only at a European level, which therefore override national blockages, just as we overrode a national blockage during the 1980s, when we were opening up the single market? The only way to solve the asylum problem is at a European level. Does the Prime Minister agree that it would be critical if we failed the nations that are joining us, and did not help them with their policing of a common border, and with the institutions right across Europe, against traffickers in people who are exploiting their countries as well as ours? *[Interruption.]*

The Prime Minister: They always shout on the Opposition Front Bench, but the comments of the hon. Member for Esher and Walton (Mr. Taylor) would strike most people outside as reasonably sensible. Yes, the issue is a European issue, and it is important that we try to deal with it at a European level, for the simple reason that whatever measures we can take in this country, there is a limit to what we can do as one country alone. That is precisely why we put the matter on the agenda. Because of that, a substantial additional element of European policy was decided at Seville. Until now, that did not form a mandatory part of the negotiation with any country of a new co-operation or association agreement. Now that will be the case. In respect of existing agreements, obviously there was a compromise, which I have just outlined. However, it is not the case that no progress was made on that agenda. Progress was made; we would like to have seen more, but if we had not tried to set the agenda we would have got nowhere at all.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Paragraph 14 of the conclusions refers to the European Union taking over from NATO in Macedonia. From the Prime Minister's previous answer, is it not clear that there is a very dangerous situation in Macedonia? What is being done by the Community as a whole to carry out the promise that we thought was made during the bombing, that there should be a rebuilding of the Balkans?

The Prime Minister: On the first point, in relation to Macedonia, de facto the Europeans, with a NATO hat on, have undertaken that. The conclusions make it clear that it would be sensible for European defence to do so,

> "provided that the permanent arrangements between the European Union and NATO . . . are then in place."

That is the complete answer to those who say that that conflicts with NATO; it does not. Yes, it is correct that it was anticipated that European defence could do that.

In respect of the other point about the Balkans, we are rebuilding the region. In Kosovo, Serbia, Macedonia and other places in the Balkans, we are doing an enormous amount of work. A great deal of aid and help is being given to those countries. One of the most exciting prospects for the European Union is the prospect of those countries, which were riven by civil war and ethnic strife, sorting themselves out so that in time—it may take some considerable time, obviously—they can become members of the European Union. Such a project would have seemed impossible a few years ago—and I say respectfully to my hon. Friend that if Milosevic were still in Serbia, it would be well nigh impossible.

Mr. John Maples (Stratford-on-Avon): The Prime Minister has gone through some of the sensible steps that were taken over immigration and asylum at Seville, and of course there is a European dimension to that. However, the vast majority of people in this country would regard it as going much too far to allow a non-British police force answerable to the European Union to operate within the United Kingdom.

The Prime Minister has muddied the waters a little, as if it had nothing to do with him, but paragraph 31 of the conclusions states that the European Council, of which he has told us he is the leading member—presumably, if he sets the agenda, he has some say over the minutes—welcomes the study that has been carried out on the matter. The Prime Minister implied that he was instituting a study. In the final paragraph of the conclusions, paragraph 39, the European Council—presumably he was still its leading member at that stage—called for a report to be submitted at the June 2003 summit to see how

"the practical implementation of the guidelines"

could be put into action. Of course we know that we have a veto, but what we want to hear from him is that there are absolutely no circumstances in which his Government would agree to the operation of a European border police force within the United Kingdom.

The Prime Minister: I have already explained to the hon. Gentleman why that is the case: the protocol in the Amsterdam treaty that we negotiated makes it clear that nothing can be done without our consent. Therefore, the whole idea of European police taking over from British police at Dover or anywhere else in the UK is fatuous and wrong. *[Interruption.]* We have no intention of consenting, as we have made it clear that we have the protocol that was negotiated at Amsterdam.

However, the point that I was making—I should like to correct the hon. Gentleman on this—is that the feasibility study is still being carried out; it has not yet been completed. I am not against its being carried out, for the reasons that I have just given. When the new countries are taken into the European Union—true, this is for us, but it is not directed at us, or, indeed, Spain or France—the issue is that when we open up the whole of our eastern European border to them, it is not foolish, although there are other ways of dealing with it, to say that some of those countries on that border will need help with policing their borders. Provided that we have a veto over what happens, which we do—

Mr. Maples: Will you use it?

The Prime Minister: I have told the hon. Gentleman already about our position on Britain. In respect of the rest of it, I will listen to what the feasibility study says, because I want to see what arguments there are. I will make up my mind on the arguments. *[Interruption.]* This is an astonishing thing to hear—apparently I should be saying that I am not going to listen to the arguments, but veto it anyway. With the greatest of respect—and we have just heard this from the Conservative party again—that is the Conservatives' policy: if something has the word "European" in it, we veto it, whether it is good or bad. That is why we ended up with no influence in Europe, and it is a policy that I will not adopt.

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): The Prime Minister will be aware that British customs officials are already working in Bulgaria and Romania, that our police force has already been giving advice to countries in central and eastern Europe, and that other countries, including Germany, are doing the same. Does he agree that if European Union enlargement is to occur and we are to enjoy the benefits of a bigger market and the historic unity of our continent, it is absolutely vital that we can all feel secure that the smuggling of people and drugs through the Balkans has been stopped?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right; that is precisely why it is important that we consider all the potential methods that can help. I have just been reminded of the fact that British policy and passport officers now operate in Paris, at the Gare du Nord. That is not considered a breach of French national sovereignty; it is a sensible arrangement, because we are dealing with a proper problem. We should be looking at whatever works, in order to deal with the problem. If that means greater co-operation in Europe, let us co-operate more in Europe so that we get the problem dealt with.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): What is the point in our alleging that we set the agenda, if that agenda is then comprehensively rejected by our partners? Why does the Prime Minister say that Seville was a success for this country, despite the fact that the Anglo-Spanish proposal on immigration and asylum was also rejected? If that was a success, what would he define as a failure?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is wrong on the facts, I am afraid. Let me repeat it to him: we made substantial progress at Seville, but as I said, we did not get everything that we wanted. *[Interruption.]* If he and his colleagues will stop shouting from a sedentary position for a moment, I will explain to them exactly what we got on asylum and immigration. First, we got the agreement that any future co-operation—*[Interruption.]* They have started again. They are unbelievable; they will not listen.

First, any future co-operation or accession agreement will contain both a migration clause and a compulsory readmission clause. Secondly, in respect of existing agreements, there is an analysis of whether there is co-operation on illegal immigration or not. Thirdly, if there is a finding that nations are not co-operating, we reserve our right to adopt positions or attitudes in respect of those nations that we can decide upon. In other words, in respect of future agreements, it is completely a part of them that they include migration and readmission clauses. In respect of existing agreements, we reserve our right, once an analysis has been conducted of whether co-operation is taking place. In addition, we have immeasurably strengthened the whole issue of joint border co-operation on the visa and security regime and action on the illegal smuggling of people. I agree that that is not the sole answer to the problem, but it is absurd in these circumstances to say that we have got nothing.

As regards the other part of the agenda coming from this country, which is the Anglo-Spanish proposal—or rather, the Anglo-German proposal—on Council reform,

[The Prime Minister]

the bulk of that was agreed by the Council. The point about setting the agenda in Europe is that one never achieves everything that one wants; the question is whether one achieves some of it. In this case, we have.

In other areas, too—economic reform, for example—we need to go far further, but at long last the whole agenda and policy direction is in favour of reform. Yes, we need to do more, but would we be in a better position if we were isolated, without any influence, simply sitting there letting others determine the agenda and saying no? The answer to that is obvious. That is where we were when we took over five and a half years ago, and it was a disaster for this country.

Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East and Washington, West): The Prime Minister stressed the benefits of legal migration and proper procedures for asylum seekers, which I support. The countries that have had the greatest burden have been those immediately adjacent to crisis areas, whether Pakistan in the case of Afghanistan or, at an earlier stage, the African countries that surrounded the area where the Rwandan genocide took place. Is it not therefore important, if not vital, for the European Union to be able to take immediate long-term measures on aid for those countries to help them to tackle such issues in a compassionate and humane way?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. That is precisely what we have done as regards the agreement on the Balkans, for example. That is a classic example of using the totality of our relationship with those Balkan countries to insist that we will help them to deal with migration flows, but they have a responsibility to respond to that help.

On Afghanistan, it is worth pointing out that 1 million Afghan refugees have returned to Afghanistan since the conflict took place, many of them from neighbouring states. We are entering into agreements with the new Afghan Government so that Afghans who have claimed asylum and no longer need it owing to the change of Government can return to their country. We have to engage with the issue systematically.

It is also worth pointing out that this, too, is not a problem for Europe alone; it is a problem all over the developed world, including in countries such as America, Australia, Canada and New Zealand. We must obviously take measures here, but, as my right hon. Friend says, we must also ensure that where there is a crisis and a migratory flow erupts as a-result, we put in place the right system of measures on aid and assistance to stop it.

David Burnside (South Antrim): The Prime Minister has been fulsome in his praise of the Spanish presidency. In his private moments discussing football, no doubt his Spanish host remarked that the referee in the last Spanish game abused his position at least once, if not twice. Did the Prime Minister point out that in the six months of the Spanish presidency, they abused their position as regards fisheries policy, further to the detriment of the British fishing fleet?

The Prime Minister: The Spanish have not succeeded in the aim attributed to them in media reports, and we can and will ensure that they cannot. I think that on balance the totality of the Spanish presidency has been successful.

Mr. Gwyn Prosser (Dover): My constituents in Dover are more familiar than most with the Dublin convention and the bilateral agreement with the French. What progress has my right hon. Friend made towards allowing us to send asylum shoppers back to the safe countries through which they have passed?

The Prime Minister: As I should have said in answer to another question a moment ago, another matter that we agreed was a set of timelines on action, including the negotiation of Dublin II by the end of this year. We must ensure that that timetable does not slip, as it has before. Better ordering of the procedures under the Dublin convention is essential, because what happens to Britain in particular is that people go through what are effectively safe third countries, then end up here when they could easily have claimed asylum in the safe country through which they passed. Tough negotiating will be necessary before Dublin II is agreed, but at least we have a firm mandate and we have set out a timetable in the Council conclusions.

Angus Robertson (Moray): To which specific suggestions by the Scottish Executive, the Welsh Executive or the Northern Irish Executive did the Prime Minister give voice at the Seville summit? For example, did he raise the point that my colleague from Northern Ireland, the hon. Member for South Antrim (David Burnside) made about the common fisheries policy and the way in which Spain handled it? Yes or no? Will the Prime Minister take the opportunity to commend President Chirac of France and Prime Minister Persson of Sweden for blocking a morally repugnant proposal to tie aid for developing countries to their immigration policies?

The Prime Minister: There was the usual consultation with the devolved Administrations about the full range of Council issues. The Spanish presidency is of the European Council; we raise matters such as the CFP in our bilateral discussions with Spain. There were no bilateral discussions at the Council between the Spanish Prime Minister and me, but they do happen on many occasions.

Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): The House will welcome the positive steps at Seville towards a more transparent and efficient European Council. Will the Prime Minister give a commitment that the Government will continue to take the lead on reform until all the points mentioned in his letter to Chancellor Schröder and all Javier Solana's proposals have been implemented in full? We have made enormous progress, but much remains to be done.

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments. He is right, and he played a part in pushing the reform agenda forward when he was Minister for Europe. Most European countries basically accept it. Germany and the United Kingdom are not traditional allies on Council or European institutional reform, but the fact that we were able to combine and make joint proposals is a great step forward. The European Council works through unanimity; forming alliances and gaining agreement is therefore the only way to get any proposal through. That is right, and I am sure that we will continue to press for all the reforms. A big part of the European reform agenda must be making the European system work better and more accountably.

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): The Prime Minister has had ample opportunity this weekend to discuss with other European Ministers matters that are of general concern to the people of the United Kingdom, and are of especial concern, for obvious reasons, to the people of east Kent. He claimed that the discussions were successful. When may we expect rail freight to resume through the channel tunnel, in compliance with European regulation? When will the Government try to enforce the Sangatte agreement? It was signed after the Dublin convention, and permits the return of illegal migrants who use the channel tunnel. When does the Prime Minister expect the Red Cross centre at Sangatte to close?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman and his colleagues keep mentioning the agreement under which we were entitled to return people to France. As a result of the Conservative Government's negotiations, the agreement lapsed when the Dublin convention came into force.

Mr. Gale: It was signed afterwards.

The Prime Minister: It is correct that it was signed after the Dublin convention, but a specific term of the agreement provided that it should lapse when the Dublin convention came into force—in October 1997, I think, from memory. Consequently we have to renegotiate with the French, and we are doing that. I believe that we shall make progress on that and on Frethun, but it will be easier to do so in the context of European action.

I did not say that we gained all our objectives at Seville; I said that we gained many of them. We also made sure that the issue was on the agenda much more clearly.

Mr. Gale: Rail freight?

The Prime Minister: That depends on reaching agreement about Frethun. I am reasonably optimistic about that, but it must be negotiated with the French. That is why the Home Secretary is meeting his French counterpart—tomorrow, I believe.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge and Chryston): I welcome what the Prime Minister said about sustainable development and the forthcoming talks in Johannesburg. Does he agree that the lesson of last week's mass peaceful lobby of this place was that we can make more progress by being objective in presenting our views on, for example, falling commodity prices and unfair subsidies, than by simply carping from the sidelines?

The Prime Minister: If international agreements require unanimity, we can block an agenda set by others. We cannot, however, gain our own position in any way other than by getting the agreement of others, which is why constructive engagement is so manifestly the right policy. My right hon. Friend's comments on trade issues are absolutely right. It would bring great shame on the developed world if we did not take significant action to open up our markets further to the goods of the poorest countries in the world. Access to our markets is what they need—possibly as much as, and sometimes more than, aid.

EXPORT CONTROL BILL (PROGRAMME No. 2)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Order [28 June 2001],

That the following provisions shall apply to the Export Control Bill for the purpose of supplementing the Order of 9th July 2001:

Consideration of Lords Amendments

1. Proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments shall be completed at this day's sitting and shall be brought to a conclusion (so far as not previously concluded) three hours after their commencement.

2. The Lords Amendments shall be considered in the following order, namely Nos. 1, 17, 10, 2 to 9, 11 to 16 and 18 to 30.

Subsequent proceedings

3. The proceedings on any further message from the Lords on the Bill shall be brought to a conclusion (so far as not previously concluded) one hour after their commencement.—*[Jim Fitzpatrick.]*

Question agreed to.

Orders of the Day

Export Control Bill

Lords amendments considered.

4.32 pm

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): I shall take the point of order in a moment. Before the House considers the Lords amendments, I wish to draw its attention to an error on the amendment paper. Amendment (a) to Lords amendment No. 17 should read:

> "Line 12, leave out from beginning to end of line 18",

not "line 17".

John McDonnell: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Thank you for your leniency. Amendments were tabled in my name and the names of a number of my hon. Friends that expressed a certain position that had been debated previously in the House, and was the subject of an early-day motion with 300 signatories.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): Three hundred and ten signatories.

John McDonnell: I thank my hon. Friend for correcting me. I accept that those amendments have not been selected today, and that the Speaker has no responsibility to provide reasons for not selecting them. Mr. Deputy Speaker, will you none the less take back to him the view that there may well be a case for the publication of the advice provided to the Speaker on amendments, so that we can have transparency and openness and, perhaps, increased accountability about the selection of amendments process?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I know that the hon. Gentleman knows well how the House deals with these matters, and that it is not possible for me to comment on the selection of today's amendments. He has, however, put his thoughts on record for everyone to see and to read.

Clause 1

EXPORT CONTROLS

Lords amendment: No. 1.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Nigel Griffiths): I beg to move, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendment No. 17 and Government amendment (a) thereto, and Lords amendments Nos. 18 and 19.

Nigel Griffiths: Given that the issues raised by amendments Nos. 1 and 17 to 19, and amendment (a) to amendment No. 17, are so closely related, it is sensible to address these amendments as a whole. I will, of course, explain the Government's position on each amendment, and explain why the Government propose to support amendment (a) to amendment No. 17, then amendment No. 17 as amended, and to agree with amendments Nos. 18 and 19. Indeed, I should add that amendment No. 1 covers ground very similar to the part of amendment No. 17 that we are proposing to change. As a result, when I discuss the unfortunate consequences of subsection 4 of amendment No. 17 as it stands, the House can take it that amendment No. 1 would have similar consequences.

This may sound a little complicated, but what I am proposing is in fact quite simple. I am asking the House to support the Government's original amendment to the Bill made in the House of Lords, through which the Government responded to concerns expressed in this House and elsewhere about the issues of guidance and of sustainable development.

I will explain in a moment why we think the House should disagree with Lords amendment No. 1 and support amendment (a) to Lords amendment No. 17. First, however, let me explain why the Government want to replace former clauses 7 and 8, which are now Lords amendments Nos. 18 and 19, with Lords amendment No. 17, as amended.

Former clauses 7 and 8 governed the operation of the export licensing process. They enabled the Government to publish guidance about matters to which regard might be had in the making of export licensing decisions, and the reasons that might be thought to justify particular decisions. The measure that replaces clauses 7 and 8 has a similar function, but we have made two significant changes.

Although we have no doubt that under the Bill as it left the House of Commons it would be possible for the Government to reject an export licence application solely on sustainable development grounds, the Government were very much aware of the depth of concern. We have addressed that concern first by strengthening the role played by guidance under the Bill, and secondly by putting beyond all doubt the Government's continuing commitment to sustainable development in the licensing process, together with all the other relevant consequences listed in the schedule.

First, let me explain how we propose to strengthen the role played by guidance under the Bill. The House will be well aware that the Government have always intended the important role currently played by the consolidated criteria announced to Parliament on 26 October 2000 to continue after the Bill becomes law. That is why clause 8 contained a reference to the consolidated criteria, and a similar reference is in the proposed new clause. The new clause, however, significantly strengthens the role played by the criteria under the Bill by making it a requirement for the Secretary of State to issue guidance about the general principles to be followed in the exercise of licensing powers, and by stating that the consolidated criteria constitute such guidance on general principles. The change will also ensure that if any Government in future wish to change the general principles on which the export control regime operates, they will be obliged to issue guidance stating what the new principles are, and to lay it before Parliament.

I am sure Members will agree that the changes are beneficial to the Bill, and I hope they will support Lords amendment No. 17 as amended and Lords amendments Nos. 18 and 19.

Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): Why was the Bill turned upside down as a result of our worries? Why did my hon. Friend not respond by simply reinserting "sustainable development" in the schedule, which is where it was in the draft Bill?

Nigel Griffiths: That was discussed fully in the House of Lords. "Sustainable development" is now on the face of the Bill, which is what was recommended by my hon. Friend and others. We think that that is the right place for it, as does Lord Scott, who did not want it to be in the schedule.

Let me now explain why the Government believe the House should agree to the Government amendment to Lords amendment No. 17 and oppose amendment No. 1. The Government's original amendment, represented by amendment (a), introduced important changes. We proposed to make the reference to sustainable development explicit by including the text in amendment (a). The fact that that addition to the Bill has much more than merely symbolic significance is demonstrated by the Government's proposal to amend the Bill to say that future Secretaries of State must give guidance about

"the consideration (if any) to be given",

in the exercise of licensing powers, to issues related to sustainable development and to all the issues listed in the table in the schedule. Taken together with the change that I have already described, which will make it a requirement for the Government to issue guidance, amendment (a) will ensure that all future Governments are required to issue guidance on how they propose to consider sustainable development and all the relevant consequences listed in the schedule when exercising their licensing powers. The only way to change that would be by primary legislation.

Mr. Roger Berry (Kingswood): Can my hon. Friend explain why the wording that the Government propose in their amendment is superior to the wording in the Lords amendment?

Nigel Griffiths: The Lords amendment opens up an unfortunate loophole in terms of what its consequences would be, which I will come to in a moment, if my hon. Friend will bear with me. I will give way to him again if he wishes to pursue the point.

Liberal Democrat Members were concerned that the words in the amendment "if any" might allow a future Government simply to decide to ignore such important issues as sustainable development when considering export licence applications. I do not share their concern, but I do share their aim, which is why we tabled our original amendment.

The hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) may still have some concerns. Perhaps he will still assert, as his colleagues in the House of Lords have asserted, that the Government's wording would allow a future Government simply to ignore relevant sustainable development issues. That is not so. I can assure the House that under the Government's original proposal, now represented by amendment (a), it would not be possible for a future Government simply to decide to ignore sustainable development or any of the schedule table issues by saying, "We have considered sustainable development and concluded that it has no place in the consideration of export licences." That would not meet the requirements of the clause proposed by the Government.

Ann Clwyd: Since my hon. Friend prays Lord Scott in aid, does he also agree that Lord Scott is in favour of prior parliamentary scrutiny, a matter that the Government have obviously turned their face against?

Nigel Griffiths: I am not sure that it is quite as straightforward as my hon. Friend states. Unfortunately, this debate is not about prior parliamentary scrutiny. I believe that measures on that were not ruled by the Speaker to be competent for debate today.

I have explained to the Opposition, and it was explained to the Opposition in the House of Lords, not only that their concern on this issue was unnecessary, but that what they have proposed instead would be profoundly damaging. Let me explain that in the light of the question that was put to me earlier.

In the House of Lords, it was explained that under the EU code of conduct and under the UK's consolidated criteria on arms exports, the Government have pledged that the criteria—I quote from the criteria here—

"will not be applied mechanistically but on a case by case basis using judgement and commonsense".

The effect of the Liberal Democrat amendments would be to make it impossible for the Government to use the judgment and common sense that we have promised to use.

All Governments need to be able to take justifiable—my emphasis on the word "justifiable" is deliberate—decisions that there is no need for sustainable development or indeed any of the other schedule consequences to be considered in certain cases. I believe that it is common ground in the House today that there are export licensing cases where it would not be relevant or appropriate to consider sustainable development: for example, the export of a single military vehicle to a developed country such as Canada. The same would be true of any relevant consequences. For example, it would not be relevant or appropriate to consider the regional stability implications of the export of a single parachute to France. I assure the House that even exports of single items still require consideration if the export is of licensable goods.

The effect of the Liberal Democrat amendments would be to impose a straitjacket on the administrative regime, forcing Government Departments to give some consideration to sustainable development and to every single schedule table implication of every single export, no matter how irrelevant certain implications might be either to individual exports or to categories of exports.

4.45 pm

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk): Is it not the case that if the Government have their way, all they will have to do is consider the issue of sustainable development and, if they see fit, reject that criteria and move ahead to grant an export licence? Has that not happened under the

[Norman Lamb]

existing consolidated criteria, with the authorising of a licence for the purchase of the air traffic control system for Tanzania?

Nigel Griffiths: It is not true to say that Ministers could take a cursory look at sustainable development issues and then move on to grant a licence, or not, as the case may be. They must consider sustainable development implications and show that they have done so if there is any future inquiry or appeal against a decision. I do not believe that the hon. Gentleman has accurately summed up how this matter will be handled.

Mr. Berry: I am trying to get to grips with why the Lords amendments should be changed. They refer specifically to guidance stating that regard should be had to issues relating to sustainable development. Why could not that guidance specifically exclude, for example, certain exports to certain countries? I do not see what is wrong with the Lords amendments at all if the guidance is appropriate.

Nigel Griffiths: Let me clarify it for my hon. Friend. Earlier, I mentioned a loophole; I should have made it clear that the amendments would make it impossible for the Government to give effect to certain international agreements according to their actual terms. These are the even more serious and damaging effects of the amendments, which would impose a brand new duty on the Government that could conflict with the Government's existing commitment—given to this House and to our European partners—to consider all strategic export licence applications against the consolidated criteria. This new duty would also take precedence over the EU code of conduct on arms exports, thus potentially requiring us to take an approach to licensing decisions within the UK different from that adopted in the rest of the EU.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): For clarification, will the Minister define exactly what he means by sustainable development?

Nigel Griffiths: Sustainable development is fairly clearly set out in our documents and is detailed in the annual report in terms of any licences that are granted or refused. There is no secret about how the Government analyse and assess sustainable development. The problem that we have with the amendments is that they would give us the obligation of a higher legal status than the consolidated criteria and the EU code. That would put us out of step with our EU partners and possibly make it impossible for the UK to abide by the EU code. That is the effect of amendments Nos. 1 and 17, unamended.

Tony Worthington: I was interested to hear the Minister's response to the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge). He said that what sustainable development would mean would be clear from the occasions when sustainable development was the ground upon which an export had been turned down. My information is that no export has ever been turned down on the ground of sustainable development.

Nigel Griffiths: I think that my hon. Friend is wrong, and I hope to put on the record the number of such cases before the end of today's proceedings.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): Surely the acid test for the Bill, and for the efficacy of the various amendments, is simply this: is the Minister saying that, under the Bill as it stands, the Tanzanian air traffic control system export would not happen again?

Nigel Griffiths: Each future case will be considered according to the available criteria and the prevailing circumstances. Ministers will take decisions on such cases and justify them.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Nigel Griffiths: Such decisions are published in the annual report—another innovation that the Bill will establish as a permanent and necessary requirement.

Ann Clwyd: My hon. Friend is offering to look retrospectively at licensing, but such a facility already exists. Our point is that it is no good having a retrospective look; we want prior scrutiny of contentious arms licences.

Nigel Griffiths: My hon. Friend argues for prior parliamentary scrutiny, but she has not convinced me that a workable system exists; indeed, since I last came to the Dispatch Box my view was reinforced during a visit to Washington. The Chairman of the Trade and Industry Committee was critical of the prior scrutiny regimes in Sweden and in Washington, and I fully understand those criticisms.

Ms Julia Drown (South Swindon): The Minister said that the Lords amendment could be inconsistent with the European code of conduct on arms. Can he give an example of such an inconsistency, because it is not obvious?

Nigel Griffiths: I mean no disrespect to my hon. Friend or to the House, but I am reluctant to pluck hypothetical examples from the air. Our legal advice is clear: if the amendment were accepted, the new duty would take precedence over the EU code of conduct on arms exports. For the UK to take an approach to licensing decisions that differs from that taken in the rest of the EU would be highly damaging to the establishment not just of a concerted, EU approach to licensing arms, but to an international approach that ensures that we are controlling as best we possibly can the export of arms and related technology. We must also recognise that, if unamended, the amendments would have other effects.

John McDonnell: Is my hon. Friend saying that the Lords amendment is unacceptable because it conflicts with prior commitments given at a European level, and that European agreements that we have entered into prevent us from taking sustainability into account in considering individual licence applications? If so, the entire debate on sustainable development being taken into account—in whatever form—under this legislation has been completely futile.

Nigel Griffiths: No, I was not saying that. I was saying that the amendments could mean that we had criteria different from those that operate under the EU code of conduct, and that is what we are trying to avoid. I did not go into specifics because I did not want to pick up on a hypothetical case.

Hugh Bayley (City of York): If the Minister wants to convince me that we should modify Lords amendment No. 17, he will need to convince me that the way in which the Government will determine whether sustainable development would be undermined or compromised by an arms export is rigorously defined. Do the Government intend to set out defined criteria in the public domain against which they will decide whether a particular arms export would compromise sustainable development? In other words, the Government need to go further than simply saying in general terms that they will exercise their judgment.

For instance, will the Government examine, as a test of sustainability, whether a particular export offers value for money or entails "productive expenditure"—to use a phrase from the rules of the Export Credits Guarantee Department—for a developing country? Those of us who have considered the Tanzanian case would say that it would not be termed a sustainable export if measured against value-for-money criteria or against—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has made his point.

Nigel Griffiths: The clearest way to answer my hon. Friend is by reference to the annual report, to which I referred hon. Members earlier. Criterion No. 8 in the report makes clear the need for the compatibility of the arms exports with the technical and economic capacity of the recipient country, taking into account the desirability that states should achieve their legitimate needs of security and defence with the least diversion into armaments of human and economic resources. Subsequent paragraphs spell out clearly the approach that Ministers take—and under the Bill must take—when carrying out that assessment. That is the important point that we need to make about the amendments.

Hugh Bayley: Will the Government publish a list of criteria that they will use in deciding whether sustainability is compromised? A set of such criteria is used in relation to export credits guarantees. Will the Government provide a similar list in relation to arms exports?

Nigel Griffiths: The report makes the position clear, and I am sure that my hon. Friend will read it. There is a list of factors that are taken into account, including information from sources such as the United Nations Development Programme, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and reports from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Whether the proposed export would seriously undermine the economy or hamper the sustainable development of the recipient country will also be taken into account. I am sure that the House will accept that the answer will vary from country to country, depending on the level of development and the size of purchase proposed when the granting of a licence is considered.

The report also makes the other criteria clear and gives a clear description of what is taken into account and, by its absence, what is not. I am not sure that we would want anyone to add anything that is not already in the report. However, if my hon. Friend has a suggestion to add, the House will listen with interest.

5 pm

Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle): I, for one, believe that sustainable development should be at the heart of all Government policy making. Nevertheless, is the Minister aware that numerous small arms manufacturers such as Manroy Engineering Ltd. in my constituency, which employs 40 people, will welcome the fact that he rejects prior parliamentary scrutiny? In rejecting the Liberal Democrat amendments, was any assessment made on the likely impact on job losses that would arise, given that, in certain cases, many small firms must already wait up to a year for the issue of a licence?

Nigel Griffiths: No one has raised the implication for jobs with me; I have read no briefings about it and have not discussed it with ministerial colleagues or anyone else. I am concerned that the Bill provides for the proper scrutiny of licences and an effective regime to avoid the pitfalls that are highlighted by Lord Scott and others. I am afraid that I cannot answer the hon. Gentleman's question, although I recognise that he is voicing the concerns of his constituents and the defence manufacturer associations.

Mr. Llwyd: The Minister referred to the criteria in the annual report. What effect, in reality, did the World Bank report on the Tanzania contract have?

Nigel Griffiths: I am afraid that I did not catch the hon. Gentleman's question.

Mr. Llwyd: What effect did the report by the World Bank, which was heavily against the export of the air traffic control system to Tanzania, have on the decision to export?

Nigel Griffiths: I am not going into detail about the considerations that were made; I am simply justifying the Government's position on the amendments and the effect of the Bill. What the hon. Gentleman refers to is a matter for the Government of Tanzania.

I disagree with Lords amendment No. 1 because I am keen to avoid a costly mechanism that would oblige us to consider every issue in every case, whether it was relevant or not. At best, that could lead to confusion about taking particular licensing decisions, which could slow down the export licensing process and make it impossible for the United Kingdom to give effect to future international obligations according to their terms.

I do not believe that any of this is necessary. If it is the wish of the House that a future Government should not be able to choose to ignore issues such as sustainable development and human rights, the Government share that wish. That is why I want to assure the House once again that Government amendment (a) to Lords amendment

[Nigel Griffiths]

No. 17 would not allow future Governments to ignore these important issues. The Government published a list of criteria in October 2000, setting out their position in detail. I hope that that helps answer the concerns expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for City of York (Hugh Bayley).

In conclusion, I urge the House to achieve our common goal and avoid the unnecessary and damaging effects of Lords amendment No. 1. I urge the House to support amendment (a) to Lords amendment No. 17 and amendments Nos. 18 and 19.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): This is an extraordinarily important debate. I am conscious of the fact that we have only three hours in which to debate all the business this afternoon; I will therefore be brief, as we have many concerns to raise on the next group of amendments on academic freedom.

Let me say first what an extraordinarily successful exercise has been carried out by a large number of organisations and by the Quadripartite Committee, whose contribution has been extremely important in informing the judgment of the House. The Select Committee on International Development has also taken a very proactive role. I am very grateful for all that and for the briefing. Everyone who has spoken today—and most Labour Members present have already spoken—has expressed opinions that reflect the passionate concern of many thousands of people who care deeply about the state of millions of the most vulnerable people in the world.

As the right reverend prelate, the Lord Bishop of Manchester said in another place:

> "If we are serious about halving world poverty, we need to strengthen our legislation regarding what should and should not be exported and imported, taking into account the purposes and outcomes of such exports and the consequences of granting licences for them."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 18 April 2002; Vol. 633, c. 1099.]

The House may recall that during Third Reading, I said:

> "The House is owed an explanation of why the Government left out the paragraph on sustainable development from the table to the schedule."—[*Official Report*, 8 November 2001; Vol. 374, c. 414.]

On that occasion, the Minister stubbornly, and quite inexplicably, refused to give a rational explanation. He could have done so, but he failed to and that misjudgment had consequences: the official Opposition voted in favour of the amendment, when we might have abstained; and, in the other place, the Under-Secretary of State caused months of trouble for the Government, ending in their defeat on the issue on 18 April. Today, we are considering the Government's attempt to reverse that defeat.

I pay tribute to my noble Friend Baroness Miller of Hendon and other noble Friends for their persistence in harrying the Government. The quality of the argument in another place is often said to reflect favourably the time available for debate. It is certainly true that if Ministers fail to win the arguments, they may fail to win the votes—something that regrettably rarely happens in this place.

Since the Bill left us last November, several things have happened. First, as a direct result of the pressure on the Government, I was told in answer to a parliamentary question that the Cabinet Office was working with

> "all Government Departments with an interest"—

to address—

> "the need for clearer procedures for reaching decisions where sustainable development is an issue".

The Minister pointed out that the Government would be discussing procedures on how criterion 8—on sustainable development—of the consolidated criteria could

> "most effectively be applied in assessing relevant export licence applications."—[*Official Report*, 20 June 2002; Vol. 387, c. 467W.]

That is an extremely important point and I wish that the Minister had dwelt on it during report and Third Reading.

Criterion 8 of the consolidated European Union and British codes sets out exactly how the process will be governed. It states:

> "The Government will take into account, in the light of information from relevant sources such as United Nations Development Programme, World bank, IMF and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development reports, whether the proposed export would seriously undermine the economy or seriously hamper the sustainable development of the recipient country.
>
> The Government will consider in this context the recipient country's relative levels of military and social expenditure, taking into account also any EU or bilateral aid, and its public finances, balance of payments, external debt, economic and social development and any IMF or World bank-sponsored economic reform programme."

That says much more than either the Lords amendment or any of the other amendments proposed so far.

As the Government said in another place that it was "absolutely mandatory"—I think those were the words of the Under-Secretary, Lord Sainsbury—for them to consider sustainable development where it was relevant to the export concerned, their reconsideration of how criterion 8 can most effectively be applied is a step forward. We welcome that.

We, too, have gone back to the beginning—to assess how the Bill and this debate measure up to the recommendations of the Scott report. In dealing with the question of the processing of export licensing applications, Lord Scott said that they should be processed

> "expeditiously and with fairness to exporters".

We should not ignore the consequences of changing the wording of the Bill. We have been advised that it would have the effect—as the Minister has confirmed—of requiring the Government to consider sustainable development and every other issue covered by the table to the schedule whenever they exercise their licensing powers under the Bill. So the Government would have to consider every export covered by the schedule even if the implication is that that is clearly irrelevant to individual licence applications or categories of exports. The practical effect would be that all licence applications would have to be systematically assessed against all the consolidated criteria. That would be bound to cause substantial delay, to the detriment of the legitimate interests of the exporters and their employees, but would the delay be significant and what would be the impact on public finances?

It is has been assessed that, if the amendment stands, the number of export licences processed by the Department for International Development will increase from about 600 a year to 15,000. The Department currently employs 1.5 people to process existing applications, so there would be a 2,500 per cent. increase in the Department's work load in that respect. That would clearly have substantial work force implications, which would be amplified right across Whitehall. Only the Government can decide if that is acceptable and, furthermore, whether the Chancellor will pay.

Mr. Berry: Will the hon. Gentleman please tell the House the source of those statistics, which come as a surprise to some of us?

Mr. Key: Yes, they come from a number of academics and the Defence Manufacturers Association. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah."] It is all very well for hon. Members to say, "Ah", but government is not just about listening to only one argument; all the arguments have to be listened to, which is precisely what we have done.

The Government are now floundering in a mess of their own making when it comes to sustainable development. They have listened and acted on concerns about the application of criterion 8 across Departments. We are concerned that, on reflection, the amendment goes much further than Lord Scott intended, so we will not seek to frustrate the Government's will in this matter.

Mr. Berry: I should like to express my gratitude to my hon. Friend the Minister for arranging a meeting with himself and officials after the debates on Report. A number of my colleagues and I had the opportunity to discuss sustainable development with him and how it might be dealt with in the Bill. I should like to thank him, first and foremost, for that opportunity. This is indeed an historic Bill, and I passionately support 99 per cent. of it. I also congratulate the Minister and his colleagues on ensuring that sustainable development has been included in the Bill. That is very welcome indeed. However, I confess to being at a total loss as to why the Government have tabled amendment (a) to Lords Amendment No. 17, and I shall explain why very simply.

Lords Amendment No. 17 is very clear. It states:

> "guidance . . . must state that regard shall be had . . . to . . . issues relating to sustainable development".

The Government want to remove that and to replace it with the words:

> "guidance about the consideration (if any) to be given"

to issues that relate to sustainable development. I have two problems with that, and I am clearly not in a minority of hon. Members in having that view. The first problem is that, pretty obviously, "to have regard to", as in Lords Amendment No. 17, constitutes a stronger obligation than the duty "to give consideration to", as in Government amendment (a).

At first blush, there seems to be an open and closed case that the Government are weakening the duty. However, the second and perhaps even greater problem is the inclusion of the phrase "if any", so a future Secretary of State could simply ignore sustainable development when issuing guidance on export licensing by the simple device that he or she would be required only to include

> "guidance about the consideration (if any) to be given."

May I please emphasise that I do not suggest that the current Secretary of State would do that? I might be in enough trouble in a minute, so I shall not dig myself into that one as well, but a future Secretary of State could say, "No, I do not think that consideration should be given". It is clear from what my hon. Friend the Minister has said this afternoon that the Government do not want that to happen, but I simply do not understand why the Government want to include amendment (a).

My hon. Friend suggested that the Lords amendment would fetter the Government's ability to make common-sense decisions—I think that that was the phrase that he used. I am all in favour of common sense, but I do not understand which common-sense decisions would be problematic. The example given by the Minister, which happened to be the same example given by Lord Sainsbury in another place, was the export of a single military vehicle to a developed country such as the United States of America. Clearly, as has been pointed out, that would not raise sustainable development issues.

5.15 pm

As I understand it, therefore, the Government's concern, expressed by hon. Friend the Minister today and by his colleagues in the other place, seems to be that a range of decisions in relation to particular exports to particular countries would not be especially affected by the sustainable development criterion. That is why they wanted the phrase "if any" to be included. For the life of me, I do not understand why the Secretary of State cannot issue appropriate guidance on the sustainable development criterion indicating, for example, what exports to which sorts of countries would be considered. I assume that that is part and parcel of guidance. Nobody has ever argued that every good and service exported by the UK to every country in the world should be subject to an appraisal before an export licence is granted. Guidance is there to assist those making decisions to ensure that the Government's policy on arms export controls and other matters is implemented. The Lords amendment, which, in my view, is better than the Government amendment, would prevent sustainable development from not being considered when it is, in fact, relevant.

My hon. Friend said that the Government have had legal advice. He will know, as we all do, that Oxfam has also had legal advice from Matrix chambers. As this is a brief debate, I shall not waste the time of the House by quoting that advice, but it is contrary to what my hon. Friend has said and says that the Lords amendment is less unclear and stronger than the Government amendment, and that the problem that my hon. Friend has identified could be dealt with in the guidance issued by the Secretary of State. I am therefore at a loss to know the real reason why the Government want to amend Lords amendment No. 17.

I want to make a couple of brief points about guidance on sustainable development, as that is relevant to what will be the work of those responsible once this welcome Bill becomes an Act. I was delighted that, in March, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary informed the Quadripartite Committee that the Cabinet Office is undertaking an exercise with relevant Departments in assessing criterion 8. I welcome the review of criterion 8, and I hope that it will address a couple of issues.

First, if one considers the consolidated criteria, they do not carry the same weight. The first four criteria take the form that

> "the Government will not issue a licence".

For example, a licence will not be issued

> "if there is a clear risk that the equipment will be used for internal repression".

[Mr. Berry]

The first four of the eight criteria state that the Government will not grant a licence if certain conditions are satisfied—for example, if it is incompatible with our international obligations, or if exports would

> "promote or prolong armed conflicts or aggravate existing tensions or conflicts".

A current example of that springs to mind.

My point is that the principle of the first four criteria is that the Government will not grant a licence if a certain condition is satisfied, whereas the principle behind the sustainable development criterion—I am glad that it is being reviewed—is that the Government will "take into account" the effects. I hope that that duty will be considered further in the review that is being undertaken. It is slightly odd that the sustainable development criterion is of a different order of importance than the first four of the eight.

My hon. Friend the Member for City of York (Hugh Bayley) made the point that any realistic and productive assessment of the sustainable development criterion must involve assessing the extent to which arms exports represent value for money or productive expenditure. I shall say nothing about the Tanzanian controversy, but it obviously springs to mind. I want to stress that, as my hon. Friend rightly pointed out, in the case of the Export Credits Guarantee Department, the Government have already accepted the principle of a productive expenditure test. The ECGD's statement of business principles makes it perfectly clear that support for exports to developing countries must be given only when they will not harm sustainable development.

I spent a few happy moments this morning looking at the ECGD's website. Its business principles include:

> "We will promote a responsible approach to business and will ensure our activities take into account the Government's international policies including those on sustainable development".

The wording gets stronger. The statement adds:

> "ECGD will ensure that debt sustainability will be a prime determinant of the provision of its support for exports."

It specifically makes it clear:

> "ECGD will . . . restrict cover for the poorest countries, to transactions which pass a productive expenditure test."

That is already Government policy in terms of what the ECGD does.

We should apply that same principle to arms exports. We should use the review of criterion 8 to raise the standards for sustainable development testing to those used by the ECGD. If we do not do that, Government policy on sustainable development will not remain joined up. For example, it would be ludicrous if the Government refused export credit guarantees because the productive expenditure tests had not been met at the same time as they granted a licence for arms exports. A key part of the review of criterion 8 is that it must be used to make the policies consistent. ECGD practice demonstrates that it is right in principle and possible in practice to test for the sustainable development impact when deciding whether to license arms exports. To support that argument, I point to the fact that the Government already do that.

I acknowledge that the Government have moved on the provision for sustainable development. When we debated the issue on Report, we were told that we did not need such a provision in the Bill because the matter was being dealt with through the criteria. At the meeting I had with the Minister, we were told that we could not put such a provision in the Bill because it would apply to every good that the country exported. We are now being told a third story—we can have such a provision in the Bill, but that the Government do not like the Lords amendment. I am not trying to be difficult and I certainly am not trying to be sarcastic, but I genuinely do not understand why the Government should want to amend the two sensible lines in the Lords amendment.

Dr. Tonge: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that this whole debate is nonsense? The front page of the International Development Act 2002, which went through the House recently, contains a provision for sustainable development, and the Secretary of State for International Development considered that provision to be the most important in the Bill. Furthermore, the Prime Minister told us this afternoon that he has signed up to all the aims of the sustainable development conference to be held in Johannesburg in September. Is this debate not complete nonsense?

Mr. Berry: I am not sure that the debate is complete nonsense, but it is confusing. I believe that the Government are committed to sustainable development, and the International Development Act 2002 contains a definition of it. However, I do not understand the argument for amending the Lords amendment. I have explained why that would make the Bill weaker and that the Lords amendment would not stop the Government doing what they want to do. I have never before heard the argument that the Lords amendment might put us in breach of the EU code, and I am still awaiting further clarification on that. I cannot believe that it does, certainly not according to the legal advice that other organisations are receiving.

I am enthusiastic about this important Bill and the last thing I want to do is vote against my Government's amendment, but I cannot understand why they have tabled it. The Lords amendment is superior. I am sad to say that if the mystery is not explained before the end of the debate, I will not be in the same Lobby as my hon. Friend the Minister. I will deeply regret that and hope that he gives me a reason to be in the same Lobby.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I am in favour of the Lords amendments and against the Government's proposed changes. Like the hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry), I, too, am confused about how the argument is progressing. There have been several triple-reverse somersaults on how we should approach sustainable development. Unfortunately, the confusion is infectious. I had hoped that the same broad coalition that operated in the other place would be in action today. It comprised a large group on the Government Benches who shared the well informed scepticism that we have heard this afternoon and Members on the Liberal Democrat, nationalist and Conservative Benches.

I listened with mounting bafflement to the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key). Only a few weeks ago, the Conservative spokesman on international development questioned the Secretary of State for International Development. She said:

> "The Secretary of State will be aware of the sustainable development amendment to the Export Control Bill, which was recently approved in another place. It was supported by Conservatives, Liberal Democrats and bishops, and might give the Department for International Development a greater say in such matters. I call on the right hon. Lady to have the courage of her convictions and tell the House that she will support the sustainable development amendment."—[*Official Report*, 25 April 2002; Vol. 384, c. 500.]

I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman outranks his colleague or has not consulted her, but he is taking a diametrically opposite point of view. I will not pursue that too much, but I hope that he will explain why for the past year or so his colleagues have said the opposite of what he now proposes.

Mr. Key: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me the opportunity to remind him of what happened in the Standing Committee in November and on Report and Third Reading when we made it clear that we might have abstained had we got a straight answer. We got the answer in the other place, the Government have moved on the issue and we have been back to Scott. I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman has read the Scott report if he thinks that the proposal conforms with what it recommended. That explains my position. For goodness' sake, it does no one any good if we never move forward in politics.

Dr. Cable: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman should have consulted his colleague because she made her remarks long after the illuminations that he describes emerged.

The more important issue is the Government's position on the matter, on which there have been several significant shifts, to which the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Tony Worthington) referred with characteristic pithy accuracy. We started with a draft Bill. The Government accepted that the schedule of purposes should embrace the principle of sustainable development. That principle was fairly uncontroversial in the White Paper, the Green Paper and the draft Bill, but then it was changed.

The Bill went through the Commons and the House of Lords. However, at the last moment, to avoid putting words into the schedule of purposes, the Government explained that the schedule of purposes was not what it was originally supposed to be. They effectively turned the Bill on its head and are now defending amendments that relate to the language that should be used. Many of us who followed the Bill through its stages and who are interested in the Scott report find those amendments unsatisfactory.

I shall take up specific points. We are told that consideration will be given to sustainable development. That is the weakest language that one could find in this context. The other phrase which is much more controversial—the hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) referred to it—is "if any". To critics of the Bill, that appears to give Ministers the option of not considering sustainable development. That is how it appears from the outside.

5.30 pm

The Government's view, which the Minister has restated, is that they could be involved in considering many extraneous issues such as trade with the United States or with France. He cited legal opinion to that effect. There are, however, alternative legal opinions. Matrix chambers is one of the most reputable set of barristers, and it makes the point that the Government's legal interpretation is bizarre. I do not want to read the legal language in great detail, but there is a key passage that needs to be put on the record. As for the problem of avoiding dealing with extraneous details, the lawyers say that it would be possible to disregard them

> "even if these two words (if any) were omitted from the clause, on the basis that, in providing guidance about the consideration to be given to issues related to sustainable development in a particular type of case, the Secretary of State can determine the weight to be placed on such issues and may confirm that in certain types of cases such issues are not relevant and may be of little consideration."

In other words, if an application arrives on the Minister's desk relating to parachutes from Britain to France, he may simply say, "The sustainable development issue carries no weight, or minimal weight, in these circumstances. We will therefore not pursue that line of inquiry." It is an easy way of dealing with the problem. It is difficult to understand why a diametrically opposed legal opinion has been given on this important point. As the Government have changed their mind several times on the legal status of the Bill, I hope that they will give fresh consideration to the issue, which makes them look rather foolish.

We are talking not only about matters of legality but broader issues of principle. In essence, the Government are trying to tell us, "Trust us. We will interpret sustainable development in the right way at the right time. Providing that there is provision in the guidance, we will look after this concern." In principle, I am always willing to take the Government on trust. However, there are good reasons why we cannot do so in this instance. The first has been taken up twice by the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd). In her interventions she asks the highly relevant question why the Government chose to disregard the Scott report, and why the four Select Committees, with all-party consensus, recommended that individual applications be considered through parliamentary scrutiny.

The Government have rejected that approach. By doing so, they sacrificed one of the key safeguards to ensure that applications were properly considered. When the hon. Member for Salisbury intervened on me to say that the amendment is not compatible with the Scott report, that must be seen in conjunction with the fact that the Government have already rejected one of the central propositions of the Scott report, which was parliamentary scrutiny. Had there been that scrutiny, we would not be having the argument. It would not be necessary. It is because the provision is not in place that the relevant language needs to be written much more firmly and strongly in legislation. That is what the debate is about.

The second reason why we cannot trust government—I do not mean the present Government or the Minister—is the way in which the Tanzanian case was dealt with. That illustrated the weakness of the process of export licence applications in relation to development, in precisely the same way that the Matrix Churchill case illustrated the failures of the old regime. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk (Norman

[Dr. Cable]

Lamb), who has done a great deal of work on the Tanzanian case, would like to talk about the issue at considerable length. However, I shall make a few points because the matter specifically illustrates the difficulty that Government have in dealing with development issues in export licence cases.

The importance of the Tanzanian case is that that was one example where the development argument was clearly set out, first by the World Bank and latterly by the International Civil Aviation Organisation, which examined the project and concluded roundly that it was not in the developmental interest. There was a specific and quantifiable test of sustainable development in the conditions set by the International Monetary Fund for the conditions of credit.

The story of the project, as many people know, is that Barclays bank, working together with BAE Systems, produced a project that appeared superficially to conform to the terms of the IMF definition of sustainable development. In other words, there was a 28 per cent. grant element in the loan. People have examined the project. My hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk has much more detail than I have, and papers are becoming available. Questions are now being asked about how the project managed to satisfy that test of sustainability.

Three hypotheses are being offered. The first is that the bank suddenly developed a fit of generosity and decided to give Tanzania, effectively, a grant of £10 million—a third of the value of the loan. That sounds to me highly implausible. The bank has not claimed credit for doing it, and its shareholders certainly have not been told, so it seems unlikely that it did that.

The second hypothesis is that the bank and BAE Systems fiddled the contract price and overstated the tender price by 30 per cent. so that they could then give a concessional loan. To do that, however, they would have had to engage in what amounts to fraud, with collaborators in Tanzania. We do not know whether that happened, but it seems highly possible that it did.

The third possibility is that the bank and/or BAE Systems were given a quid pro quo—"You sign this contract for the air traffic control system; we will give you access to banking or another arms contract"—involving, probably, illegal and covert relationships with senior Tanzanian civil servants.

We do not know what happened. It will emerge, because papers are coming out of the international organisations which are building up the story. One of the Select Committees of the House—I do not know which; it could be the International Development Committee, the Foreign Affairs Committee, the Treasury Committee or the Defence Committee—will get their teeth into it, and Ministers and their officials will be called to explain what happened, in precisely the same way as Ministers and officials were called to explain what happened in the case of Matrix Churchill. We shall then understand the dynamics of what happened in Government.

My understanding is that the Department of Trade and Industry, backed by the Ministry of Defence and 10 Downing street, enthusiastically supported the project. They were opposed by the Secretary of State for International Development and probably the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who saw it driving a coach and horses through his sustainable development work in relation to debt relief. The story will emerge, but the key conclusion is that the mechanisms of Government, as they operate at present, do not allow a proper test of sustainable development to take place, even when all the evidence is in front of them and is mobilised by Departments of State.

That is why it is absolutely fundamental that we have strong language in the legislation. If the Tanzanian case can occur under the present Government, far worse things can happen under other Governments. The legislation must be strengthened. That was the purpose of the amendment, and I urge hon. Members in all parts of the House to support it and to reject the weasel words that have been incorporated in amendment (a) to Lords amendment No. 17.

Tony Worthington: I do not disagree with anything that was said by the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable).

What a pity that we are having this debate today, given that the Bill was so welcome. It represents a major step forward and is slightly tarnished by the sustainable development aspect. It is still incomprehensible to me why we are in such a tangle on that issue. I praise the Department of Trade and Industry for its role during the mass lobby of Parliament last week, when it spoke to those who were calling for the poor to be looked after under the trade rules. At the heart of that day was the concept of sustainable development, and it was very good that the DTI, alongside other Departments, was making it clear that the Government's policy genuinely has sustainable development at its heart. Indeed, that goes back to what was said by the Chief Secretary in respect of the following announcement:

> "Government Departments have been asked by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury to ensure that sustainable development issues are considered and reflected in their bids for the 2001 Spending Review".

That gave rise to a press release entitled "Sustainable Development at the Heart of Government Policy Development"—an approach that is very welcome and which we want to encourage.

There are other instances in the light of which today's debate is genuinely incomprehensible. On 11 January 2000, the Chancellor made a very important speech. In giving the Gilbert Murray memorial lecture, he called for Government policy to maximise the benefits of debt relief in poverty reduction and economic development by imposing sustainable development criteria. He said:

> "Britain's export credits will only support productive investment that assists social and economic development and thus reduces poverty."

That is absolutely clear and it was very welcome. Hon. Members have referred to the consequence of that statement in terms of the Export Credits Guarantee Department. Seemingly, the oddity is that, although any rank and file export that goes to the ECGD must be justified by the test of sustainable development, something that is related to arms does not have to pass that test. As we seem to be getting towards joined-up government, it appears that somebody is undoing a link, which is very unfortunate.

The Secretary of State says that we take sustainable development seriously. That is the trusters' argument, but the case for the trusters is seriously weakened by two factors. First—this seems pretty much the crunch factor—no one has ever found an example of an arms export being turned down on the basis of sustainable development. I do not know whether the Minister has received information yet from other sources, but when I addressed a question about the matter to the Foreign Secretary in the Quadripartite Committee in March, he said, prompted by his officials, that there had been no cases in which sustainable development had been the ground on which an export was turned down. Unless something has happened since March—if it had, one would have expected the DTI to remember it—we are being asked to take seriously the assertion that sustainable development is at the heart of Government policy in the DTI, and in terms of export controls, even though there has never been an instance in which it was the reason for turning down an export. That is difficult to accept.

The second weakness in the argument has been the presence in the debate, perhaps for some malevolent reason, of the Tanzanian air traffic control system. If one had had to sit down in the past in a university seminar and devise a project that would fail a sustainable development test, one would have come up with this one. It is a beauty. One section of the Government had been giving debt relief to one of the world's poorest countries on the grounds that that debt was unsustainable, then along came another section of the Government encouraging it to take on £28 million-worth of debt for a civil air traffic control system that did not work and was described in the first International Civil Aviation Organisation report—I have not seen the second report, but I think that it is even more damaging—as being out of date and in need of extra equipment to make it work. One ~~has to~~ wonder how that can be classified as sustainable development.

5.45 pm

The Government's response when BAE Systems came to them in 1997 should have been to acknowledge that their policy was not sorted out and that sustainable development was not at the heart of Government at that time. However, that did not happen. The project went through the strange procedure of being approved by the arms working party, which was virtually the same as saying, "You're licensed." I say that because of 4,000 to 5,000 applications a year, only about five were not licensed at the end of the procedure. It was almost unheard of for someone not to be given permission to move forward by the arms working party, which was composed only of officials from the Ministry of Defence and the Foreign Office, and had no representatives from the Department for International Development. The project was a mess, and it would not go through nowadays.

What puzzles me is that no Minister has been able to say that such a project would be caught by the Bill. It would be welcome to hear the Minister say that the Government are upgrading the sustainable development criteria so that such projects will be caught in future. It was a mess, with Cabinet Ministers quarrelling in public over the decision on whether the project was to go ahead at a time when the system had already been built and was resting in crates on the Isle of Wight. Such things happen. However, we need assurances that projects that so clearly infringe any notion of sustainable development will not be approved in future. It would be encouraging if the Minister could say that the Government recognise the need to strengthen the sustainable development criteria and that a project such as the Tanzanian air traffic control system would be caught by the Bill. I hope that he will address those concerns.

Tony Baldry (Banbury): It is a matter of regret that the Government have given so little time to the debate on Lords amendments to the Bill, which has been widely welcomed and on which there is broad consensus. We have only three hours and the Minister took the first half an hour in introducing the Government's response to the first group of amendments.

In respect of sustainable development, in May 2001 the Quadripartite Committee said that

> "consideration should be given to putting on the face of the Bill assurances . . . that licensing decisions should have due regard to the general purposes for which controls can be imposed, as set out in the Schedule to the Bill".

I do not believe that the Committee envisaged that the Government would initially give sustainable development a strong profile in the draft measure, subsequently remove it when the Bill was first published and amend the measure to include it in another place. However, the language is rather ambiguous, and I shall briefly act as a boring lawyer and make a couple of boring lawyer's points.

I am a member of the Quadripartite Committee and I chair the Select Committee on International Development. The hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Tony Worthington) is a member of the latter, and many other members of it are or have been present this afternoon. We have tried to achieve the coherent application of criterion 8 of the EU's consolidated code of conduct for arms export, which ensures, especially in the developing world, that export licences are balanced with the recipient country's economic and poverty reduction policies. Consistent and balanced defence exports are therefore the watchwords.

The Government's assertions in the explanatory notes show that the basis for the latest status of sustainable development is clarifying

> "the manner in which sustainable development issues are addressed".

It is not so much the "manner" in which sustainable development is "addressed" as the way in which it is expressed that is ambiguous in the Bill. It states that,

> "guidance about the consideration (if any) to be given"

to sustainable development must be provided.

I have two anxieties about the status of such "consideration" of sustainable development. First, I am worried about the weasel wording of the phrase "to be given", which I suspect will mean that sustainable development is often considered but frequently ignored. The wording has not been amended to "have regard to", and the Bill will therefore not move us much further than the consideration that is currently given to criterion 8.

Let us consider a straightforward example. Hon. Members are more than aware of the further developments in the Tanzanian air traffic control debacle, and I shall not repeat them. However, hon. Members may be interested in the initial issues that surround the radar sale, not least the first International Civil Aviation

[Tony Baldry]

Organisation's report to the World Bank. It was published in November last year, when the Government claimed that they took full account of sustainable development.

When the Select Committee on International Development invited the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to give evidence on the Tanzanian case, she refused but reaffirmed in a letter to us on 17 December 2001,

> "the Government's commitment to considering carefully the issue of sustainable development as defined in criterion 8."

If the Government were serious about carefully considering sustainable development, they would not have granted the Tanzanian licence after carefully considering the ICAO's previous submission to the World Bank, which stated that,

> "the system, as contracted, is primarily a military system and can provide limited support to civil air purposes".

I understand that the Department for International Development considered the document to be sufficient ground for not granting the licence. The Department of Trade and Industry did not listen to those anxieties, and that demonstrates disingenuousness in the dealings in Whitehall.

In response to a written parliamentary question by me on 28 January 2002, the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry stated:

> "The Department of Trade and Industry's Export Control Organisation has received no representation from the International Civil Aviation Organisation on Tanzania's export licences."—[*Official Report*, 28 January 2002; Vol. 379, c. 66W.]

That statement, which implies that the Department had never seen the relevant ICAO document, contrasts sharply with the response of the Secretary of State for International Development to a question on 5 February 2002. It stated:

> "When I received a copy of the letter of 8 November from the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) to the World Bank, I sent copies to the Department of Trade and Industry, the Ministry of Defence and the Foreign Office. I have since had discussions and correspondence with these Departments on the content of the ICAO letter."—[*Official Report*, 5 February 2002; Vol. 379, c. 918-19W.]

Not only is the Department of Trade and Industry's response to my parliamentary question somewhat disingenuous, it also reinforces the Department's ambivalent attitude to the "consideration" of sustainable development criteria. As other hon. Members have said, one sometimes has to be suspicious of Government collectively—not any specific Government, but the machinery of government.

That leads to my second worry about the Bill's weasel words on sustainable development status. The Bill contains the caveat phrase, "if any" about sustainable development. Doubtless it means that the Government can flagrantly disregard criterion 8 if they wish, while using wording to make such a dismissal of sustainable development almost impossible to challenge. Under such circumstances, how can the current status of sustainable development ensure coherent export policy? It simply will not.

There are no two better examples than the early stages of the Tanzanian export control licence application and the first case of defence exports to India. Let us consider the Foreign Secretary's recent evidence to the Quadripartite Committee. On 21 March, he said that,

> "it is whether the proposed export would seriously undermine the economy or seriously hamper sustainable development of the recipient country. As with any other criteria, those have to be weighted in the round".

I believe that the Foreign Secretary is suggesting that we read "cost effective" for "sustainable development". Cost effective for whom? Can £1 billion-worth of defence spending be cost effective for a country that has increased its defence spending by 28 per cent. in the past two years? Defence spending of £1 billion by India is worth 10 years of UK bilateral development to India, which is our largest recipient of bilateral aid. I suspect that the money would be better invested in India's under-resourced health and education systems. How can the scale of such defence sales be within the capacity of a country that is the top recipient of the Government's bilateral aid?

Criterion 8 explicitly asserts that export licences should not be granted when that would be incompatible with economic capacity. That was clearly the case when Tanzania's economic stability already depended on the UK's recent writing off of £100 million in debt and richer countries' collectively writing off of $3 billion in debt.

As the Tanzanian case shows, it would be beneficial to developing countries if the phrase "if any" were removed. If hon. Members doubt that, I refer them to the Foreign Secretary's comments to the Quadripartite Committee, when he spoke of,

> "careful consideration of whether the proposed export could seriously undermine Tanzania's economy or seriously hamper Tanzanian sustainable development."

Those sentiments echo those of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and should make us question whether "cost effective" means moneys for the UK or the recipient country.

Let me put the matter another way. I suspect that the conundrum is made no clearer than by the response of the Under-Secretary of State for Defence on 29 January to a written parliamentary question that I tabled. He said that when the Tanzanian case was initially assessed under the F680 procedure,

> "sustainable development was not a specific factor taken into account . . . as . . . Tanzania did not include cost information, it would have been difficult to take any impact related specifically to the financing of the equipment into account."—[*Official Report*, 29 January 2002; Vol. 379, c. 218W.]

Where on earth is the "weighted in the round" consideration of criterion 8?

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Tony Baldry: No. The Government have provided scant time for the debate. The hon. Gentleman must make his own contribution. My hon. Friends on the Front Bench want to move on to other amendments, and the House has been given a pathetic amount of time for the debate.

Although the F680 assessment does not represent an approved licence, only a handful of the 10,000 or so applications that are assessed each year do not produce an export licence. Moreover, although the Ministry of

Defence may assure us that the F680 procedure is being reviewed to allow for "consultation" with the Department for International Development on future assessments under it, we have to question whether "consultation" will mean as much as "consideration" in the Bill.

If the status of sustainable development is not affirmed early in the defence export process, it is imperative that "consideration" of sustainable development is undertaken as much as possible later in the licence process.

Much of the measure is welcome. The Government have somersaulted so often that it is difficult to know where they stand. I do not gainsay the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key). It is good news that sustainable development is included in the Bill. However, the jury is still out on whether the Government have any intention of ensuring that the true spirit of sustainable development is invoked in the measure's implementation. The test will come and we shall ascertain in due course whether the Department for International Development and other Departments are given a fair and reasonable say in defence export licensing. If they are not, Ministers can be confident that hon. Members from all parties will raise the issue again.

6 pm

Ann McKechin (Glasgow, Maryhill): First, I want to assure the Minister of my support for the principal purposes of the Bill, which is welcomed on both sides of the House. The need for a modern, comprehensive approach to the control of exports—particularly arms—is overwhelming and long overdue. Recent events in Palestine and Kashmir have again shown the need for proper restraints to be in place.

We have also accepted that, in deciding our criteria, it is not sufficient simply to state that arms exports should not have an adverse effect on a region's peace and stability. In too many cases, countries have spent millions of pounds on expanding their armed forces and providing them with sophisticated weaponry, while making little investment in basic health and education facilities for their own citizens. Armed conflict may come at a later date, by which time the size and strength of military forces can lead to rapid and horrendous consequences.

That is why I also welcome the fact that the Government have now accepted that the principle of sustainable development should be an integral part of the decision-making process, particularly for exports to developing nations. In order to reassure our constituents, church groups and many non-governmental organisations about the Bill's ability to prevent abuses, I strongly urge the Government to consider accepting a definition of the concept that is both meaningful and capable of assessment.

Armed conflict remains the greatest hindrance to eradicating the scar of poverty from our world and preventing the unnecessary deaths of millions. In many cases, the global market in arms has led to increasing instability in conflict zones and, directly and indirectly, to the loss of life. Sadly, the United Kingdom has not been exempt from participating in this grim and tawdry business.

I note that, when the Bill was discussed in the other place, the Government agreed to review their criteria for sustainable development. It is vital that the definition of that concept is fully compatible with that used by the Department for International Development and by the Department of Trade and Industry's own Export Credits Guarantee Department—a case that has been eloquently stated today by my hon. Friends the Members for Kingswood (Mr. Berry), for Clydebank and Milngavie (Tony Worthington), and for City of York (Hugh Bayley). As my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie correctly said, it would be absurd for an export licence for arms sales to be granted after an application for export credit had been rejected on development grounds, despite both processes claiming to have considered the impact on a country's sustainable development. The Export Credits Guarantee Department's own statement of business principles clearly states that exports must not harm sustainable development, and that includes having regard to debt sustainability. Any application to the Department for exports to the world's poorest countries must pass a "productive expenditure" test.

I had the privilege of serving on the Committee that scrutinised the International Development Act 2002. That measure provides the first legal definition of sustainable development, and I am surprised that the Minister did not mention it today. It states that such development must be

> "prudent having regard to the likelihood of its generating lasting benefits for the population of the country".

Does the Minister not agree that it would be strange to have two Departments—or even two sections of the same Department—working with different definitions of the same concept at the same time? I trust that he will be able to give the House a commitment that his intention in the review is to achieve joined-up government and a definition that is as clear, comprehensive and unambiguous as that applied by other sections of the Government.

There is a great deal of support for the Bill, and it would be very sad if the Government were unable to offer a clear and comprehensive approach to sustainable development at the same time. That would not require any changes to primary or secondary legislation. A simple commitment from the Minister today would reassure many hon. Members that the Government are truly committed to sustainable development, and to one definition of that concept.

Mr. Llwyd: I shall be as quick as I can, bearing in mind that other hon. Members wish to speak. Following, as I do, the hon. Members for Kingswood (Mr. Berry), for Twickenham (Dr. Cable), for Clydebank and Milngavie (Tony Worthington) and for Banbury (Tony Baldry), there is not a lot that remains to be said. I shall, however, make one or two points.

The sustainability issue appears to have gone in and out of the Bill like a squirrel going in and out of a hole in a tree. It seems strange that we are having this debate today, bearing in mind that the Bill has much to commend it. I understood the point made by the hon. Member for Kingswood when he rightly said that there is much in the Bill to support, and that he had difficulty understanding why we were having the debate. I share that concern; I cannot understand it either.

If we proceed this evening to overturn the Lords amendments, the Bill's provisions on sustainable development will surely be extremely weak. We would merely be placing a duty to give consideration—"if any"—to sustainable development. That would be an

[Mr. Llwyd]

even weaker provision than that in the current system. The Government's original argument was that an explicit reference to sustainable development in the Bill was not needed because the Bill would give the Secretary of State the power to issue guidance.

In this context, the Bill referred specifically to the consolidated criteria that are used by the responsible Government Departments to determine whether individual export licences should be granted. I am thinking specifically of criterion 8, which covers sustainable development and was the subject of an exchange at the beginning of the debate. It is patently obvious to all, however, that the current system is insufficient, because of the decision to grant an export licence in the Tanzanian case. I shall not dwell on that example, because there are others here who are far better qualified than I am to speak on that issue. I shall, however, highlight one or two brief points.

As we know, the World Bank commissioned independent civil aviation experts to look into the Tanzanian deal, and its report has just been published. It has condemned the sale, describing the system in question as a complete waste of money. The experts concluded that Tanzania could have bought an off-the-peg system for about a quarter of the price agreed with BAE Systems, that the system actually purchased had "dated technology", and that Tanzania does not have an air force of its own anyway. We also heard about the debacle between the Department for International Development and the Department of Trade and Industry, a misunderstanding that leads us to think that government is not always joined up. If the Government are serious about sustainable development, the findings of the World Bank must surely be an embarrassment to them.

In *The Guardian* on 15 June, a DTI spokesperson said that the World Bank report would make no difference to the Department's attitude towards the deal. He also stated:

> "We will not revoke the export licence because this report is not relevant to it."

I regret having to repeat those words, and when I take into account what the Minister says about the criteria now being urgently reviewed, I have to ask when that review will commence. If the gentleman at the DTI takes part in it, I do not hold out much hope for the future.

The ICAO report has been mentioned, and there seem to be 100,000 reasons why the Tanzanian debacle sets a bad example, as the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie said earlier. I hope that the Government will reconsider their stance on this matter. I am another boring lawyer, but I do not intend to dissect the amendments. Suffice it to say that it is patently obvious to anyone, lawyer or layman, that the Government's proposals will water down the concept of sustainability. I regret that, but, whichever side of the argument one comes from, it is the obvious conclusion to draw. I repeat that there is much in the Bill to commend it, and it is regrettable that we are having this debate today.

Hugh Bayley: We have had a fairly full debate, and I will try not to detain the House. I will simply say that I welcome the Bill. How different this is from what happened when the Conservatives were in power. I also welcome the Government's decision to make specific reference in the Bill to sustainable development. From time to time, during the short time that I spent on the Front Bench, I had to dream up reasons why the Government might, on reflection, change their position. One good reason for the Government deciding, when the Bill was in another place, to agree that sustainable development should appear in the Bill, was that when they first published the Bill and brought it to this House, the International Development Act 2002 was not on the statute book. For the first time, we now have a statutory definition of sustainable development. It would be rather curious if, a few months after agreeing on such a definition, we refused to apply it in relation to a further piece of legislation.

I strongly welcome Lord Sainsbury's statement in the other place that criterion 8, the "sustainable development" criterion, would be reviewed. I do not want to repeat the arguments that other Members on both sides of the House have advanced so cogently about the need to use the sustainable development tests relating to applications for export credit guarantees—for instance, the "productive expenditure" test, to give just one example in connection with arms sales.

I should mention, however, that another of the export credit guarantee tests concerns whether an export would be compatible with debt sustainability. That test should certainly apply to arms sales; omitting it would lead to the unjoined-up-government nonsense whereby one Department—the Department for International Development—can commit millions of pounds of Government money to writing off a developing country's debt, only for another Department to make a decision that creates a similar amount of debt.

Not just the working but the wording of criterion 8 needs to be reviewed. In particular, the Government should devise and publish a series of specific sustainability tests and apply them rigorously when considering whether the "sustainable development" criterion is being applied. I ask the Minister to comment on that when he replies. Indeed, I should like him to reflect on the points raised by my hon. Friends the Members for Clydebank and Milngavie (Tony Worthington), for Glasgow, Maryhill (Ann McKechin) and for Kingswood (Mr. Berry), as well as those I have raised. If he wants the House to go along with the Government's amendment, I hope he will be able to reassure us by saying that they intend to publish that series of tests allowing them to determine the question of sustainability.

Norman Lamb: Several Members have described the Government's approach as incomprehensible, and have said that they are confused by the debate. I suspect that we should not be confused in any way. We all know, surely, that a battle is in progress at the heart of Government between those who want to pursue the concept of sustainable development and make it a binding test in all contexts of Government policy, and those in Government who are more interested in sustaining the British arms industry. That is what has happened with the Tanzanian scandal, and it is what is happening in the Bill. At present those in the Cabinet who want to sustain the British arms industry, even at the expense of sustainable development, are winning the argument.

6.15 pm

It is important for those of us who believe that sustainable development must be at the core of all Government thinking to keep challenging the Government. Their approach, and their amendment, will render any effective test of sustainable development meaningless. What they are doing represents spin without substance. It will look good on paper, but the Government will be able to evade the test whenever they need to. Moreover, it means that we will sustain this inconsistent approach across Government.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) pointed out, the International Development Act 2002 now has at its heart a requirement that the spending of development assistance must meet the test of sustainable development and the alleviation of poverty. Many Labour Members have mentioned the approach of the ECGD. The work of that department must also meet the test of sustainable development—but when the Bill has been passed, if the Government have their way, they will ultimately be able to ignore sustainable development when granting export licences.

Export licence applications are currently considered in terms of the consolidated criteria. Many references have been made to criterion 8, and to the fact that it is under review and will be reformed. We know, however, that when the Government are in a corner they will ignore that criterion. We know it from the example of the Tanzanian air traffic control system. We know that what really drove the decision to grant a licence was the issue of jobs and the interests of the British arms manufacturer BAE Systems.

I want the Minister to answer a specific question. When the Department of Trade and Industry granted the export licence in December, did it know of the role of Barclays bank? Did it know that Barclays had apparently subsidised the deal? As my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) observed, here we have a commercial bank suddenly, in a fit of generosity, subsidising a totally inappropriate arms deal with a heavily indebted country. It is unbelievable. The Secretary of State for International Development has already alluded to corruption. Did the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry know the details when she reached her decision back in December?

As other Members have said, the really troubling aspect of the Government's approach today is that a decision such as that reached in the case of the Tanzanian scandal will be just as possible after the Bill has been passed. Consideration is a very weak test. It will be perfectly possible for the Government to demonstrate that they have considered sustainable development before rejecting it. No legal challenge will be possible, given such a pathetically weak test. The Government will be able to go on sustaining the arms industry, as they seem willing to do at present.

I want to say something about the interplay between the granting of an export licence and the preliminary clearance given by the Ministry of Defence. Again, sustainable development effectively goes out of the window. The MOD, bizarrely, has an opportunity to give preliminary clearance to an arms export that will later have to be considered by an entirely separate Department, the Department of Trade and Industry. Back in August 1997—just after the then Foreign Secretary had referred to a foreign policy with an ethical dimension—it gave preliminary clearance to an arms sale to Tanzania.

Before the export licence was granted last December, BAE Systems entered into a binding contract with Tanzania, with the support of Barclays bank. The equipment was largely built, and $15 million had already been paid. All that happened before the application for an export licence was made. No one can tell me that when the application was considered in December, sustainable development played any part in the decision that was reached—and that will still be so in similar cases after the Bill has been passed.

In promoting the Government amendment, the Minister seemed to make great play of the alleged loophole—the fact that if the Lords amendment remained in place, the provision would be inconsistent with the European consolidated criteria—but in answer to an intervention he seemed, as I understood him, to make it clear that we would not be in breach of any legal obligation to Europe. If the Lords amendment were agreed, we would have a system that better protected the interests of sustainable development, and that is what the Government are seeking to throw out. They should be ashamed.

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): This seems the right moment in our proceedings to put on the record my support for the Government's decision to put sustainable development back in the Bill. That was the right decision. It cannot have been an easy decision, not least because they had previously removed it. It opens the Government to potential criticism and attack on their overall approach, so it was a courageous decision, too.

I am delighted that sustainable development is back in the Bill. The reason why the Government appeared to be reluctant to put it back has come out in the debate; I use the word "appeared" because I do not believe that they were truly reluctant. There was no lack of commitment to sustainable development. Indeed, how could anyone, let alone a Labour Government committed to tackling poverty at home and abroad, be against that admirable goal?

It is all too clear that there is a conflict—many hon. Members have referred to it—in the day-to-day business of Government, and in the pressures from different Departments, such as the Department of Trade and Industry, the Ministry of Defence, the Treasury and the Department for International Development. Those elements clearly came to a head in the Tanzanian air traffic control issue. We saw a lot of rather sanctimonious nonsense in the press about that at times.

Unrealistic expectations were voiced about how the Government should have acted. The Government were in a difficult position, because they had to try to square the circle and bring together the legitimate needs of different sectors represented by different Government Departments. What we need is not an approach to international development or trade issues that privileges one particular Department—whether that be the Department for International Development, the Department of Trade and Industry or the Ministry of Defence—but a coherent overall approach, a coherent strategy on making decisions about matters such as the Tanzanian air traffic control issue, which takes all the relevant considerations into account.

At the heart of that strategy must be the concept of sustainable development. Not only do we need a concept of sustainable development in the Bill, but it should be

[Roger Casale]

defined in the same way for each Department, so that it can act as a golden thread that joins the work of different Departments.

At the same time, we must recognise that sustainable development definitions are subject to change. Twenty years ago, we had the Brundtland definition of sustainable development, which emphasised reconciling social and economic development with the environment. Today there is a much stronger emphasis on tackling poverty and building democracy in developing countries as a way of ensuring that development in those countries is sustained over time. We must recognise that we cannot simply open the Oxford English dictionary and find a definition of "sustainable development". It is a contested concept. The notion of sustainable development that we are anchoring in the Bill today will be subject to change over time.

For that reason it is important to understand that in the application of that concept to practical everyday politics there needs to be a certain degree of flexibility and adaptability. None the less, I am delighted that the concept is back in the Bill, because the whole aspiration and thrust of the Bill is to change dramatically the approach to the control of export licences, which was long overdue, and to put it on a completely new footing with new principles at its core. I hope that the concept of sustainable development is robust enough to link the work of different Departments. I wish the Government luck, every success, and, I hope, support from reasonable-minded people who will not use that concept as a rod to beat the Government over the head with in years to come.

Jeremy Corbyn: Briefly, because I know that other hon. Members want to raise other issues on the Bill, I shall make three points. First, can the Minister say what is happening to the review of criterion 8, when he expects that to be published, and how it will be published for us?

Secondly, it must be plain that sustainable development has to be among the criteria for arms exports. The Tanzanian fiasco points that up, as do many others; one only has to look at the arms sales that have traditionally been made around the world to the most odious regimes presiding over the greatest poverty and abuses of human rights. The two often go together.

I cannot understand why we have got ourselves into the incredibly arcane debate about whether this or that version of sustainable development is in Bill. I would like to hear from the Minister a clear answer to the effect that sustainable development will be central to the considerations, and that the Department for International Development will have an opportunity to take part in that review. It would not have to review every document, as the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) seemed to claim, but at least it would have a say in the general criteria, and would therefore influence the decisions that were made.

Thirdly, I regret that the amendment in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) and others was not selected, because this whole debate clearly underlines the case for proper effective parliamentary scrutiny of arms exports. Many of us have spent many years being very concerned about the fact that the arms export industry in this country is heavily subsidised, about the damage that it does to the economies that purchase arms from us, and about the fact that regimes that have no regard whatever for human rights buy arms claiming that they will be used to defend their country against external aggression, and then use them simply for internal oppression.

Those problems are at the heart of the concerns that many people have. I hope that when the Minister replies, he can convince us that the many people who are campaigning on the issue are right, that the Government have heard them, and that they will be serious about controlling arms exports. I no longer hear talk of proposals for an arms conversion industry. Perhaps this is the time for the Minister to bring those proposals forward again.

Nigel Griffiths: With the leave of the House, I shall respond to some of the points and, I hope, reassure the House, including my hon. Friends. May I start with my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn)? On the first question that he put to me, the Government recognise the need to consider how criterion 8 can be most effectively applied in assessing relevant export licence applications, and we have agreed that there is a need for clearer procedures in Whitehall for reaching decisions when sustainable development is an issue. The Cabinet Office has been tasked with facilitating an interdepartmental discussion of the issue involving all the Departments with an interest. That discussion continues, so the Government are not currently considering a change in the policy.

The Government have already published details of how they consider, and will consider, sustainable development both now and under the Bill. The consolidated criteria published in October 2000 represent the Government's policy now, and will continue to represent it under the Bill. That is made clear by subsection (8) of the new clause to be inserted by amendment No. 17. We have a definition appropriate to that—one agreed with all our EU partners. Definitions and criteria relating to other issues and other circumstances are simply not relevant here.

I remind the House, especially the hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb), that the Bill says that the Government must have regard to the guidance. It will not be possible simply to ignore sustainable development, as I think he mistakenly stated. The use of the words "if any" does not mean that a future Government could simply decide not to address the issue of sustainable development, or indeed any of the issues listed in the table referred to in the schedule.

6.30 pm

The hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) implied that it would be fairly straightforward for advisers or Ministers to pass swiftly over obviously irrelevant considerations, but that fundamentally misunderstands the nature of primary legislation. A duty for the Government is not there to be applied or ignored according to the view of the Government of the day as to what is or is not relevant. That is the attitude that the Bill is designed to prevent, and we have taken care to draft our proposals in such a way that the Bill allows common-sense decisions to be taken, but only where they can be justified. The Liberal Democrat amendments would make it impossible for common sense to apply, and would encourage the absurdity of the box-ticking approach that we are seeking to avoid.

The hon. Member for Twickenham mentioned the Scott report and claimed that it made a recommendation on prior scrutiny. However, the Scott report never mentioned prior scrutiny. It spoke in favour of scrutiny orders, which are provided for in the Bill.

I repeat that if sustainable development were in the schedule, that would empower the Government to control the export or trade of pretty well any goods of any kind, since almost any goods have the capacity to have an effect on the sustainable development of a recipient country. This would be a massive extension of the Government's ability to impose controls.

My hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Tony Worthington) mistakenly believes that only Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Ministry of Defence officials consider F680 inquiries. I can assure him that Department for International Development officials are involved in every case in which it is necessary to consider criterion 8 of the consolidated national and EU code.

Tony Worthington: Will the Minister give way?

Nigel Griffiths: I will not prolong our proceedings. I gave way generously earlier, and my reward was to be accused of delaying things and spending too much time at the Dispatch Box. I am sure that my hon. Friend will find a way of coming back to the issue.

As there has been an allegation of wrongdoing and criminal activity on the part of BAE Systems, I want to put clearly on the record the fact that the Government have no evidence that the deal was in any way corrupt. We are committed to working with our international partners and the business community to ensure that there is effective action both here and abroad to tackle the problem of corruption, as the OECD convention on combating bribery of foreign public officials and the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 make clear.

Norman Lamb: Will the Minister give way?

Nigel Griffiths: I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman, whose hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham made serious allegations about Barclays and BAE Systems. I do not know if he intends to repeat them outside this House, but I would caution against it.

I hope that I have given a justification for rejecting amendment No. 1 and supporting the motion standing in the name of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

Question put, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment:—

The House divided: Ayes 282, Noes 40.

Division No. 278] **[6.34 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Baird, Vera
Barron, Rt Hon Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, Andrew
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jamieson, David
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann

McKenna, Rosemary
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Perham, Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Ian Pearson and
Joan Ryan.

NOES

Allan, Richard
Barrett, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
(NE Fife)
Carmichael, Alistair
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Ewing, Annabelle
Harvey, Nick
Holmes, Paul
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Keetch, Paul
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamb, Norman
Llwyd, Elfyn
Oaten, Mark
Öpik, Lembit
Price, Adam
Pugh, Dr John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Sanders, Adrian
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tyler, Paul
Weir, Michael
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wishart, Pete
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Andrew Stunell and
Bob Russell.

Question accordingly agreed to.

New Clause

Lords amendment: No. 17, before clause 7, to insert the following new clause—*Guidance about the exercise of functions under control orders.*

Amendment made: (a), in line 12, leave out from beginning to end of line 17 and insert—

'The guidance required by subsection (3) must include guidance about the consideration (if any) to be given,'.—*[Nigel Griffiths.]*

Lords amendment No. 17, as amended, agreed to.

After Clause 3

Lords amendment: No. 10.

Nigel Griffiths: I beg to move, That the House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 3, 4 and 6, and the Government motions to disagree thereto, and Lords amendment No. 16.

Nigel Griffiths: Hon. Members may be aware that extensive discussion took place in the House of Lords on the Bill's possible impact on the activities of scientists and academics. To address those concerns and make clear their position on these important issues, the Government tabled their own amendment—Lords amendment No. 16—which protects academic freedom. Opposition amendments Nos. 3, 4, 6 and 10 were passed with the same aim, but they would introduce several highly damaging loopholes. For instance, if they were accepted we could not prevent the transfer abroad of research into the development of torture equipment technology.

I shall explain how the Bill and amendment No. 16 provide protections to ensure that the Bill cannot be misused to damage academic freedoms. I shall also explain the damaging consequences of the Opposition amendments, in the hope that hon. Members will agree to their being overturned.

The academic community has acknowledged its concern not about the controls that the Government plan to introduce through the Bill, but about whether a future Government could misuse the powers in the Bill. Baroness Warwick, chief executive of Universities UK, stated during a debate in the other place that, after discussions with the Government, UUK was convinced that they in no way wanted to impinge on academic freedom by way of the Bill. Universities UK was nevertheless keen for the protections for academic freedom in secondary legislation under the Bill to be backed up by a statement in the House that the Government intended to protect academic freedom in that way. Lord Sainsbury made such a statement in the other place, and I can happily give the same assurance here today.

There are already strict limits on how the Bill's powers could be used. They can be used only to control exports or transfers required by our international obligations on military equipment and technology and on exports or transfers that could have serious consequences, such as contributing to weapons of mass destruction programmes, or human rights abuses. In spite of that, Universities UK and others, including parliamentary colleagues, requested that a clear commitment to academic freedom be set out in the Bill. In response, the Government introduced Lords amendment No. 16. That makes clear that the Secretary of State, when making secondary legislation under the Bill, must avoid unreasonable restrictions on putting information in the public domain or communicating material already in the public domain.

Although the amendment does not use the words "academic freedom", it goes to the heart of what academic freedom is about. It protects freedoms for all, not just for members of the academic community, including freedoms to publish, or otherwise make publicly available, research and to communicate it to students and others. That reflects the fact that scientific and other research is carried out far more widely than just in the academic world. Therefore the rules applying to such research should apply equally to all undertaking it—a matter of some concern, I understand, to the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key).

Under the amendment, any order under the Bill that attempted to place an unreasonable restriction on publication or communication could be opposed in the courts. We have tested the effect of the amendment on a list of scenarios sent to us by Universities UK which illustrated the kind of situation that universities were concerned about. The answers to those scenarios illustrate—I hope—that the Bill will not, and could not, be used to damage academic freedoms. The details are available in the Library. The Government are nevertheless willing to continue working with Universities UK and others to consider any remaining concerns or proposals they may have in relation to the Bill.

The Government amendment, Lords amendment No. 16, also ensures that any controls introduced under the Bill can be kept in line with our obligations under international regimes, such as the missile technology control regime and the Wassenaar arrangement. That is because it will enable us to keep the exemptions for information in the public domain contained in secondary legislation in line with the international concepts and definitions used.

The Opposition's amendment, Lords amendment No. 10, sought to protect academic freedoms, but unlike the Government amendment, it would also create very damaging loopholes in the Bill. I shall explain what those are. First, subsections 1(a) and (b) of the amendment would establish in secondary legislation an immutable exemption for information in, or being placed in, the public domain, unless the transfer was related to weapons of mass destruction or required by international treaty obligations. Because that exemption could not be adapted except by primary legislation, Lords amendment No. 10 would prevent the UK from complying with its commitments to voluntary export control regimes such as the Wassenaar arrangement and the missile technology control regime, if those agreed any change to the definition used, as they might do. As the House will know, those international regimes form a crucial part of global efforts to combat proliferation of conventional and non-conventional weapons, and it is therefore essential that the United Kingdom be able to meet its commitments to those regimes.

Subsection 1(c) of Lords amendment No. 10 would exempt from control any and all information transferred in the course of academic teaching or research unless the transfer was related to weapons of mass destruction or involved military technology. That would exempt anyone engaged in academic research and teaching from controls on the transfer of technology capable of causing the consequences listed in the schedule to the Bill, such as human rights abuses, internal repression or facilitation of terrorism or serious crime. It would therefore permit an academic to contravene the Government's 1997 ban on export of equipment and related technology about which we have had evidence that it has been used in torture—by sending overseas research results on how to make, for example, electric shock batons. It is unacceptable in the Government's view that any one group should be automatically exempted from our export control regime in that way. The all-party Quadripartite Select Committee agreed with that view in its report on the draft Bill, stating:

> "We see no case for complete exemption of academic activity from export controls".

The effect of subsection 4 of amendment No. 10 would be to require the Secretary of State to misuse licensing powers granted to her under EU law. Subsection (4) of the amendment would require the Government to grant licences under directly applicable EU provisions in such a way as to exempt academic activity in certain areas from control. However, the European Union dual-use regulation currently in force states that licence applications under it must be considered against the European Union code of conduct on arms exports. The amendment would therefore make the Secretary of State subject to conflicting duties under national and EU law. Moreover, the regulation already includes specific exemptions from control for information in the public domain and for basic scientific research, and it is not open to member states to attempt to alter those.

Lords amendment No. 4, also tabled by the Opposition, would remove clause 2(2)(c) and 2(2)(d) from the Bill. The Opposition suggested in the other place that those clauses could be used to require overseas students to obtain licences to study in the UK. Let me assure the House that that is simply not the case. The Bill could not be used to license overseas students' presence in the UK. However, the powers that amendment No. 4 would remove are crucial if we are to have a comprehensive export control regime. Those powers would give the Government the power to impose controls on transfers of technology within or into the UK where the technology transferred was intended for use outside the UK.

Without those powers, we would have a huge loophole in the Bill. Let me explain why. As well as being exported physically or electronically, technology can in effect be exported through communications in person, either in the UK or overseas—for example, an expert going overseas and providing training there could be effectively exporting technology. The European Union joint action on provision of technical assistance to weapons of mass destruction programmes requires us to control such transfers of technology by UK persons overseas that are destined for use in WMD programmes. But exactly the same transfer of WMD-related technology to exactly the same person

[Nigel Griffiths]

with links to a WMD programme could be made entirely within the UK, with the intention that the recipient would then use that technology overseas.

It would be absurd if a licence was needed for the overseas transfer, but not if the same transfer took place in the UK. Equally it would make a nonsense of the controls if they could be evaded by a UK person overseas transferring technology into the UK in the knowledge that the receiver intended to take that information and use it overseas. That is why we have proposed to introduce controls on such transfers within and into the UK. However, we recognise that regulating these types of transfers is difficult, so we have made it clear that these controls will apply only to the areas of greatest concern—namely, weapons of mass destruction and related missile programmes.

We need clause 2(2)(c) and 2(2)(d) of the Bill if we are to have effective controls against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Indeed, our proposals in this area were strongly supported by the all-party Quadripartite Committee, which pointed out that

> "non-proliferation is arguably the most important single issue in strategic export controls".

The Committee went on to describe the proposals in its report on the draft Bill as "profoundly significant".

The Government have made every effort to address the academic community's concerns about the Bill. We believe that Lords amendment No. 16 strikes the correct balance between the need to protect the freedom of academics and others engaged in teaching and research and the need for an effective export control regime. I urge the House to accept the amendment and to overturn Lords amendments Nos. 3, 4, 6 and 10.

Mr. Key: This is an important group of amendments and we have only a little over half an hour in which to have a coherent debate. I shall do my best to be speedy. The Minister is profoundly mistaken to think that the academic community will be in any sense reassured by what he has said and what his colleagues said in the other place. There is a misunderstanding about why the academic community is concerned. The current regime of export controls was introduced in 1939, and for many years it applied only to physical goods. Although technology could be transferred electronically by telegraph from the 1840s, by telephone and fax from the 1870s, and by radio from the 1900s, no attempt was made to do so.

7 pm

Some years ago the Department of Trade and Industry started applying export controls to manuals for weapons as well as to weapons. That caused a certain amount of grumbling, and served no obvious purpose other than to make work for the civil service. The DTI, however, has never lacked powers against genuine arms exporters. If a company successfully argued in court that controlling manuals was ultra vires, it would no doubt get hammered on its other licence applications. The problem is that these powers have often been used erratically. For example, the Canadian army was refused an export licence for flails for use in mine clearance in Bosnia. Apparently, the DTI saw the word "mine" and froze. That led to the Scott inquiry, after which something had to be done.

During the 1990s, the United States National Security Agency tried to tighten the regulation of civilian cryptography. In the last months of the first Bush Administration, it pitched the clipper chip—a new standard for encryption with the feature that the National Security Agency would hold a master key. Thus US business could get the benefits of strong encryption, but if it were abused by criminals, the National Security Agency would be able to defeat it. George Bush senior and his Cabinet were hostile; they thought that it was bureaucratic empire-building and would cause them all sorts of trouble. Once President Clinton was elected, however, the pitch was repeated and got a warmer reception. Vice-President Al Gore took on the role of directing cryptography policy in the Cabinet. His efforts to sell the clipper chip were hampered by the availability world wide of encryption software that can be downloaded from many academic and other websites. Why should people pay $100 for encryption that the United States Government can break when they can get free software that they cannot break?

Cryptography is now used in a large number of systems as the glue that holds things together. It is found in every personal computer, in web servers, browsers, banks' automatic teller machines, car door openers, electricity meters and even one-armed bandits. As the USA tried to retain export controls on the technology, it waded deeper into trouble.

United States law, unlike English law, allows export controls to be applied to intangibles such as software downloaded from websites. There were furious battles in the United States about whether encryption software was the constitutionally protected academic speech of the professor who wrote it, to which the answer was "Yes, sort of", and whether it could be exported printed in a paper book, to which the answer was "Yes." People printed software on T-shirts that said, "This T-shirt is a munition." Companies such as Microsoft then poured money into civil liberties groups, annoyed that European encryption software firms were establishing markets close to them. Eventually, in the run-up to the 2000 election, Vice-President Gore caved in and removed most of the controls on the export of encryption software.

Before new Labour came to power, it adopted a strong position against the regulation of cryptography. Once it was in power, the line changed. The Government started putting out proposals for cryptoregulation that eventually, after much opposition and watering down, led to the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000. At the same time, consultation was started, and accelerated after the Scott report, on modernising the export control regime. A Green Paper came out in 1996 and a White Paper in 1998; the latter recommended the introduction of controls on transfer of technology by intangible means.

The best reference on this is the Trade and Industry Committee report of 10 December 1998 on strategic export controls. It took a critical view of the White Paper's line on intangible controls—paragraphs 37 to 42 are the key. The Committee found that the Government had no clear idea of the extent of the problem that the provisions sought to address, that there were grave doubts about the practicality of the proposals and fears for their consequences, and that there would be significant economic consequences such as the increase in costs of post-sales software maintenance and the support of online instructions manuals.

The Committee noted severe worries about the effects on the operation and standing of United Kingdom higher education. It recommended that intangible export controls, if introduced, should be limited to weapons of mass destruction, and that the Government should not agree to an extension of the European Union's dual-use regime, whose aim was to bring exports of dual-use goods outside the EU under harmonised control.

The Government's reaction was to encourage the EU to put through a dual regulation in 2000 which, on the face of it, extended controls on the export of dual-use goods from the EU to intangible transfers. The legal view taken at the time by the universities was that this regulation had no force in criminal law because it would take primary legislation to introduce a new criminal offence, namely, conveying information to foreigners without the permission of Government. DTI officials claimed that the regulations did indeed have criminal force, but when pressed for an explanation of which Act would be used to prosecute, they were unable to help.

None the less, the DTI went ahead and started implementing dual-use controls on the community of arms manufacturing companies that it regulates. For such a company, a direct legal challenge could have unpleasant consequences. The view of the Defence Manufacturers Association at the time was—and, for all I know, still is—that the regulations also applied to tens of thousands of other companies which were, for example, incorporating cryptography in all sorts of products and exporting them while blissfully unaware of the alleged new legal situation. The DTI did not educate the companies which were now supposedly subject to licensing.

The Bill gives the Government almost arbitrary powers to regulate intangible exports. Officials say that it will be used sparingly. However, the EU dual-use regulation, which they will at last be able to enforce, will itself prevent, for example, technology transfers relating to cryptography outside the EU. Other technologies on the dual-use list include a very large part of what the Ministry of Defence considers to be high tech and thus a great deal of what interests universities.

Officials have been telling two different stories to academia. To Universities UK, they said that the Bill will be used to take powers to license the teaching of certain subjects to certain students. In public—and in Parliament—Ministers denied that that was the case. Lord Sainsbury tried to finesse the issue by saying loudly and often that the licences would be needed not by the students, as the Opposition had said, but by the professors teaching them. That is pure casuistry, as the students' name would also appear on the licence. Universities UK, whose chief executive is Baroness Warwick, did not push the issue.

Ministers say that the needs of academia will be met by exemptions covering pure science and information being put in the public domain. Yet the current arrangements for research grants for the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council require applicants to describe their proposal's "relevance to beneficiaries". Thus a pure mathematician wanting to do work on elliptical curves will describe it as being highly relevant to cryptography, which is the key enabling technology for electronic commerce, thereby putting his head in the noose.

One academic told me that in 1997 he worked with scientists in Norway and Israel to develop cryptographic software for a competition run by the United States Government to find a replacement for a 1970s-generation encryption standard. DTI officials told him that in future, once they had intangible export controls in place, such an exchange would require a licence. As a result, the research would not get done. The conditions likely to be attached to such licences will not be acceptable to many universities or individual academics. Yet now we see Ministers equivocating as to whether a licence would be needed. In a letter to Baroness Warwick, Lord Sainsbury says that

"it is likely that exchanges of the type described above would be authorised under the Open General Export Licence for Cryptographic Development."

Yet that relates to commercial development and thus appears to exclude free software; it needs a formal agreement, which must be registered; it excludes Chinese nationals; it has an onerous record-keeping burden; and it excludes cryptanalysis. No really useful scientific work on ciphers can be done without cryptanalysis. It is like trying to design aeroplanes without either a wind tunnel or computational fluid dynamics codes with which to test the designs.

Ministers claim that placing information in the public domain will make it exempt. That means that if I were to invent a global positioning system jammer that rendered US smart munitions ineffective, I could put the design on my web page so that the Taliban could download it and build it.

However, if I were to give a talk at a closed conference—a NATO conference, for example—I should need to obtain an export licence, not only for the talk but for any slides that I wanted to e-mail in advance to the conference organisers. Such a provision would also interfere with academic-industry collaboration, as we would appear to need licences to attend progress meetings. Perhaps all the problems will be sorted out in time—but certainly not tonight or by the Bill.

Control on the export of goods mainly affects trade. Important though the freedom of movement of goods may be, it is easy to understand the prior claims of public policy on national security. As restrictions on trade threaten jobs, the resulting tension between the requirements of national security and of the economy tend naturally to produce the necessary checks and balances on the export control power.

Control over the export of ideas is radically different, however. Freedom of expression is a fundamental human right and gives way much less readily to the claims of the state. Moreover, the natural checks and balances that affect decisions on trade are lacking, as blocking a research project will not normally produce job losses or other evident short-term economic effects. The extension of control from the export of goods to the export of intangibles is thus a radical step with serious implications; it is not merely the closing of a tiresome, recently discovered loophole in existing controls.

Export control over goods applies straightforwardly to goods being exported; ideas are far harder to control. The difficulty of the attempt to impose control on the export of ideas leads to fears of evasion and thus to subsections 2(c) and 2(d) of clause 2 giving power to impose control

[Mr. Key]

over the transfer of ideas—not their export but their exchange inside the UK. It is true that the power is qualified by the words

> "(but only where there is reason to believe that the technology may be used outside the United Kingdom)".

That is no help at all, however, as Universities UK has plainly told the DTI.

First, if the power can be used whenever technology may be used abroad, it can be used in practically every case, because any communication or publication of information may lead to its being used abroad. Secondly, if the power is used to impose controls that apply where

> "there is reason to believe that the technology may be used outside the United Kingdom",

leaving it to the publisher or communicator to judge at his or her peril whether the control applies, the risk will be too high for many people. It is certainly obvious that there is always reason to believe that technology taught to foreign students may be used outside the United Kingdom, and therefore a clear power is needed to impose controls and licensing requirements on such students.

Two exemptions are needed to secure academic freedom; one relating to the public domain, and the second relating to the, in essence, private processes of research before publication. The public domain exemption divides into two elements: first, material already in the public domain and, secondly, the publication of the results of research that puts that material into the public domain. There should be no power to impose control on either of those processes.

The Minister disclaims any intention of imposing such controls, and points to the exemptions in the existing controls. Exemptions in present controls exist by grace and favour of the Minister. It is essential that they should be entrenched in primary legislation. Academic research involves much collaboration and communication between researchers. It is not made public as the research proceeds, and much of it may never be published. We all know about the false starts and rough drafts on the back of an envelope that are, in essence, private; their communication would not be protected by a public domain exemption. If the preliminary results are shared with research students, that may take place in seminars that are not open to the public, and would thus be equally unprotected by a public domain exemption.

What is required is an exemption for communications made in the ordinary course of academic research and teaching. The Minister referred to an exemption in existing controls for "basic scientific research", but there are two flaws. The first is that such exemptions are far too important to be left to secondary legislation. The second is that "basic scientific research" is far too narrowly defined, by being limited to exclude work with practical application. The Minister's Department insists that research grant applicants explain their work's "relevance to beneficiaries", thus ensuring that applicants classify their work in such a way as to take it outside the "basic scientific research" exemption.

7.15 pm

The Minister offered a justification for not including the existing exemptions in the Bill: the definitions of "public domain" and "basic scientific research", which are used in the exemptions, are derived from international agreements and might be changed when those agreements are revised; and it would be inconvenient if he had to promote primary legislation to reflect those changes in UK law. Such an explanation fuels the very fears that he is trying to allay. The very purpose of pressing to include those exemptions in the Bill is to make it as hard as possible for them to be removed or changed. The mere fact that the Minister or his officials might agree with one or more of their counterparts abroad that it would suit them to remove or narrow down the exemptions should certainly not be enough to enable them to effect that change in UK law. Academic freedom is far too important to be exposed to dilution through horse-trading between Governments. It is far from reassuring that a Minister with responsibility for science should apparently put his own legislative convenience above the importance of academic freedom.

Lords amendment No. 4 deals with internal transfers, or imports, of technology, not its export, which is what the Bill should be limited to. The provisions would expose to control academic teaching and collaborative research within the UK—especially the teaching of foreign students—and also the publication in the UK of research work undertaken in this country or abroad.

The only justification offered for the provisions is that they will prevent evasion by foreigners visiting the UK to obtain controlled technology; but that justification is wholly inadequate. If transfers are made in the UK for the purpose of sending information abroad, in breach of controls, the parties involved are guilty of conspiracy to commit breaches of the controls and can be prosecuted accordingly. The powers are far too wide for that purpose.

There have been controls on the export of goods for many years, without any equivalent extension for controls on their transfer within the UK "to prevent evasion": the supposed loophole does not exist. It is unnecessary to prohibit the transfer inside the UK, as export by a foreigner is controlled—that is sufficient. It is no answer to say that a foreigner can carry the technology abroad inside his head.

Controls on intangibles such as technology should apply to the equivalent of controlled documents: the UK argued successfully for that very principle to be reflected in the EU dual-use regulation, where article 2 defines "export" as including

> "transmission of software or technology by electronic media, fax or telephone to a destination outside the Community; this applies to oral transmission of technology by telephone only where the technology is contained in a document the relevant part of which is read out over the telephone, or is described over the telephone in such a way as to achieve substantially the same result."

It is clear that what should be controlled are not general ideas or the results of education or training, as they are inevitably capable of being carried inside the recipient's head, but the electronic equivalent of technical documents. The foreigner visiting the UK to obtain controlled technology must thus breach export controls to send it abroad, and would be caught by controls imposed under (2)(a) or (2)(b), without (2)(c) or (2)(d) being necessary.

There are enormous problems with Lords amendment No. 10. It relates to protection of what is already in the public domain or is being published. Subsection (1)(c) deals with unpublished information being exchanged in the course of teaching or research. Subsection (2) makes it clear that there would be no conflict with the secrecy provisions under the Patents Act 1977, or with obligations under the Official Secrets Act 1911 or similar obligations.

Weapons of mass destruction and their associated missile programmes are a special case. Subsection (l)(c) ensures that controls can still be applied to unpublished information in the case of teaching and research; and subsection (3) tracks the special provisions applicable under article 4 of the dual-use regulation in respect of exports outside the European Community, thus avoiding any apparent conflict between the Bill and the regulation.

Lords amendment No. 16 relates to clause 7 which is inadequate to protect academic freedom for three reasons. First, it leaves the Minister to decide the matter; all he has to do is to take into consideration the need to do so. When a Minister claims that national security and so on override academic freedom, the courts almost never interfere.

Secondly, the clause gives no protection to anything to which the general public have no access. That may include the contents of lectures—so far as they are not previously published—and will certainly include all pre-publication interchanges between academic researchers. Thirdly, it fails to impose any duty on the Minister to grant licences under the dual-use regulations.

So the whole proposition is not founded on reality and it involves a misunderstanding of the academic world in this country. Defence manufacturers agree that there should be an equality of approach. They are not asking to be exempt from certain controls, and they are keen that academics should not be exempt from certain controls. The Bill has not got the right balance, but Lords Amendment No. 10 has, and I very much hope that the Minister will bear that in mind because we shall certainly disagree with him if he presses the matter to a vote.

Alan Howarth (Newport, East): In considering these amendments, we seek to reconcile two imperatives, which, if not in contradiction, are certainly in tension. Of course we need to prevent the transfer of knowledge that would assist terrorists in pursuing their aims, as well as those who seek to develop weapons of mass destruction. As a member of the Intelligence and Security Committee, I certainly do not understate the importance of that. Equally, however, we need to protect academic freedom.

Those who have expressed their anxieties in relation to academic freedom—notably, Universities UK and Save British Science—are not opposed to the Government's legitimate aim of preventing the transfer of technology for use in terrorism or mass destruction, but they are, as I am, critical of the very loose drafting of the clauses that relate to those matters.

I believe that the proponents of both sides of the argument are acting in good faith. Of course the Government want the universities to thrive if only because they know how important that is to our economy, and the Government encourage our universities to attract foreign students and academics to study and carry out research in this country.

It is genuinely difficult to reconcile those two imperatives and to find effective means to regulate the exchange of information and ideas, of intangibles. Universities have expressed the concern that activities that are routine in the global academic community—collaborative research, exchanging and debating ideas through e-mails and holding international conferences—could be put at risk under those provisions.

Hon. Members ought to express our thanks to Members of the other place—unreformed though it may be—for their vigilance in the interests of academic freedom. It might have been possible for Ministers who are members of the Government's legislative programme committee to have noted the possible threats to academic freedom when the Bill was originally proposed. It may have been possible for hon. Members to have observed the same things earlier in our proceedings. The Quadripartite Committee at any rate took evidence from Universities UK, drew the Government's attention to those issues and expressed its hope that a better balance might be struck.

It is not the first time that their lordships' House has been more vigilant than we have been in regard to academic freedom. Some 10 years ago, when the Further and Higher Education Bill was proceeding through Parliament in the winter of 1991 to 1992—I have to confess that I was the Minister responsible for the clauses on higher education—the Treasury, to my embarrassment and anger, insisted on intruding into the Bill a "he who pays the piper" clause, so enabling the Government to exercise some direction and restraint on academic activity. At the time, a number of peers—in particular, Lord Beloff and Lord Renfrew—made some very fine speeches in support of the principle of academic freedom. They were thorns in our side as the Government, but they were absolutely right to make those points.

Academic freedom matters profoundly, and Governments should be more careful of it than they are. As my hon. Friend the Minister has noted, the EU dual-use regulation removes certain discretion from the Government, but that does not mean that they should not be extremely careful in exercising their discretion. There is too much instrumentalism in Whitehall's approach to higher education and Governments are not customarily sufficiently tender towards academic freedom and academic sensibilities. No one, however, as far as I am aware, is impugning the good faith and good sense of the Ministers who are responsible for the Bill.

After all, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry was a director of the National Council for Civil Liberties in a previous incarnation. She certainly cannot be indifferent to considerations involving academic freedom. The Minister for Science and Innovation, Lord Sainsbury, is passionate about supporting science in our universities. My hon. Friend the Minister has two universities in his constituency, and no one is more diligent in keeping lines of communication open to his constituents, so he does not underestimate those considerations.

Having made those points, I must say that it is profoundly undesirable that we should have primary legislation on the statute book that a future Government could construe illiberally, so severely damaging academic freedom. Of course there are differences of interpretation about the significance of the drafting of the relevant clauses and amendments. I certainly do not agree with some of the more lurid accounts that have been expressed in previous parliamentary proceedings, but I attach

[Alan Howarth]

considerable weight to the testimony of Lord May of Oxford, the Government's former chief scientific adviser and an immensely distinguished scientist, who said:

> "We need to be especially careful about how we limit academic freedom. The exceptional circumstances need to be spelled out clearly and carefully, and not in sweeping general terms . . . I support the spirit of this group of amendments."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 18 April 2002; Vol. 633, c. 1119.]

I understand that the lawyers who have advised Universities UK have expressed the opinion—although in terms perhaps a little milder than those just used by the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key)—that clause 2, as drafted, may give the Government the right of prior review of scientific publications and that clauses 2 and 3 might give officials the power to require that foreign research students should be licensed and that the present voluntary vetting system should be made compulsory. They suggest that clauses 2, 3 and 4 would threaten routine academic activities in a variety of ways through the power to impose export and trade controls on intangibles—matters such as software, e-mails, presentation slides, manuals and training programmes. They also express a broad concern that the definitions in the Bill

> "are so wide that essentially all science and technology falls within it."

So their lordships passed amendment No. 10, which is, of course, deficient. The Minister powerfully explained its inadequacies, but the underlying principles are right: the Government should unambiguously affirm in the Bill their commitment to academic freedom, any exceptions should be specific and the safeguards for academic freedom should be clearly stated in primary legislation. Correspondingly, the Government introduced Lords Amendment No. 16, and we should be appreciative of that. However—this is a legitimate concern—it is loosely drawn and there are respectable fears that it could be too weak in its application.

Lord Amendment No. 16 states that the Government

> "shall have regard to the need to avoid any unreasonable restriction".

I had hoped that the Government would do rather better and drafted a clause that would be more stringent and better focused in its effect. The Secretary of State will be left with a great deal of discretion. We are told that the European convention on human rights, which is incorporated in our domestic law, would provide further safeguards, but as Lord May observed, that is a cumbersome and protracted remedy. However, no better clause has been tabled. I am a little surprised, given the extent of academic concern about this issue, that academic lawyers have not been able to propose a preferable version, but we will have to live with Lords Amendment No. 16.

7.30 pm

In conclusion, I ask my right hon. and hon. Friends to add whatever safeguards they can to the existing provisions on affirmative procedure, and to requiring modifications to the schedule to be exposed in draft. I was very happy to hear my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary reaffirm today the Government's commitment to maximise academic freedom. I hope, however, that the Government will introduce a formal statement that would be justiciable and further case studies to demonstrate exactly what their intention is. The orders will need to be tightly drawn with maximum specificity and minimum scope.

In preparation of the orders, I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends will undertake to confer with the Secretary of State for Education and Skills and with UUK. I welcome the Government's express willingness this evening to continue to work with UUK.

The scope for parliamentary scrutiny of orders is always too flimsy, but Parliament must do its best to retrieve its failures in relation to the measure and to seek whatever opportunities that it can to put further stakes in the ground in defence of academic freedom.

Nigel Griffiths: With the leave of the House, I shall respond briefly in the 60 seconds that are left to me. I thank the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East (Alan Howarth) for their thoughtful points.

The amendment has been considered in great detail in the House of Lords, and, in the spirit with which it has been raised by Baroness Warwick and others representing the universities, in terms of the need to ensure that we do not do anything to impede or attack academic freedoms.

I assure the House that the Bill will not, in practice, affect the regulation of cryptography in so far as that is controlled by the European dual-use regulations. Cryptography on an open website, however, would be in the public domain, and, therefore, would not be subject to control. We also want to control the fact that a professor who knowingly transmits information to any particular—

It being three hours after the commencement of proceedings on consideration of the Bill, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER, *pursuant to Order [this day], put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair.*

The House divided: Ayes 288, Noes 129.

Division No. 279] **[7.32 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Baird, Vera
Barron, Rt Hon Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, Andrew
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas
(Newcastle E & Wallsend)
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain

Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Perham, Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Ian Pearson and
Joan Ryan.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*

Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lansley, Andrew
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pickles, Eric
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Simmonds, Mark
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Weir, Michael
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wishart, Pete
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Desmond Swayne and
Mr. Julian Brazier.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 13 and Government amendment (a) thereto agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 3, 4 and 6 disagreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 2, 5, 7 to 9, 11, 12, 14 to 16 and 18 to 30 agreed to.

Committee appointed to draw up Reasons to be assigned to the Lords for disagreeing to certain of their amendments to the Bill; Dr. Vincent Cable, Nigel Griffiths, Mr. Robert Key, Mr. Bob Laxton and Mr. Ian Pearson; Nigel Griffiths to be the Chairman of the Committee; Three to be the quorum of the Committee.—[*Angela Smith.*]

To withdraw immediately.

Reasons for disagreeing to certain Lords amendments reported, and agreed to; to be communicated to the Lords.

Single European Sky

[Relevant documents: The Thirty-Second Report from the European Scrutiny Committee, Session 2001–02 (HC 152–xxxii), paragraph 16, on Air Traffic Management and Aviation Safety.]

7.48 pm

The Minister for Transport (Mr. John Spellar): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of European Union Documents No. 13735/99, Commission Communication on the creation of a Single European Sky, No. 12692/1/01, Commission Communication and draft Regulation laying down the framework for the creation of a Single European Sky, and No. 12693/1/01, draft Regulations on the provision of air navigation services, organisation and use of airspace and technical interoperability in the Single European Sky; considers that the establishment of a single air traffic management (ATM) framework in the Community can best be achieved by establishing and implementing common rules which are developed and monitored centrally; considers that military authorities should not be bound by these regulations; agrees that the operation of the single market would be improved by establishing a Community body responsible for the creation of a single Community airspace with common design, planning and management, for the authorisation of air navigation service providers and certification of air traffic controllers, for ensuring an equitable and transparent charging regime for air navigation services, and for the development of technical interoperability; supports the Government's position that the model mapped out in the proposals, but excluding its military part, could provide the building blocks to meet these objectives by improving the present European ATM system, reducing air transport delays and the financial and environmental cost associated with them, the key element being that the Single Sky regulator is endowed with sufficient powers and autonomy to make efficient and effective decisions; and supports the Government's intention to press for this approach in the European Union.

I welcome the opportunity to debate this important measure on the Floor of the House. The Government attach great importance to the establishment of the single European sky as it will benefit our aviation industry, the travelling public and the environment. We believe that single sky is a good project that offers the only realistic long-term solution to overcoming the difficulties in Europe's rather fragmented air traffic management system that has been coupled with an ever-increasing amount of air travel and air congestion. Single sky offers a much-needed fresh approach to smooth out the inconsistencies across Europe, to quicken the process of market liberalisation in the provision of air traffic services and to enhance airspace capacity while at the same time ensuring that air safety remains paramount. Those are the background factors.

The origins of single sky date from the heavy air traffic delays of the first half of 1999 that resulted from significant airspace closures. The June 1999 Transport Council responded by requesting the Commission to examine what was being done to minimise delays and to assess whether further initiatives were required. The Commission looked in some detail at the issue and presented to the December 1999 Transport Council its communication entitled "The Creation of the Single European Sky". The proposal subsequently cleared scrutiny in the Lords, but has yet to do so in the Commons.

Hon. Members may recall that as the development work on single sky was ongoing in the high-level group throughout 2000, it was not felt appropriate to debate single sky at that time. The United Kingdom Government participated fully in the high-level group and we enjoyed the consistent high standards of support and advice that we have come to expect from the Civil Aviation Authority. We also worked closely with National Air Traffic Services and the airlines in developing our policy on this proposal.

After the presentation of the high-level group report to the December 2000 Transport Council, there was a short hiatus while the issue of Gibraltar airport was resolved satisfactorily. Following the agreement between the respective Governments in the summer of 2001, the Commission released its two further communications on single sky last October which include four draft regulations. The proposals have not yet cleared scrutiny by either of the European Union Committees.

We recognise that single sky is a complex proposal. This is why, in conjunction with other European member states, we have sought to ensure that single sky offers significant benefits over those that we might realistically expect to arise from the work of the existing Eurocontrol organisation, even taking into account last week's decision by European member states authorising the European Community to sign the accession protocol to join Eurocontrol. The Government believe that that decision will be conducive to the success of single sky because it will help to secure the participation of Eurocontrol, with its wealth of technical expertise, in the single sky process.

Mr. Anthony Steen (Totnes): We are always interested to hear what the Minister has to say and this is no exception. However, although I am a member of the European Scrutiny Committee, I do not understand the difference between Eurocontrol, which is working on giving us a smoother ride throughout Europe, and the single sky initiative. What is the difference between a single sky and the other types of sky?

Mr. Spellar: Eurocontrol deals effectively with technical matters and harmonisation of procedures and technology. The feeling, especially since 1999, is that neighbouring countries in particular need to pull together so that there is greater harmonisation of aviation control. At the moment we have a lumpy and disjointed process that delays flights. That is also partly down to the investment by different countries at different times. As the inevitable increase in capacity does not apply everywhere, we are not able to achieve the best advantages from that.

I fully understand that there are problems with the policy. We need to work through them. The involvement of the Community will enable the process to work more smoothly. We all agree that the problem exists. Equally, however, we can recognise not so much the deficiencies but the limitations of Eurocontrol. The policy allows us to have an advanced capability that we can match up with the problems.

David Cairns (Greenock and Inverclyde): My right hon. Friend is right that the accession of the Community to Eurocontrol will push the process forward. Does he share the slight concern, however, that if the Community chooses to vote as one in Eurocontrol, there is a six-month cooling off period—it is not quite a power of veto—so that the non-EU members can have a good think about the agreement? Given that the problems are multiplying rapidly, does he think that that is too long?

Mr. Spellar: My hon. Friend may think that, but I should explain that it represents considerable progress. Unlike him in his previous occupation, I do not seek perfection; I merely try to ensure that things are more manageable.

The single sky proposal can be broken down into four parts: the establishment of the single sky committee; a new authorisation system for the provision of air navigation services within the Community; a mechanism to establish a single coherent Community airspace with common procedures; and a proposal to improve technical interoperability between Europe's air traffic service providers.

Mr. Steen: I have got the idea about the sky and the slots, but I am still not clear about defence. Air traffic control excludes defence aircraft. I hope the Minister excuses my ignorance, but how does that fit in with the new sky business? Will all the sky be controlled or will fighter aircraft be excluded?

Mr. Spellar: If the hon. Gentleman bears with me, I will come to that in a moment. He is right to identify the problem, which concerns a number of member states. We have made it clear that we need to resolve that by excluding military aviation so that we can make progress on the civil side. However, we also need to ensure that we get the right working relationship between civil and military airspace, as we have successfully done in the UK, so that we avoid some of the blockages that occur in the European system.

The framework regulation sets up an over-arching approach to European air traffic management through the establishment of the Single Sky Committee. The committee will be tasked to create a European airspace conceived and managed as a single continuum by the end of 2004, and for ensuring that the action programme to deliver single sky is achieved. The work of the committee is still being refined in the negotiations that are taking place and we are pushing to ensure that it will provide genuine improvements over what can be achieved under Eurocontrol's structure. We are hopeful that the new committee will succeed in that regard.

On the point raised by the hon. Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen), the Government made it clear during negotiations that they will not allow military operations to come within Community jurisdiction under the first pillar of the treaty of the European Union, a view shared by many member states. We believe that our position will be maintained, but I want to assure the House that we are not complacent. We will continue to scrutinise developments closely to ensure that the single sky proposals are not directly applicable to our military air traffic authorities and do not enable the Commission to take control of our military forces.

The proposal on air navigation services is still being developed.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): Can the Minister assure me that the Government are also taking seriously concerns in the light aviation community? Members of the gliding community are worried that the provisions will exclude them from European airspace and destroy the sport. Will he accept representations from the British Gliding Association to explain the issue and perhaps find a way forward?

Mr. Spellar: The hon. Gentleman will know that I am always prepared to receive representations from fellow

[Mr. Spellar]

Members of Parliament, although I am not sure why the provisions on the relationship between civil and military airspace would have that impact. However, we recognise that a considerable number of people participate in gliding. Many of them are associated with the armed forces, especially the Air Cadet Force, and we would not want their interests to come into conflict. For a moment I was afraid that the hon. Gentleman might be talking about how extraterrestrials would come within air traffic control. I recall that they were part of my remit when I was Under-Secretary of State for Defence. I thank the hon. Gentleman for sparing us that diversion. On a more serious note, I await his representations on the gliding issue.

The air navigation services' proposal is still being developed, but the Government are strongly in favour of it. This is because the UK already has a robust regulatory system for air traffic services that is enshrined in the Transport Act 2000 and the air navigation order. National Air Traffic Services and its controllers are already licensed and operate under stringent safety requirements, which has led to a service of which the UK is justly proud. The Government will not allow these standards to be lowered, and we are convinced that single sky will raise rather than lower safety requirements throughout Europe.

The proposal on air navigation services is also designed to begin what is, in our view, the overdue process of liberalising the provision of these services. That is particularly the case in the non en-route activities such as airport approach control services, meteorology and aeronautical services. Both NATS and the Meterological Office are uniquely placed to benefit from this initiative and are keen to seek to capitalise on the commercial opportunities that the proposal offers for their expertise.

In the longer run, the Government hope that NATS will be able to benefit from any developments enabling far more en-route air traffic services to be operated across national boundaries within the Community. The airspace proposal respects the essential need not to compromise each member state's airspace sovereignty. Nevertheless, it stresses that Europe's airspace is a vital resource that must be efficiently managed as a whole rather than the somewhat fragmentary approach that we see today. For example, there are about 30 flight information regions throughout the Community and single sky hopes to replace these with one region in the upper airspace.

The intention is to create also functional blocks of airspace that are unconstrained by national boundaries. The Government support this notion as it would enable the formation of larger air traffic service providers—we hope that NATS will be one of these—that can benefit from the resulting economies of scale.

Mr. Martin Salter (Reading, West): My right hon. Friend used the expression "liberalise". Was that a euphemism for privatise? If so, will he explain whether the decision to create a European single sky, which I am tempted to support, is predicated upon the liberalisation of the markets or the privatisation of National Air Traffic Services? I ask the question because of the assurance of my hon. Friend's predecessor.

Mr. Spellar: My hon. Friend knows that I am prone not to euphemism but more to blunt speech. Therefore, I assure him that this is liberalisation in terms of opening up the market. It is not predicated upon the mechanism of ownership, either in the UK or in any other country. It is, however, about making the most efficient use of the assets that are available, and the most efficient use of the airspace that is available. That has nothing to do with the decisions of individual countries in terms of ownership of their facilities.

Mr. Salter: I thank my right hon. Friend for a full answer. Does he accept that those of us on the Government Benches who have grave misgivings about the part privatisation of NATS certainly have no such misgivings about the veracity of his answers nor the honesty and bluntness with which he has always dealt with us? However, I must press him again. One of the central arguments advanced in support of the reasoning behind the need to part privatise NATS was the forthcoming creation of the European single sky. My hon. Friend has correctly suggested that that decision was not predicated on that set of circumstances. Does he understand why many people are left slightly confused and bemused?

Mr. Spellar: I do not entirely accept that. The opportunity presented by the privatisation of NATS was to enable the most efficient operation and the incorporation of new investment that would constitute the leading edge of investment in air traffic services. That capability puts NATS in the best possible position to provide services on a broader framework as we are able to negotiate that within the concept of single sky. Other countries do not necessarily have to follow that route. It might be that they will therefore not be able to have the most effective organisation that is open to them. Therefore, services provided by NATS may be more attractive. We all agree that it is providing a technically proficient service, and an increasingly cost effective one. Decisions needed to be taken in the United Kingdom. These led to the provision of more efficient services in the UK and put British air traffic control in a favourable position in the international environment. That is different from arguments that are advanced as to what should happen in other countries. We come back to the point that I was making about the meaning of "liberalise" in this context.

David Cairns: Does my right hon. Friend agree that what matters is not so much ownership but separation between those who provide the service and those who regulate it, which is not the case throughout Europe? That is where reform is needed.

Mr. Spellar: There is much in what my hon. Friend says, but we are getting one step ahead of where we need to be moving in a European context. As I have said, there are many air traffic centres throughout Europe. I believe that there are about three times as many as those in the United States, and they are handling a unified air space.

There is a danger within Europe that the argument can be caught up in ownership issues, which are causing some difficulties in some countries. We saw the results only last week. It is right that we achieve a logical separation of the different issues. We recognise the differences between the regimes that different air traffic control systems operate. Some European operators have been able to raise their charges by their own unilateral decisions. In this country, NATS has to make an application to the Civil Aviation Authority and has to be able to justify increases in charges to the airlines. I think that it is generally accepted that that is the better format for considering the long-term development of a substantial but growing industry. However, it is facing the various challenges that I have mentioned.

The Government welcome the proposal to improve technical interoperability across the Community's air traffic service providers. We see this as a natural extension of the Community directives that already exist to promote air traffic service interoperability in Europe. Moreover, we believe that less fragmented air traffic services will enhance the overall capacity of the system significantly, reduce the cost of new equipment through more effective procurement practices, and further strengthen air safety.

Detailed discussions are continuing in the Council's working group. There was also a short discussion on single sky's framework regulation at last week's Transport Council, which I attended. That agreed some common principles on single sky, and the project will now be taken forward as a package on which we expect final agreement some time next year. In the light of the continuing work on the draft single sky proposals, the Government welcome the debate.

8.8 pm

Mr. Malcolm Moss (North-East Cambridgeshire): The issue of European air traffic control has become increasingly important as a result of the ever-more crowded skies over Europe. Congestion inevitably leads to delays, increased cost burdens and inefficiencies. Last but not least, it leads to fears for safety. According to Eurocontrol's latest assessment, traffic is forecast to grow on average by 4.8 per cent. a year. That is the equivalent of an increase of 26.6 per cent. over the period to 2005. By 2015, it is predicted that there will be a 60 per cent. increase in flights. Other estimates suggest that the number of people flying will double over the next 10 or 15 years. We therefore have a real problem on our hands. Despite continuous efforts to deal with it, serious congestion prevails, particularly in the most intensively used air corridors of Europe. That congestion threatens the future of Europe's aviation market.

Current national air traffic control arrangements are indeed inefficient. To cite a popular example, Europe has 73 air traffic control centres, whereas the USA has only 20 to manage twice as many flights. The European Commission's answers to these problems are presented in the single European sky proposals that we are debating today.

At the heart of the proposals is the idea that national air traffic control arrangements should be brought under the remit of an expanded Eurocontrol. Even though operations could still be conducted by national ATCs, any such centralisation of air traffic control is contentious, because there would inevitably be some transfer of powers away from the nation state's control. That is particularly sensitive in relation to military aircraft control—a point that has already been raised by hon. Members. In most EU states, the control of military aircraft is integrated to some degree with civilian air traffic control. I hope to return to the issue a little later.

We in the Opposition accept that the single sky plan would rationalise and, we hope, simplify air traffic arrangements in Europe. That, we believe, will require the EU both to sign up to a new institutional framework and to being part of the decision-making process by working more closely and effectively with Eurocontrol.

Mr. Steen: What one often sees in Europe is duplication and an additional tier of bureaucracy. Does my hon. Friend agree that that should concern us?

Mr. Moss: My hon. Friend anticipates some of the arguments that I shall deploy later in my speech. He is right. It is necessary for the single sky plan to work more closely and effectively with Eurocontrol, which it is not doing at present. The success of the proposal is predicated on that close relationship.

As we know, a target date of December 2004 has been set for implementation of the proposals. We seriously doubt whether that date is achievable. Given the fairly tight time scale, are the individual states any nearer to ceding control of national airspace than they were a few years ago? We suspect not. How much closer are we to agreement between states on the necessary standardisation of national air traffic control arrangements?

Bringing the question nearer to home, is our own NATS system compatible with those in other countries? Can it be easily and inexpensively integrated? If not, what do the Government see as the main difficulties? How will that affect the autonomy and financial viability of the NATS operation, given its parlous financial state since the Government's highly contentious part-privatisation and the events of last September?

One advantage that we do have with NATS is that we have already separated regulation from service provision. That must be an essential starting point in any new EU-wide arrangements—a requirement with which countries such as France would have great difficulty in complying, because those two functions are both still carried out by a single Government Department.

What of the opposition from air traffic controllers and their unions? We have witnessed graphic examples of such opposition in both Spain and France in recent days. Are the actions of the French unions merely a bargaining position for better pay and conditions, or are they a sign of more fundamental and deep-seated opposition to the creation of a single European sky on grounds of political dogma? Given the part-privatisation of our own NATS, are there real fears that a new pan-European air traffic control system would be ripe for private picking? The EU Commissioner, Miss Loyola de Palacio, pleads her innocence on the matter, but why are the unions still not listening?

In response to a question from a colleague, the Minister did not say where NATS would fit into the possible privatisation on a more Europe-wide scale, if the proposals went ahead.

Given that we all agree that there is a problem, what is the best way to solve it? Does it really require a new EU body to deliver the improvements that we want? Do those who are most enthusiastic about such matters insist on the single European sky project not because it will best deliver the answers that we seek, but rather because it fits into the political framework of the Single European Act and other matters integrationist?

[Mr. Moss]

Rationalisation is a precursor of any improvement in service delivery, but could that not be achieved through co-operation and standardisation between neighbouring countries? What about the improvements to technical programmes? It is my understanding that Eurocontrol is working on a number of programmes that, by its own estimates, if all members adopted them, could increase air traffic capacity by some 60 per cent. by 2005. Those programmes include such measures as reducing the vertical separation minimums from 2,000 ft to 1,000 ft; enhancing flow management; reducing radio frequency spacing; new modes of radar to improve ground-to-air information transmission; and free-route airspace, giving greater autonomy and control to individual pilots.

If those measures can be achieved by individual states operating autonomously, and a 60 per cent. improvement is predicted by 2005, that raises the question that my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen) posed: why do we need a new arrangement if, by improving the technical programmes, substantial improvements could be achieved in a few years?

Mr. Steen: My hon. Friend kindly mentions my comments. At present, there are navigational air transport services all over Europe catering for the aircraft that fly into their airspace. As a member of the European Scrutiny Committee, I am worried that all the measures that come to our Committee tend to be more, more, more—not necessarily better, better, better. The problem with the open sky control concept is the assumption that because it will be managed centrally, it will be better. Does my hon. Friend agree that central management is sometimes worse?

Mr. Moss: Yes, I agree with my hon. Friend. The thrust of my argument is whether it is necessary to go down that road, when we can achieve improvements on an individual basis by appealing to nation states to improve their own air traffic control. Those who have influence in these matters may well feel that, by signing up to some over-arching EU arrangement, those who wish to dictate and prescribe will have more power to their elbow to deliver the things that they want.

I have set out a proposal whereby we increase air traffic capacity by up to 60 per cent. without the need to sign up to a centralising body that may become ever more prescriptive, ever more regulatory and ever more outside political control. The big "if" is whether there could be the level of co-operation necessary to achieve the objectives or whether they are doomed to failure because of individual states insisting on their own autonomy.

Is it an all-or-nothing scenario? If the EU cannot get agreement, does the whole project gather dust on the shelves? If unanimity is unobtainable, would there not be some merit in working with Eurocontrol to encourage the more forward-looking states to adapt some or all of their programmes? The Minister said nothing about the plan B that will be used if the EU fails to get agreement on plan A. There is an assumption that all the proposals will be signed up to in good time for December 2004, but I suspect that that might prove more difficult than he and others envisage. If that happens, what is plan B? Will he tell the House what the Government intend to do if the plans do not come to fruition?

Why is it necessary to create this new centralising body when the main problem of congestion lies in the sectors straddling from north to south the centre of the EU area? The zone embraces Italy, Spain, Switzerland—I understand that it is not part of the EU, but it is inside the zone—and parts of Germany. I am told that those countries are responsible for about 44 per cent. of air traffic flow management delays and 30 per cent. of bottlenecks. Of course, Greece was once a problem in that context, but the Greeks have addressed the problems and significantly improved their air traffic control. Thus, it can be shown that if a nation state addresses the internal problems of its own air traffic control system, significant improvements can be made.

As I said, one area that still raises serious concerns is the relationship between air traffic control and defence and security policies—another point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes. The matter was raised at some length last January in the most recent report of the House of Lords Select Committee on the European Union, which was entitled "Reducing Air Traffic Delays: Civil and Military Management of Airspace in Europe". The report was critical of certain aspects of the Commission's proposals. First, although the Commission attempted to clarify the relationship between the new European sky committee and Eurocontrol, the Committee felt that the proposals did not go "far enough". It recommended that

"the Single Sky Proposals for the future of Eurocontrol be spelt out."

It also discerned a lack of clarity in the relationship between the single sky proposals and the non-EU members of Eurocontrol. The Minister mentioned non-EU members earlier in answer to a question, but he did not deal with the point about the ongoing relationship between non-EU members and the single sky body.

On civil and military issues, there is still uncertainty about how to accommodate the military. The House of Lords European Union Committee pointed out the contradiction in the Government's position. On the one hand, the Government strongly oppose the idea that military operations be brought under the first pillar of the EU, but on the other they support the concept of flexible use of airspace, which they expect to form part of the Commission's proposals under the first pillar. The Committee recommended that the Government make clear their position on that issue. Given that some, if not all, military operations could not be included in the first pillar, how do the Government—or the Commission, for that matter—propose to resolve the serious issues that that raises? Does the Minister recognise a need for institutional arrangements outside the first pillar to provide a forum for civil/military liaison, a framework in which sensitive military issues affecting air traffic management can be raised and a way of involving states outside the EU?

The Minister mentioned Gibraltar. I understand that the agreement between the UK and Spain allowed the European single sky proposals to be launched last year, but does it also allow the EU's accession to Eurocontrol to go ahead? The Minister looks puzzled. What I am getting at is that we have got the agreement to proceed with the single European sky proposals, but does that mean that we can also easily move into an accession to Eurocontrol?

On the face of it, the proposals have some merit, if they can achieve the laudable objectives that they set out to achieve. However, we have serious doubts that unanimity will be found and agreement reached. In case the matter has not proceeded as planned by December 2004, we are anxious that the Government address that possibility and make proposals of their own.

8.25 pm

Dr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh): This is the first debate on air traffic services on the Floor of the House since the partial privatisation of National Air Traffic Services, the UK air traffic control system, as the hon. Member for North-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Moss) pointed out. The proposals for a single European sky raise questions and concerns, some of which my right hon. Friend the Minister for Transport has already addressed.

One of the most important issues, to which both speakers have referred, is military air traffic control. The European Commission understandably wants to eliminate delays and problems caused by what it calls "national frontiers in the sky". That is fair enough, but surely there must be national frontiers in relation to the respective air forces of the member states of the EU. I see that it is the Government's view that the military authorities should not be bound by the regulations.

Let me turn to the important matter of co-operation between civil and military providers of air traffic services. Our Royal Air Force pilots must train, and some of that training has to be in UK airspace, over these islands. We always said that one of the reasons why the UK air traffic control system has been admired throughout the word is the successful co-operation between the military and the civil side. As everyone present in this debate will know, our military controllers operate on the same premises as the civil controllers. Such co-ordination does not exist elsewhere. I understand that in France, for example, there is no such dialogue between military and civilian controllers. I hope that the new framework of operation that is to be established to facilitate the partial privatisation of NATS will not jeopardise co-operation between our civil and military controllers in any way.

I turn now to investment in National Air Traffic Services. One of the main arguments advanced by the Government for the partial privatisation of NATS was that it would facilitate investment. We all acknowledge that the financial position of NATS was weakened by the downturn in traffic after the events of 11 September, but the Minister will be aware of the great dismay in Scotland about the announcement by NATS that the new Scottish centre is to be delayed. There is a desperate need for the new Scottish centre.

My right hon. Friend the Minister may be aware of the statement that I had the privilege to make five years ago this month, with the full authority of the Deputy Prime Minister, confirming our support for the two-centre strategy for the UK. In that statement, it was pointed out that the equipment at Prestwick was almost 20 years old. If it was 20 years old five years ago, hon. Members will need no assistance in working out that it is a quarter of a century old now. Will he give us an idea of when he now expects the investment in the new Scottish centre to come through, so that the work can get under way? Is it still the Government's position that the new Scottish centre will not be completed until 2008 or 2009?

Another matter that I had the opportunity to deal with when I was Minister for Transport was the establishment of a European aviation safety authority—EASA. The UK supported EASA strongly and we secured under our presidency the decision to proceed with it. I see that the EU Transport Council adopted the regulation establishing EASA only last week. With our tremendous aviation sector, it seemed to us at the time that the UK had a very strong case for securing the headquarters. Will my right hon. Friend tell the House where the decision making has got to with regard to the location of EASA's HQ?

I should like to say a brief word about liberalisation and competition. We need to be clear that a competitive framework for air traffic control could pose serious difficulties for air traffic services in this country and elsewhere in Europe. No doubt liberalisation and competition could drive down costs and probably prices, but what are those costs? They are the people who have done so well in managing our airspace until now—the air traffic controllers, engineers and other support staff. Many engineers have taken redundancy from NATS since it was privatised. It would be a great mistake if the huge body of expertise at NATS was disbanded to be replaced by inexperienced new people supplied by private contractors. My right hon. Friend will be aware of the great concern that the agenda for air traffic control in Europe is one of competition and privatisation. How far down the track would the Commission be allowed to drive such a market-oriented policy?

Of course, we support measures that will reduce delays for holidaymakers and business people in Europe, but always transcending that is the need for the highest attainable standards of security and safety. By the highest standards, we in the UK mean standards that are considerably higher than any that are likely to be set by a regulator. Today's debate is of great importance, because Parliament will have a duty to scrutinise very closely the development of European policy on air traffic control.

8.30 pm

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): I, too, welcome the opportunity for this topical debate. The newspapers have recently been full of stories about delays, strikes and allegations of pilots on the cheap flights airlines taking short cuts.

One of the key drivers pushing the single European sky proposals is the issue of air traffic delays. A couple of years ago, it was estimated that the cost of delays is 8 billion euros—roughly £5 billion. It is calculated that about 50 per cent. of delays are due to the airspace management structures in Europe. Huge environmental costs are associated with delays, whether it be aircraft stacking above airports or aircraft that cannot take the shortest possible route from A to B.

The single European sky appears to have several advantages. First, it could lead to a more efficient system. Other hon. Members have referred to the air traffic control system in the United States, which does a lot more for a lot less—it is estimated to be about 70 per cent. more efficient than Europe's systems. Secondly, it could create extra capacity—although I should be interested to hear the Minister's view on whether we are over-egging the pudding in that respect, because many of the bottlenecks will remain around European airports, irrespective of whether a single European sky is achieved.

Thirdly, the single European sky could reduce pressure on air traffic controllers, which might in turn lead to less pressure resulting from the need to train additional

[Tom Brake]

controllers. There is a recognised shortage of controllers, which may be exacerbated in the UK by the fact that higher wages are paid abroad. Fourthly, it could improve safety by making flight paths more logical. Finally, as the Minister said, it could mean that the UK industry was well positioned to take advantage of any business prospects.

The single European sky has potential disadvantages, too. Hon. Members will be all too aware of the political minefield that it represents in terms of perceived or actual loss of sovereignty. There is also the question of military independence. The Minister is right to oppose the extension of the proposals to military operations in which the UK requires flexibility.

The Government need to answer several questions. First, do they have a clear view about how airspace would be allocated to the different nations in moving away from border-based sectors to more logical sectors that do not represent country borders? Secondly, do they have a clear understanding of how the single sky regulator would operate? Thirdly, we have heard the implementation date of December 2004. I believe that that is optimistic, and that a fallback position is required. Can the Minister confirm whether the Government have made any independent assessment of that implementation date?

If the Minister can answer those questions, the single European sky should prove to be a positive development. However, it is important that harmonisation does not lead to a lowering of standards; British standards, practices and procedures must still prevail. Nor should it lead to a loss of military independence, so the military opt-out that the Minister proposes is welcome. Harmonisation is necessary for safety reasons and because it provides benefits to the consumer and to the environment. For those reasons, Liberal Democrat Members support the proposals.

8.36 pm

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): I shall deal first with the issues on which there is general agreement. On the inevitability of "Euro-sky", there is general agreement that at some stage over the next decade there will be a need for the integration of regulation across Europe. There is general agreement that that may lead to closer co-operation and, in turn, economies of scale, as outlined by the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake).

There is general agreement, as there was in the debate about air traffic control processes in this country, that there should be a split between regulation and service providers. There are concerns about whether the proposals can be delivered by December 2004, especially given the delaying mechanisms of the six-month consultation period and the veto that could be exercised by non-Commission members. It is generally recognised in the aviation industry that a complex process of negotiation and consultation is involved.

Those are the points of agreement. The points of concern being expressed by those who work in, or have a knowledge of, the industry are that the proposals could become—pardon the pun—a launch pad for privatisation on a European scale, following what happened to national air traffic control services in this country. Industrial action is occurring in many parts of Europe because of those anxieties.

It is worth while for the Government to state that the proposals have nothing to do with privatising air traffic control services throughout Europe. It would be useful if, as a Government, we had the humility to explain to our European colleagues that we had experienced the privatisation of air traffic control services and that we had learned our lesson.

I do not want to go into detail about the air traffic control experience so far, but I shall briefly mention some facts. Last Christmas, the air traffic control workers in my constituency could not have their wages because of a cash-flow problem; the airline company group that has taken over air traffic control returns month after month for additional public subsidies; the Government are so desperate for the British Airports Authority to bail out air traffic control services that they are willing to bribe it with a new runway at Heathrow.

I do not want to go into such detail about the failure of air traffic control services as privatised by the Government. However, despite assurances so far, some of the documentation that the Government have published links the single European sky proposal with privatisation. I am referring to the helpful bundle of documents that the Vote Office provided, especially the report entitled "Explanatory Memorandum on European Community Document", which was submitted by the Department for Environment, Local Government and the Regions on 18 January 2000. It was signed by my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin), who is no longer an Under-Secretary of State and has returned home to the Back Benches. He has clearly maintained his interest in air traffic control matters, and is not with us tonight. I do not believe that he wanted to be associated with anything that happened previously.

On the single European sky proposals, the document states:

> "Similarly, the Commission's assertion that commercial sector methods and expertise should be employed in air traffic service provision . . . is fully in keeping with current UK thinking."

Yet again, the Government are perceived as a proselytiser for privatisation of air traffic control throughout Europe. There is no reference in the documents to a Commission proposal for advocating the use of commercial sector methods and expertise in air traffic control.

The high-level group's proposals make only one reference to a link between the environment for air traffic control and the discussion about monopoly services. The group said that although core air traffic control was a monopoly, there was an opportunity for competition for ancillary services. It did not refer to the introduction of commercial practices in air traffic control.

David Cairns: For the sake of completeness, my hon. Friend should include the phrase that he left out of the quote from the document signed by my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin). It says that air traffic control should be "regulated robustly". That does not detract from the thrust of my hon. Friend's argument, but it is important that robust regulation forms part of the Government's strategy.

John McDonnell: I omitted the phrase not to be disingenuous but because I said in my introductory remarks that there was no dispute between us about the separation of service delivery and regulation. Robust regulation has been the standard that British air traffic control services set the world. That is why I did not refer to the phrase. However, my hon. Friend can understand the anxiety that the fact that the UK Government are advocating the introduction of commercial sector methods and expertise causes air traffic controllers throughout Europe. We can understand the reason for their anxiety that the proposal may be a stepping stone to privatisation.

It is worthwhile for the Government to state on the record that we have learned from our experience of privatising air traffic control in this country and that we do not advocate privatisation as part of the open sky policy. It is worth stating that we want to consider integration without privatisation. Two thousand air traffic control staff have been laid off or are under threat of losing their jobs in Britain because of part-privatisation—so no wonder air traffic controllers in Europe are anxious about their jobs when the British Government advocate privatisation on the back of a Euro-sky proposal.

The expression that we are "all Thatcherites now" is inappropriate in the context of air traffic control. Privatisation has failed in almost every other transport sector, and is failing in our air traffic control services. We have never experienced so many breakdowns, loss of morale on such a scale, so many job losses or such underinvestment. British air traffic control has approached bankruptcy many times. A statement that our Euro-sky policy is not based on privatisation would be welcomed throughout Europe.

8.44 pm

David Cairns (Greenock and Inverclyde): Like other hon. Members, I shall not labour the points of agreement between us, other than to say that I welcome the proposals. They are extremely important, not just for the industry—we are talking in terms of billions of pounds for the industry—but for our individual constituents who experience dreadful delays. They work very hard all year round, get a couple of weeks' holiday, then spend huge chunks of time at the beginning and end of their holiday sitting around in airport lounges. That is not a pleasant experience, and it is one that those of us who are frequent fliers also encounter. If we can cut delays and increase capacity in the skies, the provisions will benefit not only a big industry but individuals.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh (Dr. Strang) mentioned that the national boundaries that exist on the ground are often utterly meaningless at 30,000 ft; the rivers, mountain ranges and forests that have given rise to national boundaries become less important in the open skies. Such boundaries should not, therefore, be a sufficient reason to hold us back from moving towards a new system and a new way of thinking about air traffic management. We all agree that reform is needed; it is perhaps the nature of the reform that is causing some consternation.

I was slightly confused by some of the comments by Members. On one hand, they appeared to assert that the provisions would result in duplication, with more committees and more bureaucrats considering the issue. On the other, we heard the assertion that the measures would centralise the system and introduce just one way of doing things. There was a slight contradiction there. We cannot duplicate and streamline at the same time—or perhaps we can, but I do not think that that was quite the thrust of the argument coming from the Opposition Benches, where there just seemed to be confusion.

As the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) said, we are talking not of centralisation but of greater harmonisation. That will involve the harmonisation of systems, software, hardware and training. The hon. Gentleman rightly drew attention to the shortage of trained air traffic controllers in this country. Part of the difficulty in allowing air traffic controllers to take their labour to other parts of Europe is caused by the different specifications involved in different air traffic control training programmes. If we could achieve greater harmonisation there, we would have greater fluidity of movement of labour across the continent, which would be all to the good.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) mentioned the fear that the measures are about privatisation. Privatisation and methods of ownership are not prescribed in the document. What is prescribed, however—and my hon. Friend is right to draw attention to it—is the unacceptable situation in which the providers of the service are also the regulators. That situation is untenable and ought to be challenged.

There has also been discussion about the civil and military aspects of air traffic management. An example from my own neck of the woods, which involves another medium of transport, is that of the flow of traffic on the River Clyde. My right hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh will know that the Clyde port authority is the largest such authority in western Europe, and is very busy because of the amount of commercial and military shipping—including Trident nuclear submarines—that uses the river.

Until a few years ago, there was a staggering lack of co-operation between the harbourmaster based in Greenock, who was in charge of the commercial shipping, and the military personnel based at Faslane, who were in charge of the naval shipping. The harbourmaster would often send ships off down the coast, only for them to turn the corner and see seven French frigates coming up for an exercise that he knew nothing about. There has been much more co-operation at that level recently, and it is clearly not beyond the wit of Governments to ensure that such co-operation takes place in the skies above us. The Minister for Transport, as a former Defence Minister, seems ideally placed to bridge that gap.

Those who say that privatisation intrinsically raises issues of safety often point to Railtrack—although that has not happened in this debate. I have said repeatedly that I feel no less safe on a British Airways flight today than I did when British Airways was a nationalised industry, 15 years ago. I do not believe that it is axiomatic that the involvement of private sector expertise necessarily compromises safety. Of course a robust regulatory system must have safety at its core, and I hope that the Minister will convince us that he agrees with that.

There seems still to be some confusion about the residual role of Eurocontrol in a single-sky environment—particularly with regard to the EU's position as an acceded member of Eurocontrol—and about the relationship between Eurocontrol and the EU's new single sky committee. I have studied the documents in some depth, but I am still not sure about the exact relationship between Eurocontrol, the European Union as an acceded member of Eurocontrol, and the EU single sky committee. I hope the Minister can clarify the position.

[David Cairns]

In general, however—like most Members who have spoken—I welcome the proposals, which I consider very necessary. They will be costly, but the cost of doing nothing—that is, increasing delays—would be greater, to the airlines, to the wider economy to which the airlines are tremendously important, and to our constituents who have to waste time in airports. I am pleased that action is now being taken.

8.50 pm

Mr. Anthony Steen (Totnes): I hope the House will forgive me for not having listened to all the speeches. The Minister, of course, will have listened to all of them assiduously, and taken on board all that was said.

I must declare a number of interests. We have to declare so many interests that we must be careful not to overlook any. I think I must declare my membership of the Select Committee on European Scrutiny, but if that is not necessary I declare it anyway. I am also an adviser to Airlines of Great Britain. In fact I have been an adviser to a number of airlines, both as a former practising lawyer and as a politician. I am sorry to say, however, that most of the airlines I have advised have gone bust, so I have not many left to declare. I do not know whether that has anything to do with my advice, or whether they have all got bigger, or worse. I think I have to declare the interest anyway, although the airlines I have advised have not done terribly well. One or two have kept going, however.

I shall be brief, as I know the debate must finish at 9.15 pm. I suspect that the Minister called it just to get the feeling of the House—if there is any feeling. Not many people turn up for aviation debates: the subject is technical, people do not really understand it, and they have other things to do. It is obviously important, however, for the Minister to get some feeling of what the House is thinking. I do not know whether he has got that feeling, or whether the House has been thinking or saying anything useful—or, indeed, whether it really matters. We have tremendous discussions in the European Scrutiny Committee, but it does no good. The Government go on doing whatever they want, and Europe goes on doing whatever it wants. Nevertheless, I think it useful for the Minister to take account of what is said in a personal capacity, although I do not think he will do anything with it.

What concerns me is whether the operation of a single market would be improved by the establishment of a Community body responsible for the creation of a single Community airspace. It seems rather as though a wizard were to enter Europe, wave his wand and say, "This is all one airspace". The airspace has come into being over a number of years as an airspace over the countries concerned, which have built up quite efficient air navigation schemes. People may not think them efficient, but very few accidents have been caused by error other than human error, and the machinery and mechanical equipment for navigation aids is now excellent. Ours in Britain is state of the art.

I am not sure why the Government believe that another body with more staff and bureaucracy will be better. I am reminded of the fact that if the word "safety" is used in the House, any rule or regulation—any statutory instrument—is passed immediately because no Member will ever vote against safety. Another buzzword is "security": as soon as it is mentioned, the regulation or statutory instrument will go through. The most recent example is the word "hygiene". Any measure deemed to be hygienic, or related to health and safety, will be accepted.

In this instance, everyone wants faster planes and more slots. Everyone wants to think the system is safer, and everyone assumes that if another body is created it is bound to be safer. That is not necessarily the case. Let us compare air traffic control in Poland—hopefully, it will be part of the enlargement of the EU—with that in Britain. They are miles apart. Such systems probably work over their own space, but I am not sure about trying to make them uniform, which is what this idea is about.

The Minister is a very good salesman. He will tell us that this is the best thing since sliced bread. He will use the word "safety" all the time and we will all say that this is wonderful—but is it wonderful? I do not know how we are going to judge. Is it ever going to happen? Is there ever going to be a wizard waving his wand over all the skies of the EU? Remember that another 12 EU countries will come in. No sooner will the sky be sorted out over the first 15 but another 12 will come on board.

This is a lovely idea; we all like it. I thank the Minister for bringing it to the House. We have had a good run for an hour or so and he has heard the views of some of his colleagues, who are using the debate for various reasons. It does not affect what he is doing. It is courteous of him to come along to tell us all his ideas. He wants to wave that wand over the sky and make it all one place, but I hope he will agree in reality that not much will happen other than this one-and-a-half-hour debate on whether it is a good idea.

With regret, I say: full steam ahead, get on with it, let us get it going tomorrow morning. The Minister will know that it is unlikely and that in 10 years we will not have seen anything at all. I thank him on behalf of the House for coming along and doing what he has done. I hope that I have thrown in my two pennyworth in this useful debate.

8.56 pm

Mr. Spellar: I do not recall that it was entirely optional to attend this evening, but I am delighted that we were able to provide the opportunity for a constructive debate. One often says from the Dispatch Box that it has been a constructive debate, but on this occasion I actually mean it. The comments have largely been directed at the issue. Rightly, matters have been raised that have not necessarily been resolved but are still under discussion in Europe. I shall try to deal with some of those during my contribution, but may need to write to hon. Members.

I hope my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) will allow me not to follow him all the way down his various arguments, which might be slightly diversionary. The fact that I do not do so should not be construed as agreement with a number of those arguments. I disagree with some of his comments, [illegible] takes a keen interest in the aviation industry and is a strong representative on behalf of his constituents who work at the airport. We have worked constructively on a number on issues—for example, on the issue of kirpans for staff at Heathrow and at other airports.

What I found useful about the discussion was that there was a broad recognition of the existence of a problem: there are difficulties in European airspace capacity and that leads to bottlenecks. That in turn leads not only to delays but, as the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) rightly pointed out, to considerable environmental consequences: for example, the time that aircraft spend in the air needlessly using fuel.

There was an attempt to create a distinction between airspace and the impact on airports, but it is increasingly recognised that if there are delays in en-route airspace, particularly with the tight timetables that many of the no-frills airlines operate on, those can have considerable knock-on effects at airports and on schedules, and should not be underestimated. That is particularly a problem with a number of the bottlenecks in European airspace.

The hon. Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen) said that we would use the issue of safety as a way of carrying the proposal. The situation is quite different. Safety is a prerequisite; it is an absolutely essential component that must underlie any system that we have, whether the current system or an improved one. It is essential and does not affect the argument one way or the other. We are talking today about capacity and, consistent with safety, realising the capacity to deal not only with existing problems, but with the increasing demand for air travel. We will put that in the wider public domain with the regional airport studies that will be published shortly. We are dealing with one aspect of the increase in demand and the need for capacity.

Mr. Steen: As I recall, during the terminal 4 inquiry, the deal was for 275,000 movements at Heathrow a year. As a result of navigational improvements, the figure is up to 400,000 movements a year. That has happened incrementally. At the same time, planes are getting bigger, so we could end up with a situation in which we do not need more airspace. Instead, there will be a need for ever bigger planes. Has that been considered?

Mr. Spellar: The hon. Gentleman is trying to tempt me further into issues that will be debated publicly in a short time. He is right to say that larger planes are enabling more people to travel, without there being necessarily a commensurate increase in air movements. However, running parallel to that; there has been a huge increase in point-to-point flights. That is particularly the case with many of the no-frills airlines, which are operating not necessarily from major hub airports but from many others. That does not add to congestion at hub airports, but it does add to congestion in en-route airspace.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh (Dr. Strang) and my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (David Cairns) referred to the new Scottish centre at Prestwick. I can assure them that the Government have not shifted one inch in our commitment to the two-centre strategy for National Air Traffic Services, including the Prestwick centre. The only issue is timing, for obvious reasons that have been mentioned. We shall ensure that NATS builds the centre as soon as future traffic forecasts make it viable to do so.

The hon. Member for North-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Moss) asked why we could not proceed voluntarily through Eurocontrol. Eurocontrol has done a good job on many of the technical harmonisation aspects, but it is essentially a voluntary agreement between 31 member states and progress, understandably, has been slow. A number of major Eurocontrol programmes have been delivered late, or have not been as effectively implemented as we would have hoped. The greater authority of the EU allied to the technical capacity of Eurocontrol is a recipe for the more rapid progress that, for the reasons I have outlined, we believe to be increasingly urgent.

The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington and my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington asked about the 2004 deadline and whether it was optimistic. In the Council working group, progress has been slower than we hoped, but we still believe that there is every prospect that the single sky framework will be in place by the end of 2004 as planned. It has been recognised that implementation will be a gradual process that will be spread over a number of years.

The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington and my right hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh asked about military airspace. It is true that military aviation accounts for only 4 per cent. of aviation, although there are some localised issues related to that. However, that does not detract from the essential position; we have made it perfectly clear in the negotiations that we will not allow military operations to come within Community jurisdiction, under the first pillar of the treaty of the EU. As I also said, that view is shared by several other states.

Tom Brake: On the point raised by the right hon. Member for Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh (Dr. Strang), if civil and military air traffic control no longer work together—if the former is conducted on the basis of a single European sky and the latter is kept separate—might that not lead to less harmonisation, and therefore to an increased risk to safety?

Mr. Spellar: No, I certainly do not see that happening. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the UK has had considerable success in harmonising requirements and ensuring compatibility in terms of resources. However, it is clear that this is a matter of national competence, which is an extremely important principle for many other reasons.

The hon. Member for North-East Cambridgeshire also asked about NATS compatibility with the single European sky. As he knows, NATS is widely recognised as a leading air traffic service provider. It has invested heavily in new equipment—notably at Swanwick—and is already ahead of the rest of Europe in that regard. We do not envisage the single European sky placing an additional financial burden on NATS; indeed, it could win more work in a liberalised air traffic market.

I should tell my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington that undertakings with an individual state in respect of ownership have no bearing on the liberalisation of air traffic control; such matters are rightly those for the individual state concerned. As I said in my opening statement, the route that we have taken enables us to provide better, cost-effective services for the travelling public. However, privatisation of individual entities is not a prerequisite to liberalisation of the market.

Mr. Moss: The Minister talks about liberalisation of the European market, but one of the objectives is to reduce the 73 existing air traffic control centres to

[Mr. Moss]

something more manageable, which must involve a dilution of the importance of the nation state and of national control. As the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) pointed out, surely many centres will therefore be ripe for amalgamation and takeover by the private sector.

Mr. Spellar: That is not a prerequisite. *[Interruption.]* No, liberalisation of the market, coupled with transparency in accounting procedures to ensure a level playing field, is perfectly compatible with different forms of ownership. It is right to debate this issue, but there is no prerequisite in terms of the European single sky and liberalisation of the market.

John McDonnell: It is accepted that there is no prerequisite, but air traffic controllers across Europe are anxious that the UK Government are becoming advocates of privatisation as the next stage in the process. An assurance from the Minister that the Government are not in fact advocating privatisation would go some way towards reassuring many of them.

Mr. Spellar: We are not advocating the idea that other countries run their businesses in a particular way, save that we should all work for the most effective use of European airspace, in the manner outlined in the single European sky proposals from the European Commission.

This has been a constructive debate in which the principal issues have been aired. It is also clear that there is some considerable way to go, and that the subject is one to which we shall doubtless return. However, we should bear in mind the fact that there is widespread recognition of the underlying problems, and of the need to make progress on behalf of the aviation industry and—perhaps more significantly—of the travelling public.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of European Union Documents No. 13735/99, Commission Communication on the creation of a Single European Sky, No. 12692/1/01, Commission Communication and draft Regulation laying down the framework for the creation of a Single European Sky, and No. 12693/1/01, draft Regulations on the provision of air navigation services, organisation and use of airspace and technical interoperability in the Single European Sky; considers that the establishment of a single air traffic management (ATM) framework in the Community can best be achieved by establishing and implementing common rules which are developed and monitored centrally; considers that military authorities should not be bound by these regulations; agrees that the operation of the single market would be improved by establishing a Community body responsible for the creation of a single Community airspace with common design, planning and management, for the authorisation of air navigation service providers and certification of air traffic controllers, for ensuring an equitable and transparent charging regime for air navigation services, and for the development of technical interoperability; supports the Government's position that the model mapped out in the proposals, but excluding its military part, could provide the building blocks to meet these objectives by improving the present European ATM system, reducing air transport delays and the financial and environmental cost associated with them, the key element being that the Single Sky regulator is endowed with sufficient powers and autonomy to make efficient and effective decisions; and supports the Government's intention to press for this approach in the European Union.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 119(9) (European Standing Committees),

AUTHORISATION OF HUMAN AND VETERINARY MEDICINES

That this House takes note of European Union document No. 13361/01, Commission Report on the experience gained as a result of the operation of the procedures for granting marketing authorisations for medicinal products and No. 14591/01, draft Regulation laying down Community procedures for the authorisation and supervision of medicinal products for human and veterinary use and establishing a European Agency for the Evaluation of Medicinal Products, and draft Directives amending Directives 2001/83/EC and 2001/82/EC on the Community codes relating to medicinal products for human use and veterinary medicinal products; supports the Government's position of broad agreement to the proposed amendments, and the overall aims of the Review; supports the Government's ongoing work with Member States to build on the current system of medicines regulation to ensure it continues to contribute to the protection of human and animal health, also to promote the further development of a single market in pharmaceuticals, prepare the regulatory regime for enlargement, and provide a competitive environment for the pharmaceutical industry; notes European Union Document No. 6240/02, draft Directive amending Directive 2001/83/EC as regards traditional herbal medicinal products for human use; and supports the Government's position of broad agreement to the proposed amendments in order to achieve a regulatory regime for traditional herbal medicines which improves public health protection while maintaining consumer choice.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

The House divided: Ayes 283, Noes 111.

Division No. 280] **[9.10 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Barron, Rt Hon Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, Andrew
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas
(Newcastle E & Wallsend)
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack
(Copeland)
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank

Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie

Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNulty, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Martlew, Eric
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Julie
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad

Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*

Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncas[illegible] C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D [illegible]*Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Te[illegible]*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Angela Smith and
Mr. John Heppell.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barrett, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnside, David
Butterfill, John
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gray, James
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Harvey, Nick

Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Hendry, Charles
Holmes, Paul
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lamb, Norman
Letwin, Oliver
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Maples, John
May, Mrs Theresa
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pickles, Eric
Price, Adam
Pugh, Dr John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sayeed, Jonathan

Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Steen, Anthony
Stunell, Andrew
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Weir, Michael
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Wilshire, David
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Desmond Swayne and
Mr. Julian Brazier.

Question accordingly agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): I propose to put together the Questions on motions 5, 6 and 7.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

EXTRADITION

That the draft European Union Extradition (Amendment) Regulations 2002, which were laid before this House on 9th May, be approved.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE

That the Local Government Finance (England) Special Grant Report (No. 100) (HC 869), on 2001/02 Special Grant for Rate Relief in Respect of Hardship Caused by Foot and Mouth Disease, which was laid before this House on 22nd May, be approved.

INTERNATIONAL IMMUNITIES AND PRIVILEGES

That the draft International Maritime Organisation (Immunities and Privileges) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 23rd May, be approved.—*[Joan Ryan.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

CRIMINAL LAW

That the draft Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001 (Amendment) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 16th May, be approved.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

The House divided: Ayes 279, Noes 30.

Division No. 281] **[9.22 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Barron, Rt Hon Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Burnside, David
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Farrelly, Paul
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNulty, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric

Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Julie
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Angela Smith and
Mr. John Heppell.

NOES

Barrett, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
(NE Fife)
Carmichael, Alistair
Doughty, Sue
Ewing, Annabelle
Gidley, Sandra
Harvey, Nick
Heath, David
Holmes, Paul
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamb, Norman
Llwyd, Elfyn
Moore, Michael
Price, Adam
Pugh, Dr John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stunell, Andrew
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tyler, Paul
Weir, Michael
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Willis, Phil
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Bob Russell and
Mrs. Annette L. Brooke.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With the leave of the House, I will put motions 9, 10 and 11 together.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

BETTING, GAMING AND LOTTERIES

That the draft Betting, Gaming and Lotteries Act 1963 (Schedule 4) (Amendment) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 12th June, be approved.

DEFENCE

That the draft Army, Air Force and Naval Discipline Acts (Continuation) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 1st May, be approved.

INDUSTRIAL ORGANISATION AND DEVELOPMENT

That the draft Horticultural Development Council (Amendment) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 10th May, be approved.—*[Joan Ryan.]*

Question agreed to.

COMMITTEES

PROCEDURE

Ordered,

That Ian Lucas be discharged from the Procedure Committee and Huw Irranca-Davies be added.—*[Joan Ryan.]*

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Ordered,

That Mr. Paul Boateng and David Davis be discharged from the Committee of Public Accounts and Ruth Keily be added.—*[Joan Ryan.]*

Business of the House

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That, notwithstanding the practice of the House as to the intervals between stages of Bills brought in upon Ways and Means Resolutions, more than one stage of the Finance Bill may be taken at any sitting of the House.—*[Joan Ryan.]*

9.35 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): It is all very well for the motion to be moved formally. However, this important motion starts with a phrase with which we have become all too familiar—

"notwithstanding the practice of the House"—

so we might have been entitled to an explanation from either the Chancellor of the Exchequer or the Leader of the House. Neither of them is present and that practice has become all too frequent. It well illustrates the Government's attitude to the House of Commons. The motion seeks to change our normal practice on something as important as the Finance Bill of all things, but we have not even had the courtesy of an explanation as to why that is happening.

Perhaps the Chancellor of the Exchequer does not understand his motion, but I do not expect that of the Leader of the House. I would have thought that he understands it all too well. However, neither of them are here to explain to the House what is going on.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): We should draw the House's attention to the fact that, although the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Leader of the House are not here, no one from their Departments is either.

Mr. Forth: Sadly, that is the case. Many Government Whips are present, and that suggests that the Government expect their Members to vote the motion through willy-nilly without the courtesy of an explanation from anyone on the Government Front Bench. *[Interruption.]* In fairness to the Leader of the House—he knows that I am always fair to him—he has just turned up.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): Does my right hon. Friend think that he should start his comments again so that the Leader of the House can hear them?

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman would not want to find himself guilty of breaching Standing Order No. 42 by obeying the advice of the hon. Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin).

Mr. Forth: Indeed, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was just about to explain that I have not even got into my preamble yet. The Leader of the House has not missed anything of substance and neither have you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Leader of the House has not seen fit to provide us with an explanation despite the fact that the game is given away by the phrase "notwithstanding the practice". The details of the motion entitle us to a measure of alarm. Normally—you know this almost better than anyone in the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker—the Finance Bill is very much regarded as a special case by the House of Commons. That is as it should be, because the provision of finance and the raising and spending of moneys are among the things about which we in the House are extremely jealous, and rightly so. Therefore, we have always given the Finance Bill a very special place and we have always treated it with very great care. For example, we deal with many aspects of it on the Floor of the House and then other more detailed provisions upstairs in Committee. The motion suggests that more than one stage of the Finance Bill

"may be taken at any sitting".

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that, when his Government were in power, they cut the grant for all gypsy site refurbishments? Will he tell us why?

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising that very important point. When my party had the privilege of being in government, we allowed a proper amount of time to deal with such matters. The House would have given those subjects more than adequate time—both on the Floor and upstairs in Committee. I do not know whether he knows, but we almost certainly did not try to deal with more than stage of the Finance Bill—even the one containing the measure about which he has reminded us—in any one sitting.

I suspect that, given the importance of that measure, it would have been properly considered in Committee, on Report and on Third Reading. Even if the hon. Gentleman was not happy with the outcome, in the good old days when my party had the privilege of being in government, proper time would have been allowed by the House to consider a matter even as detailed as that, never mind the great issues about the raising of revenue and the concomitant expenditure that confront the House in a Finance Bill.

A mysterious proposition is before the House and we are left wondering why the Government would want to give such special treatment to the Finance Bill. I am forced to speculate on that because no explanation has been given. It is just possible that one of the arguments might have been that we do not have enough time to treat the Finance Bill in the traditional way, but that argument does not stand up.

Hon. Members will be aware not only of the fact that a number of make-weight measures are on the Order Paper for this week and next week, but of the proposed date of our rising. The Leader of the House was kind enough to say to us last Thursday that the House would rise on 24 July subject to the passage of business. Does he want to rush the Finance Bill through with unseemly haste so that the House can adjourn early? I hope not. I like to think that he would not dare to come to us with such a proposition.

If we dismiss that speculation as outrageous even by the standards of this Government and Chancellor of the Exchequer, we are forced to consider other possibilities. One of them might be that the Government are so ashamed of what is in the Finance Bill that they do not want it to be properly scrutinised. I incline to the view that that is probably a more credible explanation than the Leader of the House wanting us to go off on our hols early. Again, however, I can only speculate because we have not been told.

The right hon. Gentleman came rushing back into the Chamber having been told that the House was impertinent enough to want to query the measure, which he assumed would go through on the nod. I hope that he has a thorough briefing from his assiduous officials so that he can give us at least one credible reason why the motion has been tabled. [HON. MEMBERS: "Where are they?"] I assume that hon. Members are referring to a certain box at the end of the Chamber where officials are wont to sit. That comment is probably out of order, however, and I would not want to be caught out in such a way. Some of us have been around long enough to avoid that trap.

We have a parliamentary conundrum. We have before us an important, possibly ground-breaking measure that may well set a precedent. If the House agrees exceptionally to the measure after hearing a proper explanation of it, I hope that the right hon. Gentleman gives an undertaking that it will not be regarded as a precedent. I want to be reassured that the Government or the Leader of the House will not quote it as a precedent if we agree to it. We slip all too easily into bad practices in which something is brought before the House and slipped through on the QT at an early stage of the evening, and the night is still young in parliamentary terms.

The right hon. Gentleman should give a full explanation of why he wants the measure. Is it to do with an early recess? Is it to do with his shame at the Bill's content? When he explains his reason for the motion and if we accept it, I hope that it will be explicitly stated that it is not a precedent and will not be quoted as such by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, should he ever deign to come to the House. We need to be assured that we will treat each future Finance Bill on its merits. Only if we get that explanation will we be satisfied and allow the measure to proceed.

9.44 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I thought there was some levity in the approach to the subject. That disturbed me because it is a serious matter, and I strongly agree with the concerns raised by the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth).

In recent years, Finance Bills have got longer and longer and have become increasingly complex. This year's Bill is no exception. The articulation of the debate—quite apart from its length—is important if the House is to have a proper opportunity to assess all the complex issues that arise from it.

In recent weeks, some major, serious Bills have not received proper attention in Committee or in the House as a result of the programming and guillotining of those measures. The Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill is an obvious example. We must ask those on the Government Front Bench on precisely what grounds the usual practice is being broken on this occasion, as it would appear. No attempt so far has been made to explain the precedents for this practice. Before we even reach the question whether it should be a precedent for the future, as the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst said, we should surely at least be told whether there have been precedents in the recent past for approaching the Finance Bill in this way.

We should never forget that the Finance Bill is unusual. That is because it is the House alone that considers the measure. There is no second chance. There is no second guessing at the other end of the building. The Lords cannot consider the mistakes that are made in this place. Only we can do that, and only during consideration of remaining stages. If those stages are hurried in any way—if they are managed in such a way to achieve a rapid result rather than a comprehensive result—that would be entirely wrong.

Mr. Forth: I am interested in what the hon. Gentleman has just said. He might want briefly to explore the implications of consideration of all stages in one day. It strikes me that if, for example, an error were to be found during one stage of our deliberations, it might procedurally be difficult, or even impossible, to deal with that error in the immediate subsequent stage. By conflating consideration in that way, we would have less chance of picking up what could potentially be a serious error in the Finance Bill, of all things, in our usual procedures.

Mr. Tyler: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. He has more than adequately made the point to which I was coming. A manuscript amendment may be appropriate in some circumstances, but not on a Finance Bill. I served in Committee on a Finance Bill. At 3 am the Minister responsible explained that we were trying to correct an error that had been made the previous year. I asked whether he could recall, or perhaps his officials could, at what stage in the night in the previous year the mistake had been made. It had been made in the middle of the night. That is what is unusual about the Finance Bill. Not only is it extremely—

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): Will my hon. Friend bear in mind the high proportion of the contents of each Finance Bill that consists of correcting mistakes that were left over from previous Finance Bills? Does he agree that to accelerate that process is to worsen it?

Mr. Tyler: If I did not know my hon. Friend so well, I would think that to be a planted question. As he is such an independently minded Member, I know that not to be the case.

I was about to say that during consideration of the Finance Bill on the occasion to which I was referring, part of the previous year had been spent correcting another part of a previous Finance Bill, passed two years previous to that. That is what is so significant about a Finance Bill. There are some members of the Treasury team on the Government Front Bench, and I am sure that they will be the first to concur that every year the Chancellor has to bring forward some proposals to correct mistakes made not necessarily by a previous regime but in a previous year.

The Finance Bill is significant in that respect. It must be extremely precise. That is why it is exceptionally important in this instance that we have proper management of the time given to the Bill.

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): I ask the hon. Gentleman, for the information of the House, whether he received any indication that this matter would appear on the Order Paper today. I understand that we, the official Opposition, received no such indication. Despite the abbreviation of the way in which we scrutinise Bills now, at least there is some consultation on them

[Mrs. Cheryl Gillan]

between both sides of the House. It is a heinous crime that on something as important as the Finance Bill, no discussion has taken place across or through the usual channels.

Mr. Tyler: I am grateful to the hon. Lady. I shall cut short my remarks to enable an occupant of the Government Front Bench to respond to that. However, it is not only a matter of indication; the convention in the House on a matter of this sort is that there is consultation, not merely a unilateral statement of what the Government intend to put on the Order Paper. There should be consultation with the Opposition parties for the good order of business in the House. Surely that is what we should all be interested in.

The handling of the Bill may have justification, but as far as I and my Chief Whip have been involved, and I understand that it is a similar case with those on the Conservative Front Bench, there has been no consultation or explanation whatever. That is a break with the conventions of the House. Yes, there are elements of the Order Paper that can be issued as a Government diktat or fiat, but usually the business of the House involving a major Bill, let alone a Finance Bill, would be a subject for consultation.

Now that the Leader of the House and senior members of the Treasury team are with us, I very much hope that they intend to speak on the matter. It would be quite outrageous if they simply pushed it through by the force of numbers, without any explanation, given that the proper way to do business in the House is that we, the House, decide how we handle our business—not the Government, but all Members of the House.

I am sure that hon. Members on the Government side will agree, as will the Father of the House, who is present and who is always a great protector of the interests of the House, that it would be against all precedent and all convention for the motion to be carried forward without proper discussion and consultation between the parties. I hope that we will now get an explanation and that there will be a proper discussion before we come to a conclusion.

9.51 pm

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): I thank the shadow Leader of the House for this unexpected pleasure—unexpected, in part, because I announced the business for the next week last Thursday, and unexpected also because, contrary to what the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) said, the order was laid on Thursday and has been on the Order Paper since last Friday. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"]

The right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) asked me for an assurance that the order would be no precedent. I can tell him that tonight's order will form no precedent because the Order Paper and the history of the Journal of the House of Commons are littered with precedents to the same effect. I refer the right hon. Gentleman to page 739 of "Erskine May", which states that

> "the third reading of the Finance Bill has frequently been taken immediately after consideration"—

that is, consideration on Report—

> "when such an order has been made."

The right hon. Gentleman will be particularly interested to know that there is a footnote, No. 5. When I refer to footnote 5 for the precedent for taking the Third Reading after consideration on Report, I find that it quotes 1995–96. *[Laughter.]* I hope my hon. Friends will allow me to continue. I think that the look on the right hon. Gentleman's face is the nearest that he is capable of getting to being sheepish. I managed to get through school without studying modern studies, but as I recall 1995–96, it was the right hon. Gentleman's party that was in power at the time, and he was a member of the Government of the time who created that precedent.

As to the reason for the order, I remind the right hon. Gentleman—who is present every week for the business statement and hears the business announced every time—that virtually every Bill whose remaining stages we have considered in this Session has been taken on Report, with the Third Reading immediately afterwards. Most of those Bills have been the subject of a programme motion which set that out from the start.

There is no programme motion covering this Finance Bill. The reason is that the right hon. Gentleman's own party requested that it should not be the subject of a programme motion, which meant that we would require such an order to handle the remaining stages. I make no complaint of the fact that the right hon. Gentleman's party requested that there be no programme motion. My understanding is that the proceedings in Committee have been perfectly amicable, carried out by agreement, with both sides fully delivering on the agreements that they achieved in Committee. The right hon. Gentleman now looks rather more than sheepish.

At no stage during the proceedings in Committee has the right hon. Gentleman's party asked for more time. At no stage has it disputed the allocation of time in Committee. Indeed, last week's Committee sitting rose early because members ran out of things to say about the Finance Bill. I understand that it is expected that the Committee proceedings will finish at tomorrow's sitting. In those circumstances, I think that two full days in total to consider the remaining stages is perfectly adequate provision. It is adequate partly because this Finance Bill has already been through more consultation with the industry, outside bodies and financial services than any previous one. Many of the clauses were seen in draft form by the industry, which may partly explain why the Opposition ran out of things to say in Committee.

Mr. Forth: I am, as ever, grateful to the Leader of the House for his history lesson and analysis of the Bill to date, but will he give me the undertaking that I requested? Notwithstanding the explanation that he has just given, which is just about adequate for the purposes of the motion, will he go that step further and give us an undertaking that, if we agree to it for the reasons that he has kindly given us in respect of this Bill, it will not be quoted as a precedent for doing the same thing again for future Bills without similarly valid reasons?

Mr. Cook: I understand that the right hon. Gentleman is now scrabbling for firmer ground and I do not wish to discourage him. I am very happy to give him the assurance that, for all future times, should we be minded to introduce similar provision for future Finance Bills, we will always quote as our precedent that which was set in 1995 to 1996. He can therefore rest assured that no new precedent is being created.

I sense that we are winning the argument, so I am happy without further ado to commend the motion to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That, notwithstanding the practice of the House as to the intervals between stages of Bills brought in upon Ways and Means Resolutions, more than one stage of the Finance Bill may be taken at any sitting of the House.

Single Room Rule

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

9.56 pm

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): Many people outside the House find it difficult to understand how we can find half an hour to discuss the toe clippings of activities in this House and not debate the real issues that our constituents face. Nevertheless, I am grateful to have an extra three minutes or so to discuss the case of my constituents, the Rev. and Mrs. John and Stella Celia. I am grateful to the Minister for being present to respond to the debate. I look forward to hearing his response. My constituents' case highlights something that is common in the experience of many disabled people in the United Kingdom and serves as a salient example of why a particular regulation needs to be changed, and perhaps of why many benefit regulations need to be reviewed in the light of the progress that we have made towards disability equality and against disability discrimination in the past few years.

The Rev. John Celia suffered a brain stem stroke some four years ago. Before then, he was a very well-known personality. He gave advice to the previous Conservative Government on the issue of cults. His charity, a Christian charity, was heavily involved in rescuing people from cults and fighting the indoctrination of extreme religious cults. He therefore gave hugely to the civic and religious life of this country. Indeed, on the day when he suffered his stroke, his ill fortune was announced on national television, such was his status at the time. His wife, Stella, has given him sterling support and has herself worked in the community for many years. For 20 years, both of them have worked and dedicated their lives to their charity and the work in which they have engaged.

Their work continues. Despite his disability, John Celia is now a volunteer in the local day centre in Aberystwyth, and Stella, Mrs. Celia, has just become a trained magistrate. I welcome her to the JPs' bench in Ceredigion, where I am sure she will make an enormous contribution with her experience.

So these two people have contributed greatly to society over many years. I say that to the Minister not to distinguish between some sort of deserving and undeserving disabled person in respect of the regulations, but to underline the deep dissatisfaction that some people feel when, after giving many years of service, they find that the regulations and Government attitudes are hardening against them because of some ill fortune that they have suffered because of illness or disabilities.

Many people who may be healthy and fit now, such as ourselves, do not realise just how debilitating suffering disease or disability can be, not because of the disability itself, but because of all the obstacles that seem to appear from bureaucracy and government in the face of it.

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Jim Murphy.]*

Mr. Thomas: A Government who promised to restore dignity to disabled people seem to have achieved very

[Mr. Thomas]

little in practical terms. We must judge our society by the way in which we treat the worst off and the poorest within it, and the case of the Rev. and Mrs. Celia highlights that.

Their case turns on housing benefit entitlement. More than two years ago, they were advised by their general practitioner on medical grounds to move from their one-bedroomed house to a two-bedroomed house. The stroke that John had suffered made his medical needs intensive. His main carer is his wife, and their GP felt that it was better that they should not necessarily share a bedroom at night, so that his wife could have a decent night's sleep. John's rest is very disturbed and he does not necessarily have a good night's sleep, but it is important that his main carer, his wife, is able to do so. Thousands of married people must be in a similar position whereby one or both have become disabled and have specific medical reasons for not sharing a bed—for example, because of medical equipment.

As the Minister will know, under housing benefit regulations a rent officer can give a rent judgment only on the basis that a married couple should occupy a one-bedroomed property. There is no leeway or discretion in that. People who are married must be judged as though they occupy a one-bedroomed property. Those who have to occupy a two-bedroomed property for medical reasons or for reasons of disability have to meet the extra rent that may be payable because they will not get full housing benefit to cover it. As Mrs. Celia told me when I first met them two years ago, they would be better off divorced and living in sin, which is a bit much to expect from the Rev. and Mrs. Celia.

At the moment, they pay £85 per week in rent for a two-bedroomed house in the wilds of Ponterwyd outside Aberystwyth. That is not an awful lot these days for a two-bedroomed house in Ceredigion—in fact, it is a little on the cheap side. The rent recently went up by £10—previously, at £75 a week, it was very reasonable. They receive £18.50 a week as a discretionary housing payment, which used to be called the severe hardship payment. That is in recognition of the fact that they have strong needs and deserve a two-bedroomed house. The payment is controlled by the local authority, and it can stop at any time if the local authority runs out of funds for it. The couple have already received at least five payments, which is highly unusual in my experience. I once served on a local authority panel that judges such payments, and I never knew of anyone who had received five payments. They were good enough to suggest that it would not have happened had it not been for my advocacy. In fact, it is simpler than that—the local authority recognises that their case screams out for some measure of justice within housing regulations and has given them every assistance that it can, five or six times now, by providing a discretionary housing payment. However, the most recent letter received by the couple clearly states that this must be the last time that such a payment can be made.

Two letters illustrate the situation in which the Rev. and Mrs. Celia find themselves. On 11 July 2001—about a year ago—they received a letter from Ceredigion county council's finance department regarding their housing benefit. It said that the total income for benefit purposes was £126.15 and that the weekly eligible rent—that is, the rent upon which the housing benefit is based—was £60 a week.

This year, on 13 June, they received a similar letter, which again set out that their total income for benefit purposes was £128.30. It has increased by £2.15 in a year. However, their weekly eligible rent is £51.40. That means that the Rev. and Mrs. Celia's rent entitlement has decreased by £8.50 a week while their income has gone up by only £2.15 a week. There is no justice in that. How can there be justice in a decrease in rent entitlement for the same property in one year when income has increased only slightly? The justification is that rent has been reassessed in the area. I fail to understand how rents have decreased in a year when house prices in Ceredigion, especially in rural areas, have increased substantially.

There is a problem about the way in which housing rents are calculated and the way in which the valuation officer works. Perhaps that is wider than the scope of tonight's debate, but it is pertinent. The housing valuation officer takes the highest, lowest and middle rent in an area and calculates the average. It is not a serious study of genuine rent levels in an area. Perhaps that accounts for the perception of decline in rents. For example, one of the properties that the valuation officer used for his re-evaluation was a three-bedroomed house that was available at £42 a week. The reason for that was that the farmer was letting it to his daughter. No wonder the rent was £42 a week. Some of the property rents are crazy.

The Rev. and Mrs. Celia's income has increased by £2.15 a week but their housing benefit has decreased by £8.50 a week. They have been forced to meet the difference from their pockets. As Mr. Micawber said, the difference is between happiness and misery. The Rev. and Mrs. Celia are in an increasingly desperate position, whereby their income is considerably less than it was two or three years ago compared with their rent. It would be easy to contrast their position with that of Prince and Princess Michael of Kent, who live in Kensington palace or perhaps even the Deputy Prime Minister with his access to an RMT cheap flat. That would not be irrelevant but I do not want to make such a comparison until we treat disabled people with a modicum of respect. In particular, we should consider the housing benefit regulations and ensure that they do not discriminate against disabled people.

As the Minister knows, the relevant order is the Rent Officers (Housing Benefit Functions) Order 1997. That is simply an update of the 1987 order, and it did not change anything. The Child Poverty Action Group stated in a letter to me that the order did not reflect advances in views about the needs and rights of people with disabilities. That is true. The order appears increasingly to go against the Human Rights Act 1998 and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

The Rev. and Mrs. Celia would probably not have a case under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. Section 59 states:

> "Nothing in this Act makes unlawful any act done . . . in pursuance of any enactment; or . . . in pursuance of any instrument made by a Minister of the Crown under any enactment; or . . . to comply with any condition or requirement imposed by a Minister of the Crown . . . by virtue of any enactment."

It is clear that actions by Ministers of the Crown are exempt from the 1995 Act. That needs review.

A briefing that I received for the debate from the Disability Rights Commission recognises that we are considering part of a wider problem of statutory duty exemption under the Disability Discrimination Act. In 1999, the disability rights taskforce said that that should be changed. It recommended that statutory bodies should be under the same obligations as other service providers under the Disability Discrimination Act. The Government have agreed to that in principle. When will that happen? It has been suggested that we shall have a new disability Bill, which may be announced in the Queen's Speech. Will that happen? Is that how the Government intend to deal with the position of people as the Rev. and Mrs. Celia?

The Child Poverty Action Group is interested in the effect of regulations on disabled people such as the Rev. and Mrs. Celia. Indeed, it is keen that they should be a test case under the Human Rights Act 1998 to ascertain whether section 2 of the 1997 order can stand up in court.

The Rev. and Mrs. Celia do not have access to the funds necessary to bring a test case; nor do they necessarily want to do so. They certainly want to take forward this debate with the Minister, however, and I hope that he will respond to some of the issues that they have raised with me and with the Child Poverty Action Group.

It has been suggested that article 14 of the European convention on human rights, which outlaws a discriminating manner, or article 8, which relates to a person's home, family or private life, could be used to protect people such as the Rev. and Mrs. Celia. It is surely detrimental to a disabled person's home life to discriminate against them on the basis of their medical condition, yet that is what the present housing benefit regulations seem to do.

I have to say to the Minister as an aside, albeit an important one, that there is also a religious discrimination aspect to this matter. I understand that orthodox Jews are forbidden under Mosaic law from sharing a bed with their wives during menstruation. That is an orthodox tenet of faith that would underline a religious need for the recognition in legislation of two bedrooms for married couples. The blanket application of the rule that married people must share a bedroom must, therefore, fly in the face of the needs of disabled people, the needs of people with strong medical grounds for separate bedrooms and of the religious needs of strict orthodox Jews.

In local government terms, the Government seem to have fettered their discretion. They have painted themselves into a corner, from which they cannot respond to people's genuine needs. In local government terms, that would be ultra vires. In central Government terms, it is not, but it is open to challenge. The order that was made in 1997 states:

> "The Secretary of State may by order require rent officers to carry out such functions as may be specified in connection with housing benefit and rent allowance subsidy".

The use of the word "may" makes it clear that the Secretary of State has discretion as to the form of order that he might make, and it is surely a fundamental principle of public law—and particularly of the Human Rights Act 1998—that a Secretary of State must exercise such discretion in a lawful manner. I suggest that the discretion that the Secretary of State is currently exercising under the order is unlawful under the Human Rights Act and certainly discriminatory, and that it needs to be reviewed.

The Disability Rights Commission takes a similar view. In a submission to me, it states that the Rent Officers (Housing Benefit Functions) Order 1987—and the subsequent 1997 order—constitutes indirect, unfair discrimination against the Rev. Celia. The Commission believes that stating the eligibility of a married couple to claim benefit on the basis of having a shared bedroom places the Rev. Celia, and other disabled people in similar circumstances, at a clear disadvantage if, for a reason relating to a disability, a married couple are advised to sleep in separate bedrooms. The Commission wishes to pursue this matter in the review of legislation that it is currently undertaking.

The Child Poverty Action Group, Shelter, Age Concern and Help the Aged all agree with the Rev. and Mrs. Celia's—and my—analysis of this matter, and I look forward to hearing the Minister's justification of this position. We have to remember that 50 per cent. of disabled people have an income of less than half that of the general population, so there is a double discriminatory whammy here. These people are told that they cannot have recognition of their true medical needs, or needs based on their disability under housing benefit regulations. In addition, they are penalised financially under those regulations, which places them further down the financial pecking order in society.

The central issue is this: we all know that every order, regulation and Bill that comes before the House bears an undertaking from the Minister concerned that it meets the obligations set out in the Human Rights Act 1998. That is now enshrined in our constitutional procedures. This is important; I have seen several challenges to Ministers across the Dispatch Box as to whether a Bill really meets our obligations under the Act. Ministers are called to account by saying, "Yes, it does" and by coming to the Floor of the House and justifying their position.

I want to ask the Minister whether he would sign the 1997 order now, in the light of the experience of the last few years in relation to the way in which people are discriminated against in society, and to the way in which disabled people suffer discrimination. The order might have suited the times in 1987, and we might just have got away with it in 1997, but, in post-Human Rights Act times, I can see no justification for it. I believe that it is flawed and cannot stand up to a challenge under the Human Rights Act.

I should like the Minister to respond to that. I should like him to respond to the comment by the Disability Rights Commission that the rule constitutes indirect unfair discrimination against my constituents. I should like him to respond to the recommendation of the disability taskforce that the Government's actions should be within the remit of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. I should like him to say when statutory bodies will be brought within that remit, and I should like him to explain to my constituents how he expects them to live on an ever-decreasing income while making an ever-increasing contribution to rent.

10.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Malcolm Wicks): I congratulate the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) on initiating the debate on behalf of his constituents. I listened to his speech with great interest. I acknowledge

[Malcolm Wicks]

the important contribution that the Rev. Celia and his wife have made to the national and the local community in recent years, and I am sorry about the position in which they now find themselves.

I shall stick to the main point—housing benefit—although the hon. Gentleman's speech ranged fairly widely. I should welcome an opportunity to discuss with him, on another occasion, the Government's policies on disability and a policy for carers. I think our record will stand any assessment, and I have an interest as a sponsor of the Bill that became the Carers (Recognition and Services) Act 1995. However, I want to concentrate on the key subject of housing benefit. Let me begin by explaining our policy on the benefit in relation to private sector tenants, and explaining why we have rules such as the size criteria.

Unlike social housing, the deregulated private rented sector is not subject to any internal rent controls. It is essential that we exercise control over housing benefit expenditure, so that the needs of people receiving benefit are balanced against those of taxpayers—indeed, those of the wider community. Surely it is a fundamental principle that people receiving housing benefit should not have their rent met in full if the level exceeds the broadly average rent level for an appropriately sized property in the area where they live.

Rent officers play an important part in the administration of housing benefit in the deregulated private rented sector. In carrying out his or her functions, the rent officer will make a determination based on certain criteria. He or she may make two or more determinations on a particular decision if those criteria apply to the same property. One is the size-related rent, which is the main subject of this debate.

The size criterion works like this. If a claimant lives in a property that exceeds the defined size criteria for his household, the rent officer must determine a rent for a similar tenancy of the appropriate size for that household in the vicinity. By "vicinity" we mean the immediate surrounding area. The defined criteria provide for one bedroom per couple and one for each single person over 16. The rules also state that two children—under 16—of the same sex should share a bedroom, as should two children of different sexes under 10. Any child who does not come into those categories is allowed his or her own bedroom. We also allow the household to have up to three living rooms, depending on how many people live in it. A one, two, or three-person household can have one living room, four people can have two, and three are allowed when there are more than four people in the household. We pay some attention to household circumstances.

The rules are set out in the Rent Officers (Housing Benefit Functions) Order 1997, which covers England and Wales, and the Rent Officers (Housing Benefit Functions) (Scotland) Order 1997.

The rent officer has no discretion to alter the size criteria for any particular case—for example, where, due to health reasons, a husband and wife would find it difficult to share the same bedroom. That could, as in the case of Rev. Celia and his wife, result in a shortfall in housing benefit where the property exceeds the size criteria.

In such cases—it is an important point—discretionary housing payments are available. Indeed, that was acknowledged by the hon. Gentleman. Those are free-standing payments—they are not payments of housing benefit or council tax benefit—that can be made at the discretion of the local council where the claimant has a shortfall in housing benefit or council tax benefit and requires further help with rent or council tax.

As the hon. Gentleman knows, an overall cash limit is set on the amount that local authorities may spend on discretionary housing payments in any one year, and we contribute towards that limit. For this year, we have set the national limit at some £50 million: £20 million of that is the Government contribution, leaving £30 million that authorities may spend from their own resources.

Rev. Celia is receiving discretionary housing payments, as has been acknowledged, although they do not mean that his rent is met in full. I appreciate that that tight definition of the size criteria may seem inflexible but, as I said earlier, in housing benefit—as is perhaps always the case, sadly, with public expenditure—we must balance the needs of claimants with taxpayers' interests.

It would clearly be irresponsible to have no limit on the number of rooms in any given property for which housing benefit is paid, and to do so would put claimants at an unfair advantage perhaps vis-à-vis their working peers, who might not be able to afford to live in larger properties. There is an issue of equity that we must allow for in this area of housing and social security policy.

Having said that, I have listened with concern to what the hon. Gentleman has said. We need robust rules for housing benefit, but that does not mean that we do not listen to constructive argument, or that we are inflexible, and I can see how the situation faced by Rev. Celia and his wife is a particularly difficult one.

In balancing our sensitivity and concerns about the individual with a sickness or disability, we need to recognise, perhaps with equal force, as the hon. Gentleman has done, the needs of the carer, in this case the reverend's wife. In these situations, we need the carer to have a proper night's sleep and to be looked after in all sorts of appropriate ways. Therefore, although I cannot make any promises immediately to the hon. Gentleman, I have asked my officials, with whom I discussed the matter today, to re-examine the size criteria rules to see whether, in the circumstances before the House, with which I have much sympathy, the rules can be changed to accommodate this sort of situation. We will need to exercise care to ensure that we do not open housing benefit to abuse, with perhaps a large number of people claiming that they would rather have a second bedroom, but we will review the rules nevertheless.

If change is possible, we will consult, as would be our normal practice, the Social Security Advisory Committee and the local authority associations in the normal way before laying the necessary legislation before the House.

Mr. Simon Thomas: On that point, I am very pleased to hear what the Minister is saying. I accept his point that we do not want to drive a cart and horses through the rules. We do not want people to claim snoring or some other spurious reason, but Rev. Celia is on invalidity care benefit—the long-term rate. He is on disability living allowance, higher care allowance and mobility allowance. Where high disability pensions and benefits are paid to such individuals, it is clear that they have true disability needs. Those are the cases where the Minister might find some flexibility in a new set of rules.

Malcolm Wicks: If we can make progress—I stress "if"—establishing such criteria would be important in our deliberations.

I should make it clear that Rev. Celia's property is, in our judgment—this may be a matter of controversy—relatively expensive for the locality, although I heard what the hon. Gentleman said about locality rates. The fact that Rev. Celia's benefit is restricted is in line with our policy that housing benefit should not cover in full rents that exceed the broadly average rent for an appropriately sized property in the same area. Even if the size criteria were to be modified, it is unlikely that Rev. Celia and his wife would have their full rent met, although his housing benefit entitlement would rise.

I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on raising the issue. It is when we judge social policies against the hard reality of our constituents' experience that we are sometimes able to make better policy and better public administration. I have found this to be a good opportunity to consider these matters.

Finally, the hon. Gentleman said that Rev. and Mrs. Celia had judged at one stage that should they ever live in sin—of course they never would—they might be better off. Our social security regulations, as always, understand that point. I assure the hon. Gentleman—an assurance that Rev. and Mrs. Celia will want to hear—that they would be no better off living in sin under our no-nonsense social security regulations. Whatever crises the churches face in our modern society, this is not a temptation that we are able to place before them.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-six minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 25 June 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

The Secretary of State was asked—

East Timor

1. **Mr. Neil Turner** (Wigan): What continuing support to improve civil administration he will offer to East Timor. [62104]

8. **Mr. Michael Connarty** (Falkirk, East): What continuing support the Government will offer to East Timor. [62111]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mike O'Brien): Before answering the questions, I apologise for the non-attendance of the Minister for Europe, my right hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Peter Hain), who is in Brussels for a meeting on the Convention on the Future of Europe.

The United Kingdom has pledged £12 million over the next three years to provide budgetary support for the implementation of East Timor's national development plan. That will help to increase East Timor's capacity to deliver better public services.

Mr. Turner: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Few people have suffered more than the East Timorese did during their struggle for independence and self-determination, but their country's future looks bright because of the possibility of oil and gas revenues. However, that income will take time to come on stream, so will my hon. Friend give an assurance that the UK will continue to fund East Timor until then?

Mr. O'Brien: It is certainly true that East Timor's future is potentially very bright, given its oil and gas reserves. At the donor conference in May 2002, the UK—which pledged £30 million—and other donors pledged a total of $440 million to East Timor for the next three years. We believe that that is sufficient to meet East Timor's funding gap before it can expect oil and gas revenues from the Timor gap to come on stream in 2005–06.

Mr. Speaker: Michael Connarty is not here. I call the next question.

World Trade

2. **Phil Hope** (Corby): If he will make a statement on post-Doha world trade liberalisation. [62105]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Denis MacShane): World Trade Organisation Trade Ministers agreed an ambitious negotiating agenda at Doha last November. Talks on that are now getting under way, but much work still needs to be done to complete the Doha round.

Phil Hope: Last week, like many hon. Members, I met constituents who are concerned that if free trade is to work, it must work for the world's poor, and not only for the benefit of the world's richest countries. Linked to that issue is my concern about the steel industry—there is a steelworks in my constituency, and I know that steel is represented in my hon. Friend's constituency. The impact of the United States' tariffs on imported steel is punishing our constituents and steel producers throughout the world. Can he assure me that the Government are doing all that they can to make the Doha development agenda a reality for the world's poor, and that we are taking firm action to ensure that the United States lifts those steel tariffs, which are illegal and unacceptable?

Mr. MacShane: I agree with my hon. Friend. Last Wednesday's trade justice lobby was a wonderful carnival that showed the best of Britain wanting a fairer world. The Government can be proud of the fact that of the major G8 countries, this country is taking the lead in arguing against agriculture and steel protection, and in increasing overseas aid.

My hon. Friend is right about steel, which is of profound concern to my Rotherham constituents. It was mainly steelworkers' presence in Seattle during the anti-globalisation movement's demonstration against the WTO that secured them their wish for protectionist measures, which do grave harm to working people in steel industries around the world. The Government have taken up the matter with the United States and talks are continuing. The European Union, too, has fashioned a robust response.

Sir Peter Tapsell (Louth and Horncastle): Do the Government accept that since Doha the momentum towards liberal world trade, which has underpinned the prosperity of the world for the past 50 years, has come under threat, especially from the unilateral decision of the United States to impose tariffs on steel, which is all too reminiscent of the Smoot-Hawley trade tariff Act of June 1930, which precipitated the world depression? Will the British Government draw that—*[Interruption.]*—that sad example to the attention of America's President and Congress?

Mr. MacShane: There was some levity at the fact that the hon. Gentleman clearly remembers the Smoot-Hawley tariffs, but he is right—they were a disaster imposed by a reactionary right-wing Administration. It has always been reactionary right-wing administrations that tend to go in for protectionist measures. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] That is why Europe is concerned about forms of protection, including the farm subsidies Bill that has just been introduced by the US Administration—with, alas, the support of Democratic senators. We continue to argue against all such measures, but the House should not forget that the United States remains a huge importer and a great trading nation. Finally, when I talk about reactionary right-wingers, I am speaking about Conservative Front Benchers.

Jim Knight (South Dorset): US protectionism as expressed through steel sanctions and the Farm Act is clearly disappointing and regrettable. Despite that, will my hon. Friend continue to press the United States to make positive proposals consistent with its undertakings at Doha?

Mr. MacShane: That is precisely what the Prime Minister will be doing in Canada later this week. We should acknowledge the doubling of aid to $10 billion that President Bush brought to the table at Monterrey earlier this year. The Government are committed to open trade, investment and creating jobs in the third world, where they are needed. It is by breaking down protectionist barriers, however they are put in place, that that is best achieved.

Zimbabwe

3. **Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger** (Bridgwater): If he will make a statement on the situation in Zimbabwe. [62106]

6. **Barbara Follett** (Stevenage): What recent discussions he has had with Commonwealth colleagues on Zimbabwe. [62109]

10. **Mr. Andrew Miller** (Ellesmere Port and Neston): What recent discussions he has had with other Commonwealth Governments about Zimbabwe. [62113]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): Let me begin by condemning the extraordinary and reprehensible decision of ZANU-PF to order farmers in Zimbabwe to stop farming and to drive them and their workers off the land, at a time when the people of Zimbabwe face a level of starvation unparalleled in their recent history, most of which is due not to drought, but to deliberate decisions of the Mugabe regime. Zimbabwe's only way back from disaster is through the restoration of the rule of law, an end to political violence, an end to the intimidation and arrest of journalists and the free press, a return to democratic legitimacy, and the adoption of credible economic policies.

Our approach to Zimbabwe has been to create and sustain an effective international coalition. All along, ZANU-PF has been desperate to present itself as a colonial victim of the United Kingdom. In contrast, ZANU-PF is now set against the whole of the international community. We have worked closely with the European Union, the United States, the Commonwealth and others. The EU has imposed a travel ban and asset freeze on 20 leading members of ZANU-PF, and an arms embargo. EU applicant states, the United States, Norway, New Zealand and Switzerland have imposed similar measures. The Commonwealth has suspended Zimbabwe from its councils.

We welcome recent efforts by the Governments of South Africa and Nigeria to promote reconciliation in Zimbabwe, and we deplore the recent decision by ZANU-PF to pull out of talks with the Movement for Democratic Change.

I and my ministerial colleagues keep in close contact with Commonwealth partners on Zimbabwe. My most recent such meeting was last week, on 20 June, with South African Foreign Minister Zuma.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: I thank the Secretary of State for that comprehensive set of answers. With the G8 summit coming up, what will the right hon. Gentleman be saying to the G8? Will he be able to pressurise the group into making firm commitments to sort out the situation in Zimbabwe and to make sure that President Mugabe realises just what the feeling of the international community is? It is all very well going round and round the bush, but we must stop the situation before there is a disaster.

Mr. Straw: Because I am not a Head of Government, I shall not be attending the Heads of Government meeting of the G8 that is coming up. However, the matter was discussed at the G8 Foreign Ministers meeting two weeks ago, and there is overwhelming opposition to what has been happening in Zimbabwe, and a determination on the part of the international community, which includes the European Union, the United States, and as far as the G8 is concerned, also Russia and Japan, and many other nations, including those of the Commonwealth African group, to see effective action taken against Zimbabwe. I understand the frustration and anger felt in all quarters about what has happened in Zimbabwe—a man-made tragedy, brought on by Mugabe—but I also ask the House to appreciate that we must work collectively with our international partners, if we are to be effective in dealing with Mugabe.

Barbara Follett: I thank my right hon. Friend for his reply and for the work that he is doing on the issue. Will he share with the House his assessment of the effect that EU sanctions are having in Zimbabwe, particularly in the light of Mr. Mugabe's presence in Rome?

Mr. Straw: There is no doubt that the travel sanctions taken against Mr. Mugabe and 19 other members of the ZANU-PF regime have been both highly disruptive and humiliating to that regime. That is evidenced by some strident criticism made recently by none other than one of Mr. Mugabe's former henchmen, Mr. Andrew Ndlovu, the secretary of the Zimbabwe National War Veterans Association, who criticised Mr. Mugabe for trying to get out of the so-called smart sanctions

"to enable them to travel all over the world".

I should also explain to my hon. Friend that it was always acknowledged in the EU common position, as it has been by the United States, that sanctions on the travel of regimes such as that of Mugabe are qualified by our international treaty obligations. It is for that reason that the United States had to admit Mr. Mugabe to a United Nations conference and that European nations have had to admit representatives of the ZANU-PF regime to international conferences inside the European Union. None the less, the sanctions are proving effective.

Mr. Miller: A week ago on Sunday, I had the privilege to be in Manchester at a business awards ceremony for the Asian community. In particular, British citizens who came here from Uganda brought to my attention the problems that they face. The event was a great celebration of the contribution that that community, among others, has made to British society.

One business man raised with me his hope that the Foreign Secretary will use the opportunity of the Commonwealth games in a couple of weeks' time to meet as many visiting Heads of Government and leading politicians as possible, so as to reinforce the message to Zimbabwe that its actions are intolerable and that the whole Commonwealth will no longer stand for its activities.

Mr. Straw: I shall certainly do that. Of course, it is a matter of record that it was a decision taken by Prime Minister Howard of Australia, President Obasanjo of Nigeria and President Mbeki of South Africa that led to the suspension of Zimbabwe from the councils of the Commonwealth because of the way in which it had rigged the elections in March.

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon): Given the fact that the BBC World Service is the leading international broadcaster in Zimbabwe, providing the Zimbabwean people with free and independent news at a time when press freedom has been so curtailed, will the Foreign Secretary lend his weight to ensuring a realistic funding settlement in the imminent spending review?

Mr. Straw: Yes, I can assure the hon. Gentleman—I am very grateful for the question; more questions like it would be only too gratefully received as we reach conclusions on the spending review—that I shall certainly be doing exactly what he describes, as I shall in respect of the British Council and the Foreign Office's main budget.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): I am sure that the whole House is delighted.

Is the right hon. Gentleman aware of the allegations that much of the land that has been seized by Mugabe's thugs has been given to his cronies and members of his family? If that is true, has he made specific representations on that point?

Mr. Straw: Yes to both questions. That issue may offer a large explanation of why a country that is naturally rich and that once supplied agricultural produce to the whole of southern Africa can now produce only 850,000 tonnes of cereal, as opposed to a requirement of 2.7 million tonnes. The land has not even been handed over to ordinary black farmers, but to Mugabe's henchpeople. It includes 300,000 acres of prime land seized from commercial farmers and handed out to Mugabe's closest allies, including 10 Cabinet Ministers, seven Members of Parliament and Mugabe's brother in law, the aptly named Reward Marufe.

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, as well as the Commonwealth, the European Union has a very important continuing role to play in relation to Zimbabwe, and that through its arms embargo, freeze on assets and travel restrictions, it should continue to flex its muscles in response to the political violence and human rights violations there? What discussions has he had with his EU counterparts in relation to Zimbabwe and are any further targeted sanctions planned in response to the recent deterioration in human rights? What will be the objectives of those sanctions and the EU's common foreign and security policy in relation to Zimbabwe?

Mr. Straw: The objective of the sanctions, as of the suspension of Zimbabwe from the councils of the Commonwealth, is to secure one end: the restoration of democracy, the rule of law and economic stability to that country, and at the same time to ensure that any such sanctions do not penalise the poor people of Zimbabwe. The issue is continually discussed with my European Union colleagues, and the overall question of the sanctions that have been taken and the common position—as it is called by the European Union—will be reviewed by the General Affairs Council at its meeting in late July.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): Does the Foreign Secretary agree that it is difficult to escape the conclusion that Zimbabwe under President Mugabe is a country in free-fall in which ordinary citizens suffer the most? Is he aware that inflation is running at 112 per cent., that two thirds of the population are unemployed, that foreign direct investment has fallen from $430 million in 1998 to $4 million in 2001, and that, since 1998, 500,000 people have died as a result of contracting HIV?

Is the Foreign Secretary aware that production of maize is 77 per cent. less than it was two years ago? In a country that was the granary of southern Africa, farmers are now forbidden by law to work their land when there is a threat of massive food shortages. Is this not truly the theatre of the absurd?

May I ask the Foreign Secretary to consider this question on behalf of Her Majesty's Government? If events in Zimbabwe conspire to create a massive refugee problem, will the United Kingdom honour not only its legal, but its moral obligations towards the people of Zimbabwe?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I would expect that the next time that the right hon. and learned Gentleman asks a question, it will be shorter than that.

Mr. Straw: It would be absurd, but for the fact that it is entirely deliberate, and we need to be aware of that. This is a natural consequence of deliberate policies embarked upon by Mugabe—rationally, but amorally and wrongly.

On refugees, the Government stand ready, as we always have done, to meet our full obligations under the 1951 convention. I just say this to the right hon. and learned Gentleman: the countries that will principally suffer from refugees from Zimbabwe in future, as they already have, are those that border Zimbabwe. The crisis has its epicentre in Zimbabwe, but it is now moving out to the whole of southern Africa. Yes, the Zimbabwe dollar is in free-fall, but the rand, too, has suffered badly, and hundreds of refugees are streaming across the borders into South Africa, Botswana, Malawi and Zambia.

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): Hon. Members know, and have heard again today, about the depth of the crisis facing Zimbabwe, not least the decision to close more than 2,000 farms within the next 15 days amid terrible food shortages. But what the House really wants to know is what the Government are going to do to change the situation. In the light not only of Mugabe's visit to Rome, but of his visit to New York in May, his wife's visit to Spain to go shopping and his police chief's visit to France in May, does the Secretary of State really believe that Mugabe's henchmen are experiencing the isolation that he talked about, or does he not rather agree with the author of the recent International Crisis Group report, John Prendergast, that the sanctions as they are currently applied are a joke?

Mr. Straw: A year ago, President Mugabe expected to be treated, and was treated in capitals around the world, as a legitimate head of state. Today he is condemned by the Commonwealth, the European Union and the United States. He is increasingly shunned by other African Governments and has been declared by the International Monetary Fund to be in non-co-operation and subject to sanctions and suspensions. That international consensus has come about not least as a result of the painstaking diplomatic activity of the British Government.

Listen carefully to what the right hon. Gentleman says about the matter. As ever, his attitude is discordant not only with Members on this side of the House, but with those on his own side. I have listened to him on the radio. He constantly calls for things to be done—I agree with him about that—but when he is pressed on what should be done, he says, as he did this morning that there has to be

> "an international coalition put together."

What does he think that we have been doing but putting together an international coalition with the European Union, the Commonwealth, the United States and many other Governments, as well as actively supporting the southern African development consortium?

The right hon. Gentleman went on to say:

> "I think we shouldn't try to do anything on our own".

So he accepts the fact that there are clear limits on Britain acting by itself. We must have an international consensus, and that is what we have been actively working for over the past year. Since he makes a slightly disobliging point, I point out that it is a matter for debate whether, with his approach to the European Union, he would have accomplished anything like our achievements with the EU.

Mr. Ancram: But does not the Foreign Secretary understand that the people of Zimbabwe want to know what will be done to change things, not a definition of the problem? They do not want to know what talks are taking place, but what will improve matters. He told us about the sanctions and claimed that they were clear, unambiguous and unanimous, but he must tell us what they have achieved in changing Mugabe's direction.

The position is constantly deteriorating, with more torture and abuses of human rights, yet nothing is done. While torture and other flagrant abuses of human rights continue, where is the international coalition about which the Foreign Secretary told us?

The United States is apparently exploring further measures to ratchet up pressure on Mugabe's regime; what is the right hon. Gentleman doing to increase the pressure? Is not he ashamed that John Prendergast's report went on to state:

> "Britain and the EU talk tough and do nothing"?

Is not John Prendergast right? When will the Foreign Secretary stop talking and start doing?

Mr. Straw: I appreciate the difficulties that the right hon. Gentleman experiences in opposition, but his approach does not recommend itself and I suggest that he move away from it. I have listened carefully to him in the past year, and he has made the same point in the same tone. He has never suggested action different from that taken by the Government.

The right hon. Gentleman went on about the United States. The sanctions that I was able to ensure that the European Union imposed in February are stronger and more extensive than those applied by the United States. For example, the United States has imposed no financial assets freeze. We welcome the fact that it is now considering that. Meanwhile, as I announced to the House, the EU Foreign Affairs Council will review sanctions towards the end of July.

Sub-continent

4. **Mr. Peter Luff** (Mid-Worcestershire): What his most recent assessment of the state of relations between India and Pakistan is. [R] [62107]

5. **Ms Dari Taylor** (Stockton, South): What his assessment is of the present situation in Kashmir. [62108]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): As I said in my statement to the House on 10 June, the dispute between India and Pakistan is at root a bilateral matter, which can be resolved only by direct dialogue between the parties. However, it is also a dispute with potent international implications. Intense diplomatic efforts by the United Kingdom and the United States, and the steps taken in recent days by the Governments of India and Pakistan to ease tension give grounds for some optimism. None the less, with 1 million men under arms on either side of the line of control in a high state of readiness, the risks of a conflict remain significant.

The international community remains fully engaged in seeking further de-escalation and encouraging India and Pakistan to work towards a lasting settlement of their differences.

Mr. Luff: The Foreign Secretary rightly emphasised the contribution that the international community can make. What are the Government doing to help move Pakistan towards democracy, enable international observers to monitor the situation, and, perhaps above all, encourage the Pakistani authorities to prevent terrorist groups based in Pakistan from launching attacks on India, its people and its Parliament?

Mr. Straw: I welcomed the decision of the supreme court of Pakistan that the assumption of power by President Musharraf was legitimate provided that there was a clear pathway to resuming elections by October this year. I also welcome the steps that President Musharraf has taken towards that end; he has kept to the staging posts. We shall do everything that we can to assist Pakistan. We have no reason to believe that monitors will not be admitted to that country.

I also welcome the fact that the chief election officer for the whole union of India said that foreign observers would be free to visit Jammu and Kashmir to monitor elections there. He said that they would not be officially invited to do that and that they would have to make their own arrangements, but that they would be allowed access to polling stations. He also said that both the national and international media would have free access to polling stations in Jammu and Kashmir. He stated:

> "We are doing this deliberately . . . as they are the best observers".

Ms Taylor: I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's statement to the House and I would be grateful to hear whether he has had discussions with the Indian and Pakistani authorities on the three assurances given by General Musharraf. Those assurances, which were warmly welcomed, were to stop terrorism—which my right hon. Friend has mentioned—to stop infiltration and to dismantle terrorist networks. Although it is still early days, will my right hon. Friend tell the House whether those assurances are becoming a reality?

Mr. Straw: The undertakings given by the Government of Pakistan, and the corresponding diplomatic and military moves made by the Government of India, are a matter of constant discussion between Her Majesty's Government and the Governments of those two countries. I last discussed the issue with Jaswant Singh, the Indian Foreign Minister, in a phone call yesterday. The tension would not have reduced had there not been a significant reduction of infiltration across the line of control. The international community obviously looks to President Musharraf fully to meet the undertakings that he has given on further bearing down on the terrorist groups and, in due course, closing the camps. Detailed undertakings were given to Richard Armitage, the United States Deputy Secretary of State, and there will be a great expectation that they will be met.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): A recent US Government report stated that the greatest risk of nuclear conflict between the two powers would occur if field commanders on the ground used nuclear weapons without reference to their commanders-in-chief or their Governments. Do the British Government agree with that assessment? What, if anything, can the international community do to address that specific danger?

Mr. Straw: I have not heard that particular anxiety expressed. We have worked on the assumption that, were nuclear weapons—appallingly—to be used by either side, it would be only at the behest and decision of the central Governments and leaders concerned. None the less, we remain very concerned about the relatively low nuclear threshold, and about the need for the development by both sides of the kind of highly sophisticated nuclear doctrine and effective fail-safe back-channels of communication that led, over some decades, to the nuclear weapons of the Warsaw pact and NATO never being used, and, in the end, to the profound differences between eastern and western Europe being resolved in a peaceful way.

Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): The whole House will welcome the easing of tension between India and Pakistan, and the efforts undertaken by my right hon. Friend. When does he intend to restore the entry clearance operation in Islamabad, Karachi, Mumbai and New Delhi to its full operational strength?

Mr. Straw: We keep the issues of travel advice and the visa operation under close review. We have to make different decisions for each of the two countries, because, although they are both parties to the same conflict over Kashmir, I am afraid that the security situation in Pakistan is significantly different from and worse than that in India, because of the terrorist actions that have already taken place against western diplomats, and other threats. We have, however, already restored something of a service. I am fully aware of the difficulties involved, because I, too, have many Indian and Pakistani constituents, and we are working hard—particularly in respect of India—to get back to as near normal a service as we can. So far as Pakistan is concerned, that will take longer.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): My hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne) has hit the nail on the head, in that, when tension over Kashmir was recently at its height, the real concern was that there appeared to be no established nuclear doctrine, such as there used to be between east and west during the cold war. I know that the Secretary of State has just referred to this issue, but could he expand a little further on what steps can now be taken to ensure that such a doctrine can be established, through both diplomatic and military channels, so that whenever there is a risk of tension rising again, there will be proper safeguards to ensure that the risk can be minimised and that the situation can be reacted to in the most responsible manner?

Mr. Straw: One small silver lining that may already have emerged from this conflict is the greater realisation by the Governments of India and Pakistan of the huge international anxiety about the potential of nuclear conflict, and of the fact that the effects of nuclear conflict in India and Pakistan would in no sense be confined to the narrow theatre of war, but would spread across the whole sub-continent and turn the leader or leaders who unleashed the nuclear weapons, and their countries, into international pariahs for generations to come.

As to discussions, within the limitations set by our own non-proliferation and other treaty obligations, which we take very seriously, we will of course do our best to offer such advice as the Governments of India and Pakistan think appropriate—as, I believe, will other appropriate members of the international community.

Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): Does the Foreign Secretary agree that the most practical way of demonstrating to India and Pakistan that nuclear weapons undermine their security is for Britain to take a lead by ridding ourselves of our own weapons of mass destruction? If he does not agree, can he explain why nuclear weapons are suitable for our security, but not for that of India and Pakistan?

Mr. Straw: The difference is that we are signatories to a range of international treaties on the control of nuclear weapons, but neither India nor Pakistan is. I understand my hon. Friend's point, but I do not personally believe in unilateral nuclear disarmament by the United Kingdom—[HON. MEMBERS: "You used to."] Yes I did, and I do not. I went on the Aldermaston march when I was 12, and I think that I am entitled to change my view between the ages of 12 and 55. Indeed, I was nearer to 12 than to 55 when I changed it.

Although I do not subscribe to my hon. Friend's view, I do believe that a first staging post in making the world safer would be for Pakistan and India both to sign up to the non-proliferation treaties.

Jonathan Lincoln Brown

9. **Mr. David Cameron** (Witney): What representations his Department has made to the Omani Government about Jonathan Lincoln Brown; and if he will make a statement. [62112]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mike O'Brien): Our embassy in Muscat has made at least 12 representations to the Omani Government concerning Mr. Lincoln Brown since November 2000. The embassy was instrumental in restoring Mr. Lincoln Brown's right of appeal in December 2001. Although this case is essentially a private legal matter and we cannot interfere in another country's judicial process, we will continue to provide Mr. Lincoln Brown with all the assistance that we properly can.

Mr. Cameron: I am very grateful for that answer. Is the Minister aware that Mr. Lincoln Brown has been stuck in Oman for some 19 months? Could the Minister press the Omani authorities to ensure that Mr. Lincoln Brown is allowed to appeal in the normal way, and that his complaint to the director of public prosecutions in Oman about the manner of his treatment can be dealt with in the normal way? Will the Minister also give me an assurance that the friendly relations that we rightly have with that country will not get in the way of making robust representations on my constituent's behalf?

Mr. O'Brien: We have already made robust representations, and I have given the hon. Gentleman an assurance that we will continue to do so. We have always taken Mr. Lincoln Brown's case very seriously, and we will continue to do so and to help him. Work on his case has amounted to more than 50 per cent. of the total time dedicated to individual British nationals in Oman. I shall certainly consider both the points that the hon. Gentleman raises, and if he is happy for me to do so I shall write to him about when and how we can make the representations that he considers necessary.

Zimbabwe

11. **Tony Cunningham** (Workington): If he will make a statement on the political situation in Zimbabwe. [62114]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Denis MacShane): As the Foreign Secretary and many hon. Members have made clear, the political situation in Zimbabwe is lamentable. Elections are stolen, journalists are arrested and there is widespread corruption among the governing elite. This issue will of course be debated today on a motion for the Adjournment—[HON. MEMBERS: "It's an Opposition day"]—but I have confidence that the democratic spirit of the people of Zimbabwe will one day rise up, so that they can return their beautiful land to the commonwealth of free nations. I wonder whether, instead of personalising the issue in terms of Mr. Mugabe, we should work harder to show our support for, and solidarity with, those who want true democracy in that great country.

Tony Cunningham: Does the Minister agree that the pronouncements by the Zimbabwean Government attacking my constituent Brian Donnelly, who is the British high commissioner in Harare, are completely outrageous and totally unacceptable? Will the Minister join me in paying tribute to the high commissioner and the staff in Harare, who are doing a superb job?

Mr. MacShane: I very much agree and I hope that those points will be made in the debate on the Opposition's motion later today. Our high commissioner has acted in accordance with the highest standards of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office service, and he has the complete support of the Government and, I am sure, the whole House.

Sir Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): As the Foreign Secretary said earlier, the Government of Mr. Mugabe is destroying Zimbabwe and causing untold misery, starvation and poverty for its people. Many feel that the problems of Kashmir and the middle east are pushing the problems of Zimbabwe on to the back burner, but I have what I think is a unique question on this matter: what thought has been given to using the good offices of the father of modern central southern Africa, Nelson Mandela, in seeking a solution to the problems of Zimbabwe?

Mr. MacShane: We are in discussion with South Africa and neighbouring states on this issue. The House and the people of Zimbabwe would be delighted if Mr. Mandela took a direct personal interest. Whether Mugabe would listen to him is another matter.

Angus Robertson (Moray): I wish to associate myself with the suggestion about the involvement of former President Mandela as part of the carrot. The Government have rightly been working with European Union partners in a sanctions regime against Mr. Mugabe and his henchmen in ZANU-PF. May I ask what assessment the

Government and the EU have made of the effectiveness of targeting ZANU-PF and whether any plans exist to enhance the sanctions regime?

Mr. MacShane: As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said earlier, a year ago Mr. Mugabe was receiving red-carpet treatment around the world. Recently he had to cool his heels for eight hours in the waiting room of an airport in Paris, reading back numbers of *Le Monde*, because the French Government would not let him into the country. His Foreign Minister was not allowed into Germany to attend his daughter's wedding. Mugabe's bank accounts—when we can find them, because most have been moved offshore—are being seized. A further tightening, or examination, of the sanctions will be discussed at the forthcoming meeting of European Foreign Ministers.

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): A programme for free and fair elections—which was, of course, ignored—was drawn up by the Southern African Development Community before the presidential elections in Zimbabwe. Does the Minister agree that the programme should apply throughout sub-Saharan Africa and that the terrible political situation in Zimbabwe should be an object lesson to others not to tamper with the democratic political process?

Mr. MacShane: Yes.

United States Steel Tariffs

12. **Ms Meg Munn** (Sheffield, Heeley): What his assessment is of the effect of US steel tariffs on world trade. [62115]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Denis MacShane): The United Kingdom believes that the United States steel measures are economically unjustified and inconsistent with World Trade Organisation rules. We fully support the European Commission's response. The US measures will increase prices for US steel consumers and decrease trade.

Ms Munn: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. A recent report from the Progressive Policy Institute, a Washington think tank, outlines how much the US tariff policy hurts both the poor in the US and the poor of developing countries. Does he agree with me and many who took part in the lobby of Parliament last week by the trade justice movement that the claim by the Indian Trade Minister that the rich countries want the developing countries to remain exporters of only primary products appears correct? Yet only international trade on fair and equitable terms will help the poor in both the developed and developing world to improve their lot.

Mr. MacShane: My hon. Friend is right, and that is why the Government are strong advocates of progress in the Doha development round and of winding down steel but also agricultural protection on both sides of the Atlantic. The only way in which the world can grow and develop is if the tariff barriers are dismantled and trade, investment and job creation are increased.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): Is not the crude protectionism of the United States steel tariffs compounded by the US Farm Act? Does not that make a nonsense of all the American rhetoric over the years supporting free trade and correctly criticising the common agricultural policy? Has it been brought home to the American Government that there is a real risk of their unilateral actions derailing the whole post-Doha development round? If so, how will the world put back together what should be a process towards free and fair trade?

Mr. MacShane: The United States has debated this and I have read commentaries and speeches by politicians and commentators who are highly critical of the measure, which, of course, was supported by Democrat Senators on the Hill. However, we should not forget that the huge trade deficit that the United States runs represents immense imports into America, each of which represents a job for someone around the world. We will keep arguing firmly and strongly for free trade. I invite the Liberal Democrats to ask their friends—particularly those in the anti-globalisation movement who are hostile to trade—to support the Government on this crucial matter.

Rosemary McKenna (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth): I associate myself totally with the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Ms Munn). Many UK companies are struggling in this area and have formally applied for product exclusions. What steps have been taken by the Government to assist those companies?

Mr. MacShane: I have a direct constituency interest myself, as much of the steel made in Rotherham is exported to the United States. Corus and my steelworker constituents warmly welcome the extraordinary energy shown by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and my noble Friend the Minister for Trade and Investment in their discussions with the US Administration to seek the necessary exemptions for as many British steel products as possible.

Zimbabwe

13. **Mr. Henry Bellingham** (North-West Norfolk): What recent discussions he has had with the members of the Southern African Development Community concerning Zimbabwe. [62116]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Denis MacShane): My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and his ministerial colleagues have frequent discussions with their SADC counterparts about Zimbabwe. The most recent was on 20 June, when the Foreign Secretary met the South African Foreign Minister, Dr. Zuma, in London.

Mr. Bellingham: Has the Minister seen the recent report by the distinguished journalist Neil Darbyshire on the disastrous situation in Malawi? To what extent is this tragedy partly the result of the dislocation and deliberate ruination of agriculture in Zimbabwe? Does he agree that the time has come to ratchet up the smart sanctions? At the forthcoming European Council of Ministers, will he look at this point, and at extending a ban on Air Zimbabwe, which obviously will not hit the ordinary people of Zimbabwe but will hit Robert Mugabe and his cronies?

Mr. MacShane: I am happy to ask my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary to take all those points on board. I am not sure if the famine problem in Malawi is related directly to the situation in Zimbabwe. We must continue to talk with our friends in SADC to ensure that as much aid as possible gets through to the people who really need it.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): Is it not a fact that the economic situation and the lack of stability in Zimbabwe is causing tremendous problems for the economy of the whole of southern Africa, and that SADC must be concerned about that? Might not the economics of the situation bring Mugabe and his henchmen to heel in Zimbabwe, forcing them to move forward and return to democracy?

Mr. MacShane: Zimbabwe is the most awful lesson for its neighbours. I hope that the whole of Africa, particularly southern Africa and SADC, understands that democracy and an open economy go hand in hand and that the Zimbabwe road is one that no other African country should contemplate taking.

Kashmir

15. **Mr. Michael Weir** (Angus): Whether Kashmiri terrorists are receiving funding from sources in the UK. [62118]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mike O'Brien): We are determined that this country should not be used as a base for supporting terrorism. It is a criminal offence under the Terrorism Act 2000 to belong to, or to raise funds for, a proscribed terrorist group. The police investigate all credible allegations of fundraising for such groups and will take action where there is sufficient evidence to do so.

Mr. Weir: The Minister will be aware of press reports that two prominent Kashmiri politicians were arrested by the Indian authorities and accused of receiving substantial sums of money through al-Qaeda representatives in the United Kingdom to fund terrorism in Kashmir. Has the Minister made an assessment of whether al-Qaeda is involved in the Kashmiri situation, and has he received any requests from the Indian Government to investigate money coming from the UK to fund such activities?

Mr. O'Brien: We are examining with great care various representations that we have received from the Indian Government and will take action where there is sufficient evidence. It is important that we do not simply act on an allegation that funds are coming from this country unless there is sufficient evidence to back it. It is difficult for the police to act on a mere allegation. We are talking to the Indian Government about some of the statements that have been made and hope that where there is sufficient evidence we will be able to take the necessary steps. The police and the prosecuting authorities will also have to make their decisions based on the evidence.

Mr. Mohammad Sarwar (Glasgow, Govan): Does my hon. Friend agree that the dispute over Kashmir is a source of rising tensions between India and Pakistan? India and Pakistan have had three wars because of this dispute. Will my hon. Friend put pressure on the Governments of India and Pakistan to negotiate and to bring about a peaceful settlement to this dispute?

Mr. O'Brien: We have been working with the Indian and Pakistani Governments to set up a process of dialogue between them and to de-escalate the current tensions. The tension between Indian and Pakistan is a bilateral matter that must be resolved by direct dialogue between the parties. We certainly do not believe that war is inevitable, now or in the long term. The problems between India and Pakistan will never be satisfactorily resolved by military means. We want support for cross-border terrorism to stop and a verifiable end to infiltration as the first step towards reducing the current tensions. We want both Governments to talk through the issues that divide them and to talk to the people of Kashmir about how they want to go forward.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Is the Minister aware of the extent of public disquiet in the United Kingdom that we may unwittingly be the base for the prosecution and funding of terrorism in other parts of the world, including Kashmir? Is he conscious of the fact that the United Kingdom does not have a good record in this respect, inasmuch as FARC and the ELN in Colombia and Sendero Luminoso in Peru are not proscribed organisations in this country or the European Union? Can Her Majesty's Government be much more vigilant, because the public have become rightly concerned since the emergence of al-Qaeda and the increased terrorist activity in Kashmir?

Mr. O'Brien: My recollection of some of what the hon. Gentleman refers to is not quite the same as his. I will double-check my recollection on one of the groups that he mentioned.

We have proscribed three Kashmiri terrorist groups, and the list of proscribed groups is kept under constant review. It is a matter predominantly for the Home Secretary, in consultation with Foreign Office Ministers and other ministerial colleagues, to take into account the nature and scale of groups' activities and the extent of their presence in the UK. It is a factor in our considerations whether there is an issue in the UK; it is not simply a matter of proscribing an organisation that may be a threat in another country but may not have substantial, or even any, activities in the UK. However, I have taken the hon. Gentleman's point on board, and will write to him about the groups that he mentioned, because I think that he is wrong on one of them.

16. **Mr. Gordon Prentice** (Pendle): What recent discussions he has had with his counterparts in India and Pakistan concerning security along the line of control in Kashmir. [62120]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mike O'Brien): During his visit to Pakistan, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary underlined to President Musharraf the need for Pakistan to take visible, decisive and verifiable steps to seal the line of control, to stop supplies to militant groups, to help restrain the violent actions of those groups and to close the militant training camps on Pakistan's side of the line of control. In his meetings in Delhi with Prime Minister Vajpayee and Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh, my right hon. Friend stressed that as Pakistan was taking the necessary steps to clamp down on terrorism, India should respond positively.

Verification that infiltration by terrorists across the line of control has stopped will be a vital element in de-escalating the crisis over Kashmir. Any arrangement on verification would have to be acceptable to both India and Pakistan.

Mr. Prentice: Our right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary told me two months ago that

"there may well be a role for observers"—

along the line of control—

"better to enforce a proper peace".—[*Official Report*, 16 April 2002; Vol. 382, c. 440.]

Well, why are we so laid back about this? I want to see the line of control absolutely flooded with UN observers, but the line we constantly hear from the Front Bench is that we cannot make progress unless there is bilateral agreement between India and Pakistan. What exactly is the problem for India in allowing UN observers on the Indian side of the line of control to police the border, if the Indians are concerned, as they must be, about insurgents moving from Pakistan—Azad Kashmir—into Jammu Kashmir?

Mr. O'Brien: Perhaps I might gently explain to my hon. Friend, who asks a serious and important question, that if we do not have the consent of both parties to the presence of observers from the UN or elsewhere, it is possible that such observers might be shot at or that their security might be otherwise compromised. It is thus important that, as part of the process of dialogue, we engage with both the Indians and the Pakistanis to see whether there are circumstances in which, given their particular concerns about international observers, those concerns can be remedied. It may well be that Pakistan has always accepted that there should be some international role, but that India has not felt the same way. The circumstances may have altered but they will alter only to a limited extent. We want to ensure that India's response is carried out reasonably and sensibly by dialogue and agreement.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): Following his helpful reply to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sarwar), has the Minister considered suggesting to both sides that, as a further step to reduce tension, there should be a demilitarised corridor of, say, 50 or 100 miles along the line of control?

Mr. O'Brien: That, too, must be part of the process of discussion and dialogue between the two countries. We cannot just impose that sort of thing—it has to be done by discussion and agreement.

Gibraltar

18. **Mr. Lindsay Hoyle** (Chorley): If he will make a statement on the talks between the UK and Spain over Gibraltar. [62122]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): As my right hon. Friend the Minister for Europe said in Westminster Hall on 18 June, discussions between the UK and Spain about Gibraltar are continuing, but real difficulties remain to be resolved. I shall be meeting the Spanish Foreign Minister Josep Pique in London for informal discussions tomorrow, 26 June. We intend to hold a further ministerial meeting of the Brussels process before the summer break, if at all possible. Our aim remains an agreement that we can commend to the people of Gibraltar.

Mr. Hoyle: I welcome that statement from my right hon. Friend. Is it true that there will be a meeting this week between my right hon. Friend and Spanish officials, and will those matters be discussed? Can we ensure that when the talks end, that is really the end and that the people of Gibraltar can get on with their lives and the sword of uncertainty hanging over Gibraltar will be taken away once and for all?

Mr. Straw: If only it were possible to enable the people of Gibraltar—in my hon. Friend's words—to "get on with their lives" simply by bringing those talks to an end; would that it were that straightforward. The reason that the previous Conservative Government decided in 1984 to enter the negotiations—the Brussels process—which included in their terms of reference discussions about sovereignty, was to try to secure a better future between Gibraltar and its neighbour, Spain. Yes, I have made it clear that we stand by the people of Gibraltar; but am I able to secure significant improvements in the daily lives of the people of Gibraltar without securing an agreement? That remains very difficult.

Mr. Speaker: We now go back to Question 14. Before I call the hon. Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross), I remind the House that it is a question, not a statement.

Middle East

14. **Mr. Ernie Ross** (Dundee, West): If he will make a statement on the middle east peace process. [62117]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): The search for peace in the middle east has suffered many setbacks in recent months. The speech yesterday by President Bush is therefore very welcome. In summary, he called for a final settlement within three years, including

"two states, living side by side in peace and security".

He said that there must be an end to terror, and that

"Israeli settlement activity in the occupied territories must stop".

He went on to say:

"Israelis and Palestinians must address the core issues . . . This means that the Israeli occupation that began in 1967 will be ended through a settlement negotiated between the parties, based on UN

> Resolutions 242 and 338, with Israeli withdrawal to secure and recognised borders. We must also resolve questions concerning Jerusalem, the plight and future of Palestinian refugees".

I recognise that there are some uncomfortable messages in that speech for the Palestinian Authority, but I am glad to note that President Arafat has welcomed the speech.

On President Arafat's position, we strongly support the call for reforms to the Palestinian Authority and for new elections, as they will be an opportunity for the Palestinian people to decide who will lead them towards a final and peaceful settlement.

The United Kingdom has long advocated the vision of two states—Israel and Palestine—living side by side in peace and security. We will do all that we can to assist the process now restarted by President Bush. In this new political environment, we look to the Palestinian leadership to act decisively to end the suicide bombings. We look to Israel to end the closure of the occupied territories and its incursions into area A. Both parties have a duty to take up President Bush's initiative—there is no other way forward.

Mr. Ross: I thank my right hon. Friend. I welcome the fact that President Arafat saw the speech last night as a serious effort by the American President to push forward the peace process. If that is to happen, does my right hon. Friend agree that President Arafat's speech in May, in which he called for early elections, should be supported? In that speech, he also said that he wanted the Palestinian judiciary and security system to be reformed, so in that sense he is ahead of the President of the United States of America in calling for that.

If there are to be free and fair elections, what role will the European Union and the United Kingdom play in them? In particular, will they help to create a climate in which those free and fair elections can take place? If there is to be such a climate, does my right hon. Friend agree that it should be one where the Israeli occupation forces are withdrawn from the Palestinian centres to allow those free and fair elections to take place?

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for tabling the question and for his subsequent remarks. Yes, we welcomed the speech made by President Arafat in May, and we and the international community now look for its full implementation, so that there can be free and fair elections and a much more legitimate Palestinian Authority.

As for the action that Israel must take, President Bush was right to call for an end to occupation, but the precondition has to be an end to the terrible suicide bombings that have continued to disrupt and scar the whole of Israel and, in turn, politics in the occupied territories.

As for the advice and help that we can give, we in the United Kingdom stand ready, with our European partners, to give every assistance that we can to the Palestinian Authority, including with the organisation and monitoring of the elections.

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): May I join the Foreign Secretary in welcoming President Bush's speech not only as a helpful framework in which to take forward the peace process, but as confirmation of the much-needed American engagement in this troubled issue and troubled area?

I agree with the right hon. Gentleman in endorsing President Bush's vision of two states living side by side in peace and security. I also strongly support the twin underlying principles: it is untenable for Israeli citizens to live in terror, and it is untenable for Palestinians to live in squalor and under occupation. The counterbalancing elements of comprehensive reform within the Palestinian Authority and the obligations on Israel to withdraw fully to the pre-28 September 2000 positions, and, later, to the 1967 boundaries, as well as to halt settlement activity within the occupied territories, are also welcome in view of the prominence that they are given.

How does the Foreign Secretary now see this framework being advanced—in what order, and within what time scale—and how can balance and fairness be maintained in the process? Does he agree that the basic elements for the resolution of the middle east problem are the removal of fear and the creation of hope and trust? Does not President Bush's statement set out the framework within which, with good will and commitment on both sides, those elements can be found and built on?

Mr. Straw: I agree with the right hon. Gentleman, not least in his last remarks about the removal of fear and the creation of hope and trust. What we must do, in a position in which hope and trust has broken down on both sides and fear is the all-pervasive emotion, is ensure that, through a staged process, we can reach a situation in which both sides—6 million people in Israel, including 1 million Israeli Arabs, and 3.5 million in the occupied territories—can live in peace and security. That is the only way in which they can enjoy a life. There is no other alternative.

On the length of the process, President Bush set out a time scale of three years. He talked about the possible creation of a transitional state of Palestine, which is an attractive proposition in, as President Bush recognises, appropriate circumstances. In terms of the order in which matters must be dealt with, the first and overwhelming priority is to recognise that the continuation of repeated suicide bombings in Israel, with all the death, destruction and paralysis to normal politics that that secured, must come to an end. The very welcome words of President Arafat and the Palestinian Authority in condemning this suicide bombing must be followed by action.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): Does my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary agree that suicide bombers are the enemies of peace? Has he made representations to the United Nations in relation to permitting the Jenin refugee camp to be transformed in part into a terrorist base where young and older people were trained to kill the maximum number of Israeli citizens possible? Does he agree that it is necessary to stop glamorising terrorism and to face organised suicide bombings head-on if peace is to be given a chance?

Mr. Straw: I certainly agree with my hon. Friend; there is no glamour to terrorism whatever. It leads not only immediately to death but to a complete undermining of any kind of political process. We must return to the political process, which is why, notwithstanding the despair and fear felt both in Israel and the occupied territories, I greatly welcome the move by President Bush.

On my hon. Friend's specific question, I have not raised the matter with the United Nations, but I am happy to consider doing so.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): May I apologise and seek to make amends for my earlier excesses? Does the Foreign Secretary agree with the United Nations Secretary-General that the issue of who should lead the Palestinian people is one that they, and only they, can decide? Is he disappointed by the absence of any reference in President Bush's speech to a middle east peace conference, which is one of the most cherished proposals of the moderate Arab states whose co-operation in a peace settlement will be essential for success?

Mr. Straw: As I said, as far as elections are concerned, they will be an opportunity for the Palestinian people to decide who will lead them towards a final and peaceful settlement. I am very grateful to President Arafat, however, for the constructive approach that he has shown in welcoming the speech. I am afraid that I do not share the right hon. and learned Gentleman's disappointment about the speech, which I believe is very welcome and very positive. It provides the best basis for a middle east peace process that we have seen since the intifada began in September 2000.

As for an international conference, the United Kingdom Government are in favour of such a conference provided that there is a guarantee in advance of it being successful. There would be nothing but setback for the peace process if we went into an international conference without a clear agenda and without a clear and satisfactory exit from that conference.

Mr. Bob Laxton (Derby, North): I share the disappointment with the long-awaited statement from President Bush. However, may I ask what might be a hypothetical question? What will be the view of our Government and of the United States Administration if, in the elections in Palestine, President Arafat is likely to be re-elected? That is a real possibility.

Mr. Straw: Our view has never been in doubt. We deal as we find them with the leaders who are elected and, in the cases of dictatorial regimes, with those who are not elected. If President Arafat were re-elected in the Palestinian Authority, we would deal with him.

We welcome the speech by President Bush and the fact that it has clearly set time lines and, in particular, contains a clear commitment to a settlement based on United Nations resolutions 242 and 338, which is something that the whole House has called for for many years.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): I wholly endorse my right hon. Friend the shadow Foreign Secretary's measured response to the statement and agree with the Foreign Secretary that this long overdue speech provides the best way—indeed, the only way—forward to a peace process. Does the Foreign Secretary agree, however, that the situation in Jordan and Egypt remains difficult to say the least, and that there is very much an increasing imperative for the European Union collectively and for individual nations on their own account to press forward to ensure that the peace process moves ahead?

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. He is right to say that there is anxiety in Jordan and Egypt about the continuing instability in the occupied territories and in Israel. However, as President Bush said, the very fact that, after years of antagonism, it was possible to conclude peace treaties between Jordan, Egypt and Israel shows what can be done even out of the despair and darkness of the kind that Israelis and Palestinians are now within. There is hope.

We continue to give every support that we can to President Mubarak and to King Abdullah of Jordan. I am glad that it is all-party support, and I commend the visit that the shadow Foreign Secretary and Front-Bench spokesperson made to the middle east recently. That included a visit to President Mubarak. We shall work with the parties concerned.

As to the intervention of the European Union, President Bush made clear references on more than one occasion to the United States Government working with the European Union, Arab states and with what has been called the "quartet"—the European Union, the United States, the United Nations and the Russian Federation—to act together to help to secure an international consensus. That is essential if there is to be an effective peace process.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): Is not the most effective way to undermine the terror groups responsible for suicide bombings to do precisely what they least want? We should start the peace process and bring about what should have been brought about years ago—a viable and independent Palestinian state that would have as much right to exist as the state of Israel. Will my right hon. Friend give the pledge today that he will do whatever he can on behalf of the British Government to see that such a state is brought about? The United States will obviously play the leading role in any such peace process.

Mr. Straw: I agree, and that is a lesson that we have learned from our experience. Effective and necessarily tough action against the immediate expression of terrorism and terrorist violence has to be taken alongside a political process. That is what we faced in Northern Ireland. I defer to no one in my hatred of terrorism nor in my full support for effective military and security action. However, such action needs to take place alongside a political process so that consent for terrorism among the people from whom it arises is correspondingly reduced. I therefore welcome a number of the messages in the text of President Bush's speech, including those to the Government and people of Israel to do what they must to help to create a "viable, credible Palestinian state."

Mr. John Maples (Stratford-on-Avon): Does the Foreign Secretary agree with President Bush when he says that President Arafat is an impediment to peace and that peace will be successfully negotiated only under new Palestinian leadership?

HOUSE OF COMMONS PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES (HANSARD) ● 2001-02

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Mr. Straw: As I said, I greatly welcome the speech. Many people are disappointed with President Arafat's record, and those disappointments are shared by this Government, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made clear. We also made it clear, however, that we deal with the elected leadership of the Palestinian Authority. I have put my view on the record. I welcome the elections and have expressed the hope that they will be free and fair; otherwise they will not be legitimate. However, we shall deal with whoever is elected, as we have in the past.

Mr. Tony Clarke (Northampton, South): What right has President Bush got to call for any elected leader to be deposed? Can my right hon. Friend confirm that that is not the view of the British Government? Can he also correct what he said a few moments ago? Having looked carefully at President Bush's speech, I could not find a reference to the word "viable". He used the word "credible", but credible by whose means? Unless Arafat is allowed to rule and the Palestinian Authority can prove itself, what right have we to say that Arafat is not doing that correctly?

Mr. Straw: The word "viable" appears in the penultimate paragraph on page 2 of the speech. I shall let my hon. Friend have a copy.

President Bush did not call for President Arafat to be deposed. He made criticisms and I urge my right hon. and hon. Friends, and Opposition Members, to read the text and not headlines because the text repays rereading.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I welcome the right hon. Gentleman's measured approach to free and fair elections in Palestine, but I agree with other hon. Members about the nature of what President Bush said. How can America expect to be treated as a neutral mediator when it calls for a democratically elected leader to be set aside?

Mr. Straw: The views of the American Administration on President Arafat are based on experience. There have been many disappointments with the Palestinian Authority. I have explained the position of Her Majesty's Government. I recently noted that President Arafat and the Palestinian Authority said that they would have accepted the terms on offer at Camp David and Taba. Had they done so, the history of the past two and half years would have been very different. It was a misjudgment, to put it delicately, for them not to have done so and not to have seized the moment to go for peace then.

We need a democratic, effective and well run Palestinian Authority. We have made it clear in the EU and the United Kingdom that we stand ready to help to rebuild the Palestinian Authority as well as to continue to provide increasing amounts of humanitarian aid to the Palestinians, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development is doing.

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): While it is for the Palestinians to elect their own leadership, we should bear it in mind that the Peres Government wanted peace and were brought down by terrorism and that the Barak Government and his excellent peace proposals were also brought down by terrorism. Is not President Bush effectively recognising the reality of the politics of the middle east when he says that the Palestinians ought to elect a leadership not tainted by terrorism which is capable of reforming Palestinian institutions if the Israelis—never mind our Government—are to have confidence in the partner put forward by the Palestinians to negotiate a peace treaty with them?

Mr. Straw: The whole region stands at a crossroads. I say in particular that the Palestinian community has had a terrible time. I will discuss that matter later this afternoon with Mr. Nabil Sha'ath, the Foreign Affairs Minister of the Palestinian Authority. Who is chosen as a representative is a matter for the Palestinians, not for us. We need a Palestinian Authority that does what it says it will do. It must clearly control its security apparatus, which has to be unambiguously opposed to terrorism. Its single job must be the maintenance of law and order and the bearing down on terrorism within the area of the occupied territories and, I have to say, in respect of Israel as well.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): Although I agree with everything that the Foreign Secretary and others have said condemning Palestinian suicide bombers, should we not be asking the Government of Israel to desist from their policy of targeted assassinations of Palestinians? They have killed perhaps hundreds of Palestinians in circumstances—some of which I saw a month ago in the west bank—that appear on the face of it to be a violation of the fourth Geneva convention.

Mr. Straw: Yes. We always make representations whenever we think that a member state of the United Nations is transgressing international law.

Ms Oona King (Bethnal Green and Bow): Does the Foreign Secretary share my concern about the double standards employed in this debate? I speak as someone from a Jewish family. Is it not strange that Ariel Sharon and others have said that Yasser Arafat is not fit to be leader because he cannot control terrorist groups, whereas Ariel Sharon served under a Jewish Prime Minister who did not merely control a terrorist group, but set up the terrorist group that blew up the King David hotel in Jerusalem, killing 91 people? Does not that show us that the Jews and the Arabs are the same—that if they are exposed to ethnic cleansing and have no other escape, they will resort to unacceptable violence? Please can we have a reduction in the double standards and get the peace process back on track?

Mr. Straw: The United Kingdom Government and, I believe, the international community, have to have one view of terrorism, which is that we are against it and we want the full implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1373. I have to deal for now and for the future, rather than for the history. The simple fact is that the suicide bombings that have taken place and are continuing are organised by the most terribly evil people in those terrorist groups, and they are designed as much to deny the Palestinians any effective say over their future as to deny the Israelis any sort of life for themselves. That is why it is imperative that firm action is taken against the suicide bombers by the Palestinian Authority as well as by the Israeli Government. Meanwhile, and alongside that effective security action, we have a political process which, thank God, might now have started following President Bush's speech yesterday.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Point of Order

3.52 pm

Kali Mountford (Colne Valley): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I seek your guidance for Back-Bench Members such as myself who often use the good offices, help and guidance of external organisations such as our local authorities. Yesterday, my local authority and other organisations gave me a great deal of help to prepare for a debate on social care that was due to take place today. However, late last night we found out that the subject for debate was to be changed. What is your view of due notice to the House of such changes if we are to be able to have full, free and fair debates in the Chamber?

Mr. Speaker: As the hon. Lady knows, the Speaker has no views. I sympathise with her difficulties, but notice was given and was within the rules of the House. The Opposition have acted properly.

Auctions

3.53 pm

Mr. Frank Doran (Aberdeen, Central): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision about the sale of goods by auction; and for connected purposes.

I have had an interest in auctions for most of my adult life, attending my first auction when I was still in my teens. That was in the days before the "Antiques Roadshow" persuaded everyone that their granny's old vase in the attic must be worth a fortune and antiques prices spiralled.

There is an ancient tradition of auctioning goods in this country, from which has grown an international arts and antiques market worth between £2 billion and £3 billion a year. London is the centre of the international arts market, and more than 90 per cent. of that market is controlled by two companies, Sotheby's and Christie's, which are still thought of as British, but which are both now international companies. That market is probably the least-regulated sector of business in the United Kingdom, and one in which consumer protection is at its weakest.

The main purpose of my Bill is to deal with the buyers premium. Until 1975, auction houses were fairly simple. Someone who had something to sell would take it to the auction house, and if it was an everyday item—a piece of furniture, some jewellery, or perhaps granny's old vase from the attic—they accepted the house rules and agreed to pay the set commission on the sale price. If it was something grander—an impressionist painting or a Chippendale table—the seller might be in a better bargaining position and could negotiate a more favourable commission rate. If the seller was not happy, he or she could go to another auction house. As far as the buyer was concerned, it was even simpler—a bid was made, and the item was paid for and taken home.

In 1975, when Sotheby's and Christie's were in some financial difficulty, the directors of Sotheby's introduced the buyers premium. That was a commission charged to the buyer as a straight percentage on the sale price. The commission was set at 10 per cent. Christie's introduced its buyers commission, also at 10 per cent., almost simultaneously.

The arts and antiques world was in uproar. At a stroke, the purchase price at both companies' auctions of all goods had increased by 10 per cent., plus VAT on the commission. There was a great deal of anger, which led to attempts at boycotts, threats of legal action, and referrals to the Office of Fair Trading. The OFT received complaints about the buyers premium in 1975, 1978 and 1982. On each occasion, no formal investigation was carried out and no report published. All the opposition failed and, in the process, showed the weakness of the UK regulatory regime in this regard. The main ground for complaint was the alleged collusion between the two companies.

There are a number of serious problems with the buyers premium. First, in return for the premium, no services whatever are provided for buyers. They have the privilege of attending the auction houses for sales, but they had that before the premium. There are catalogues and other services, but those have to be paid for. All the services provided by the auctioneer are charged for separately.

Secondly, the buyers premium produces a serious conflict of interest for the auction house. The duty of the auctioneer is to obtain the best possible price for the client. Artificially increasing the price to the buyer inevitably leads to a trade-off against the interests of the seller. Most buyers will take into account the extra to be paid in commission, and bid less.

That is not so much of a problem for the sellers of valuable and important items. They can probably negotiate a lower commission, and for the most important artworks, perhaps even a zero rate. However, for the sellers of more modest items—that includes most of us—there is a real problem. They have to pay the sellers commission, usually 10 per cent., and accept the lower price that purchasers are prepared to pay because of the imposition of the buyers premium.

An example of how that operates in practice was provided to me by Mr. Peter Walton, who is an art dealer in Buckingham. He has led most of the campaigns against the buyers premium over the past 25 years. On a hammer price of £1,000, with the buyers premium of 17.5 per cent., which is not unusual now, the charge would be £175, plus VAT. The commission on the hammer price to the seller at 15 per cent. in Mr. Walton's typical auction house would produce a figure of £150. Of the hammer price of £1,000, £812 would be returned to the vendor, but the auction house would take £393.62 in Mr. Walton's example. That is a third of the sale price, which would go directly into the pocket of the auctioneers for a premium that did not exist previously. It is a rip-off—a very up-market one, but a rip-off none the less. I shall say a little about the current rates. I mentioned that Sotheby's and Christie's had introduced the rates at 10 per cent. in 1975. Sotheby's now has a buyers premium of 20 per cent. and Christie's rate is 17.5 per cent. The common rate in the rest of the country is between 15 and 20 per cent.

The most worrying aspect is the continuing evidence of collusion between the two major auction companies, Christie's and Sotheby's. There is evidence of collusion in 1975, when the buyers premium was introduced by both companies at the same rate within weeks of each other. Most of the attempted legal actions and OFT referrals failed for lack of evidence. However, there is now real evidence of long-term collusion between the two companies. That was presented at the trial last year in the USA of Mr. Alfred Taubman, who was chairman and principal shareholder of Sotheby's.

Mr. Taubman was jailed for a year and fined the equivalent of £5.3 million. He was prosecuted following investigations by USA anti-trust authorities, but also because the chief executive of Christie's, Mr. Davidge, provided evidence that the two companies had been colluding for years over commission and on matters such as the buyers premium. Mr. Davidge gave evidence to save his own skin. The only reason that he was not prosecuted was that he was lucky enough to get in first. That is not a very edifying spectacle for what were previously two of the most up-market of British companies. In America, there are laws to deal with these issues. In this country, the same practices have been in place for a generation and no action has been taken. Consumers remain unprotected.

My Bill would do two things. First, it would establish that the relationship between a seller of goods and an auctioneer is one of agency. That is what the law is assumed to be at the moment, but the important legal cases in this area were decided before Sotheby's and Christie's made the fundamental change of introducing the buyers premium. Secondly, the Bill would abolish the buyers premium. It would be lawful for auctioneers to charge for services such as publication of catalogues, valuation and so on, but the imposition of a straight commission on buyers would be unlawful because it creates a clear conflict with the duty of an agent to his client.

The effect of the Bill is not limited to the two big auction houses. It would apply to every auctioneer in the country. Following the decisions of Sotheby's and Christie's in 1975, slowly but surely, the vast majority of auctioneers in this country have introduced the buyers premium. Most had no choice if they were to remain competitive, because their competitor companies were able to cut the sellers premium and take work away from them. There is as little a case for these auction houses to charge the buyers premium as there is for the two larger companies to do so.

If leave is given for my Bill to be brought in, I hope that it will be the start of the Government's taking a proper and considered look at the way in which auctions are regulated. I am very pleased to see that the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Miss Johnson), is present. Yes, the two big auction companies make an important contribution to the economy and standing of this country, but as the court case in America shows, there have been serious deficiencies in the way in which the market has been run. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Frank Doran, Rosemary McKenna, Hugh Bayley, Linda Gilroy, Mr. Chris Bryant, Joan Ruddock, Miss Anne Begg and Ms Dari Taylor.

AUCTIONS

Mr. Frank Doran accordingly presented a Bill to make provision about the sale of goods by auction; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 19 July, and to be printed [Bill 153].

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In view of the fact that there has been some unflattering sedentary comment—it was very ill-informed, may I say—from those on the Opposition Front Bench, could some of us register that on this vitally important matter, expertly raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, Central (Mr. Doran), there should be some sort of response under privilege? That is what we are given privilege for. Some of us would like to hear a proper response to the very important matters that he raised, but I would guess that it had better be under privilege.

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is not a matter for the Chair.

ROYAL ASSENT

Mr. Speaker: I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that Her Majesty has signified her Royal Assent to the following Acts:

State Pension Credit Act 2002

NHS Reform and Health Care Professions Act 2002

Land at Palace Avenue, Kensington (Acquisition of Freehold) Act 2002.

Opposition Day

[15TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Mental Health

Mr. Speaker: I wish to inform the House that I have selected both amendments in the name of the Prime Minister for the Supply day.

4.4 pm

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): I beg to move,

That this House expresses its deep concern at the plight of those who suffer mental ill-health and notes that almost every family will have experience of some form of mental illness; is concerned at the inadequate treatment so many receive, the shortages of staff and beds, the gaps in community provision and the lack of choice; condemns the lack of support and respite for carers, the lack of early intervention with the young and the unmet needs of the elderly; further notes that many vulnerable people with mental health problems are in prison and receiving inadequate medical care; expresses concern at the rise in the suicide rate of those suffering from mental illness; regrets the diversion of mental health funding into other clinical areas; and calls on Her Majesty's Government to act to raise awareness of the scale of mental health problems and to ensure that patients are treated in an appropriate and dignified way.

There will be much in this debate on which both sides of the House will agree, and some that we will want to debate, but we can begin by recognising that the way in which a society treats those who are least able to play a full role is a measure of how civilised that society is. Sadly, we accept a level of care for people with mental illness that we simply would not accept for many more readily identifiable physical illnesses. If we walked from the House up to the Strand or into the centre of London and saw people, many of whom may have a mental illness, sleeping rough in front of our biggest institutions, most of us would regard that as a policy failure that a humane society should not be willing to tolerate.

It will come as a surprise to many outside the House, and perhaps to many hon. Members, too, that one in four of us will at some point in our lives suffer from a mental health problem. I doubt whether there is one person in the Chamber who has not experienced the impact of mental ill health on someone in their life, be it a relative, a friend or a colleague.

Stephen Hesford (Wirral, West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Fox: I have barely started; I shall give way shortly.

Mental illness is society's unspoken epidemic, and as one of our last social taboos it is too rarely discussed. All too often, people regard it as a weakness and stigmatise those who suffer from it. If we are to diffuse the stigma surrounding mental ill health, we must dispel the ignorance surrounding the whole subject.

The spectrum of mental ill health is incredibly broad, as hon. Members will know from their constituency work. It encompasses many different groups—the mum with post-natal depression, the dad struck by depression because of a period out of work, and the son or daughter with a behavioural disorder who underperforms academically or is disruptive in the classroom. It is also about college friends who commit suicide, seemingly for no reason, a soldier returning from overseas unable to adjust to the realities of normal life, and, perhaps most commonly, elderly patients slowly being ravaged by the dehumanising erosion of Alzheimer's disease.

Although the safety of the public must always be at the top of our priorities, we need to move the debate away from an obsession with the mercifully few incidents when someone with a mental illness harms someone else, and remind ourselves that it is in the interests of public safety to ensure that there is adequate and appropriate treatment for all those who need it.

Stephen Hesford: Does the hon. Gentleman consider it appropriate to dump an important debate that was on the Order Paper until last night, and substitute it at the last minute—

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is not a matter for debate.

Dr. Fox: I wonder what people outside this House who think that this is a very important issue will make of such an imbecilic intervention.

Sadly, too many politicians pay more attention to the potential dangers posed by psychiatric patients, and to their compulsory treatment, than to the far more important issue of appropriate treatment for all patients. I hope that the Government have avoided that mistake in the Bill that they are publishing this afternoon. Members on both sides of the House will be aware that on the ground the situation is often bleak, with widespread staff shortages, acute and day bed shortages, wide gaps in community provision and a lack of effective step-down care for those returning to the community. Things are made worse by the knowledge that although funds are earmarked in the health budget, they all too often fail to reach those in need. Cutting the mental health allocation is an easy way of balancing the budget. The mentally ill are the least likely to complain, make a fuss or write to newspapers.

The evidence that mental health is not considered to be a priority is stark. Buckinghamshire mental health NHS trust has had £1 million that was originally earmarked for mental health diverted into other areas. Half of all GP practices in Cumbria offer counselling to patients in need, but there are plans to axe that £78,000 service. The Avon and Wiltshire mental health partnership trust faces service reductions amounting to £0.5 million. On a smaller scale, but equally important to patients, the acupuncture clinic at the department of psychiatry at North Manchester general hospital is threatened with closure. It costs £60,000 a year to run. As for big organisations, Saneline requires £1 million a year. It deals with more than 1,000 calls a year from distressed people, but is still under threat.

It is clear that far from being a priority, mental health care is too often an afterthought in today's NHS. The burden falls across our whole society. Our inner cities bear more than their fair share of that burden. People who are homeless or have alcohol or drug addictions frequently have mental health problems. They end up in inner cities, where amid the hustle and bustle of city life they become invisible to those who otherwise might help them. Of course this is not simply an inner-city issue. The crisis in our countryside has led to an increase in mental health problems, such as the well documented tragedy of farming suicides, which touched my constituency in north Somerset when a father and son, whom I knew well, committed suicide.

The Conservative party has always been at the forefront of mental health reforms. Lord Shaftesbury began to change the perception of mental health problems from a private misfortune to a matter of public concern. He highlighted the atrocious conditions in many London asylums, and changes began, albeit slowly, to occur.

The increase in asylums and other custodial institutions was such that by 1954 the population of psychiatric hospitals peaked at 152,000. That is more than twice the current prison population. Enoch Powell took the first, decisive step from that model of care. He said that the Mental Health Act 1959 "lit a funeral pyre" beneath the decaying network of asylums. He was at his most eloquent on the subject in 1961, in what has become known as his "water tower speech". He spoke of asylums that stood

> "isolated, majestic, imperious, brooded over by the gigantic water-tower and chimney combined, rising unmistakable and daunting out of the countryside."

His broad goal was to move treatment of the mentally ill away from remote asylums and into local hospitals closer to the community.

The development of new drugs meant that the possibility of treating patients in the community slowly became a reality. It began with the findings of the committee that considered mental health. The now Lord Parkinson chaired it at the request of the now Lord Fowler when the Conservatives were in opposition in the 1970s. Policy development culminated in the Mental Health Act 1983 and the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990, which my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) introduced.

Most people accept that it was right in principle to close the old asylums and have patients treated close to or in the community. The concept of care in the community was supported across the political spectrum, although experienced hon. Members might suggest that widespread political consensus sometimes leads to the worst legislation. My right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Surrey (Virginia Bottomley) wrote in a letter to *The Times* in 1998:

> "In an institution, an individual can be monitored 24 hours a day. In the community, reporting and fail-safe mechanisms are necessary if tragedies are to be avoided."

The suicide rate is increasing again, the family unit is increasingly breaking up, there is homelessness, abuse and the absence of a sense of community in many inner-city areas. Those factors all contribute to the increased prevalence of mental health problems among people of all ages, including, perhaps most worryingly, the young.

Care in the community has provided many thousands with an opportunity for a quality of life that is far better than the life that they would have experienced inside restrictive institutions. Criticism cannot be laid at the door of the medical, nursing and voluntary staff—the latter are forgotten too often—who have made a Herculean effort in the face of great difficulties. I reject the criticism from some that care in the community was nothing more than the unfortunate or catastrophic meeting of a desire for financial savings with a naive passion for the rights of the individual.

However, the pendulum swung too far, too fast. Many believe that care in the community was implemented too quickly, and too often with inappropriate patient selection. In too many places there was too little investment in training, finance and related matters. At times there has

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been too little care, scant support and a form of community that exposed the vulnerable—the public and the patients—to danger. Individuals were sometimes placed in complex urban environments with which they simply could not cope. They lacked understanding of their condition, and their institutionalised background made them unable to deal with the complexities of modern living. When they needed help, their cries went unanswered.

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): The hon. Gentleman is making a speech the like of which I have never previously heard from him. Is he prepared to acknowledge that the Conservative Government left the Labour Government with an enormous problem, which they have had to tackle?

Dr. Fox: We should not get into arguing about who introduced what, and who have been in office for the past five years. The principle of care in the community was correct, but mistakes were made in implementing the policy, both under the Conservative Government and under the current Government.

Claire Ward (Watford): Will you say sorry?

Dr. Fox: Yes, I would say sorry to patients who have suffered unnecessarily because of the poor implementation of policy—but I must say that I find the hon. Lady's approach of sitting in a debate on a very serious subject making stupid sedentary points rather pathetic.

We require a balance to be struck that will ensure the most appropriate treatment and environment for patients—a balance in which those who need treatment in a hospital setting can receive it, and in which only those able to cope in the community are placed there. We must accept that achieving that balance is made more difficult under this policy—which is discredited in the minds of the public—because of a series of crimes committed by mentally ill people who had fallen between the gaps or come off their medication.

I do not need to go through that litany today. As Michael Howlett of the Zito Trust said:

> "People don't just attack people in the street out of the blue. There's always a build-up over weeks or months. These incidents are usually as a result of services breaking down and the danger signs not being spotted."

The Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health published a briefing on acute in-patient care a few weeks ago, which stated:

> "We have yet to develop realistic plans to deliver acute inpatient care which is therapeutic and supports recovery. Unless we develop and implement such plans, nationally and locally, we will see an increasing cycle of decline in acute mental health care, with increasing user dissatisfaction, incidents and inquiries and the loss of high-quality staff—all despite the best efforts of so many committed staff. The situation is little short of a crisis, and has to be addressed now. In some instances the quality of care is so poor as to amount to a basic denial of human rights."

Incidentally, that briefing describes not the situation five years ago, but the situation now.

Hugh Bayley (City of York): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman's party on bringing this issue before the House, and I congratulate him on his speech. My question is about the funding and control of mental health services. The hon. Gentleman has gone on record talking about fees, charges and private insurance for health care. Does he agree, however, that for mental health care that is a dead end? Whatever the failings of our mental health care system, privatised health care systems such as that of the United States are much worse. Does he agree that we must have a state-funded system with a proper framework, such as the national service framework?

Dr. Fox: I have stated on the record that we are not looking towards the American system for mental health care or any other type of health care. I am sure that the whole House would agree that it is essential that those who require treatment for mental illness get it free at the point of use, irrespective of their ability to pay. Whether a range of providers could provide that care, funded by the NHS, is an entirely different matter—to which I shall return, giving examples, later.

When discussing the issue of danger in connection with patients with mental illness, the question we have to ask is: a danger to whom? Events involving just a few stigmatise the many, and can lead others to overlook the danger that some mentally ill people pose to themselves. The case of Ben Silcock is a good example. Hon. Members will remember that he was severely mauled after climbing into the lion enclosure at London zoo while mentally disturbed. It is also worth remembering that the incidence of suicide, particularly in prison, is far higher than the number of cases in which mentally ill patients harm someone else. Sadly, about 1,000 schizophrenic patients in this country commit suicide every year. That is a figure that we should focus much more on.

It will always be the duty of the Government to protect the public from harm, if necessary by detention or compulsory treatment, but politicians must take care to adopt a balanced approach that does not stigmatise, and thereby worsen the plight of, those who pose no risk to anyone—except, possibly, themselves. I look forward to the Secretary of State outlining some of the measures that the Government are introducing in their draft Bill today. I hope that they will be dramatically different from some of the proposals in the White Paper.

In a joint statement, the Royal College of Psychiatrists and the Law Society have warned that they would find proposals too closely based on the White Paper unacceptable:

> "We call upon the Government to halt any further attempt at legislation based on the White Paper 'Reforming the Mental Health Act' and to begin meaningful consultation on a statutory scheme that takes account of mental incapacity on the successful Scottish model."

The Secretary of State needs to address those reservations.

The statement goes on to say that the question of resources needs to be considered and that an Act based on the framework of the White Paper

> "would collapse under the weight of its own regulatory framework . . . The proposals would be . . . costly to implement . . . The new Mental Health Review Tribunals alone would require the time of 600 (extra) psychiatrists. It would be impossible to recruit such numbers. Those in post would be diverted from . . . patient care."

It is well known that reservations were expressed about proposals relating to those with dangerous and severe personality disorders. The statement said:

> "In order to accommodate such a risk, the criteria for compulsion have been so widened that large numbers of patients would find themselves inappropriately placed under . . . the Mental Health Act . . . increased numbers would overwhelm already over-stretched acute ward and community teams. Patient care would suffer and the level of risk would be increased rather than reduced."

I should be grateful if the Secretary of State would deal with three issues, the first of which relates to compulsory treatment in the community. In what circumstances will a patient receive enforced treatment, particularly medication, in the community? Secondly, if the Government intend to remove the criterion of treatability under the draft legislation, how will patients with personality disorders who are detained be affected? Who will decide which patients can be detained and for how long, and how do we get round the fact that there is no suitable definition of severe personality disorder? Experiments to determine whether patient behaviour can be predicted through case studies have produced extremely poor results, yet predictability of behaviour will be central to the Government's proposals. Thirdly, when is the proposal likely to become law?

The hon. Member for City of York (Hugh Bayley) referred to private sector provision. I have been extremely impressed by the way in which other countries that I have visited deal with mental illness. I was especially impressed by a psychiatric hospital in Denmark, which stood in stark contrast to those in the UK that I have visited. I noted the sense of calm, and the profound sense that patients were treated as individuals, and with great dignity.

Hon. Members may be aware of examples such as the Hotel Magnus Stenbock, in Helsingborg, which is well known in mental health circles. It is a good example of what might be termed a halfway house for those moving between an institutionalised setting and the community. It has 21 single rooms and offers a balance between private and social space. It offers not just structure and crisis accommodation but a place of safety, and develops a sense of community and acceptance. It is run by the RSMH, a multi-million pound organisation of mental health care users that sustains and nurtures self-help care models throughout Sweden.

Perhaps the most striking comment on that hotel was made by a shopkeeper who runs a nearby store. One might have expected the local population to object to the proximity of such an hotel, but on the contrary. The shopkeeper said:

> "The proximity of the hotel has not had any adverse effects on business, sometimes the general public are a little wary of users, but they see the staff in the shop are not afraid and are treating the hotel residents the same as all the other customers. It makes them more comfortable. We believe everyone has the right to be treated as a human being and at some point in everyone's life we all encounter problems, some more severe than others."

That is symptomatic of the way in which Scandinavian countries deal with mental illness. They regard it as an illness that is no more to be afraid of than cardiac or respiratory illness; they do not attach to it the stigma that the United Kingdom does. As it involves a private sector organisation, that example shows that such services do not have to be provided by the state.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): I apologise to the hon. Gentleman for missing the first couple of minutes of his speech. The facility that he has just described sounds remarkably similar to the Countess of Chester site, launched by the Secretary of State a couple of months ago, in which £14 million has been invested. Does he recognise that such provision can be made within the framework of the NHS, and is it not a pity that we have had to wait for so long for the end of buildings that were condemned in the 1980s?

Dr. Fox: Sadly, we have not seen the end of enough such buildings. The updating of facilities is to be commended, but that is not just a question of changing the bricks and mortar. A cultural problem exists in this country and we need to overcome it, but the stigma attached to mental illness makes it difficult to achieve progress.

I shall now turn to another hidden scandal in the UK—the situation that pertains in our prisons. Enoch Powell may have lit a funeral pyre beneath mental asylums when his Mental Health Act 1959 began the process of shutting them, but today some 70 per cent. of the prison population have a mental health or substance abuse problem, or both. We once hid our mentally ill in asylums, but we now unwittingly locate far too many of them in our prisons.

The incidence of mental disorders among the prison population far exceeds that in the population as a whole. It is a troubling thought that, at the beginning of the 21st century, anyone who is mentally ill and has a brush with the law could be subject to inadequate treatment in Dickensian settings in our prisons. Facilities for patients often amount to little more than sick bays with limited primary care cover. The assessment of a prisoner arriving at a prison typically takes five to seven minutes, and is often conducted by a retired GP or a locum with no specialist knowledge of mental health.

The level of training of staff often does not match the complexity of the conditions with which prisoners present. Prisoners are therefore less likely to have their mental health needs recognised or to receive psychiatric help or treatment, and are at an increased risk of suicide. The number of suicides in 1999 was twice the figure in 1990.

A report by John Reed, the medical inspector for the inspectorate of prisons, has stated:

> "A period in prison should present an opportunity to detect, diagnose and treat mental illness in a population hard to engage with NHS services. This could bring benefits not only to patients but to the wider community by ensuring continuity of care and reducing the risk of reoffending on release."

John Reed has also said of prisoners:

> "Many are quietly mad behind their cell door and are not getting any treatment. Care for mentally disordered offenders in prison is a disgrace."

As a matter of urgency, therefore, the Prison Service needs to consider how to address the mental health needs of the people in its charge. In particular, research is required to determine how much the prison environment impacts on mental health. That may include issues such as overcrowding, confinement in cells and the range of activities available in prison.

A second problem is that prisoners with mental health problems remain in the Prison Service and are not diverted to the NHS as the Reed report, among others,

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recommended. It is inappropriate for prisoners with severe mental health illness to be in prison. Sir David Ramsbotham has said:

> "In my view mentally ill prisoners requiring 24-hour nursing care should be in the NHS, not prison."

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): My hon. Friend is making a powerful point. Does he agree that part of the solution lies at the beginning of the process? The police should be trained—they have a good record on the issue in Kent—to pick up early, before a case even goes to court, the fact that a prisoner might be suitable for mental health assessment and sectioning, instead of putting him into the criminal justice system.

Dr. Fox: That is greatly preferable, but it is also essential that people who go to prison with an undiagnosed mental illness are not under-treated and then return to the community with a much greater chance of reoffending. That is part of caring for the vulnerable, but it also involves enlightened self-interest for the wider society. Whether patients are in the criminal justice system or not, it is in everybody's interest to ensure that they are properly treated in the right setting, so that they are not released from custody with a treatable condition.

I have read the draft Bill, and we will examine closely the Government's proposals for a shift from prison to NHS treatment. If my cursory reading is any guide, those proposals will certainly command the support of the Opposition.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): I remind hon. Members that Armley prison is in my constituency. I do not want to rehash history, but I remember that in 1996 some hon. Members pleaded with the then Government to halt the bed closure programme because it would mean a shift from care in the community to care in custody. That is what has happened. Without going over the past, will the hon. Gentleman be generous enough to acknowledge that for some months we have had 10 pilot mental health in-reach programmes in prisons to address that problem? Is he aware of that fact?

Dr. Fox: I am aware of it and I welcome it, but we should treat the matter as one of even greater urgency. I hope that the Secretary of State will outline the proposals in the Bill to do just that; it is something that we have been urging the Government to do. If that is what the Secretary of State confirms this afternoon, he will have our support.

The Wanless report looked at the costs of mental illness and the potential savings that a better system might bring. Derek Wanless pointed out that MIND had estimated the total cost of mental illness at £37 billion a year, of which £11.8 billion was accounted for by lost employment. In 1995, more than 91 million working days were lost as a result of mental illness. The Home Office estimates that the overall cost of crime is £58 billion a year, and a significant proportion of crime is carried out by those with a mental illness.

When asked about the cost benefits of better mental health care, Wanless said:

> "It is difficult to estimate the exact value of potential savings, but it does not seem unreasonable to assume that there might be a 5 per cent. reduction in the costs of mental illness and a 2 per cent. reduction in the costs of crime . . . giving a net saving across government as a whole of some £3.1 billion a year."

The House would do well to take a wider view of costs and benefits.

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): The hon. Gentleman is making a thoughtful speech, much of which I agree with. In respect of prisoners, he referred to the Reed report, which recommended strongly—as have a number of individual inquiries—the break-up of the special hospital system and the development of more regional secure units. Would it be his policy to follow those lines and develop further regional secure provision, with a view to moving prisoners who are wrongly in prison into more appropriate places?

Dr. Fox: I could not honestly say that I have come to a fixed view on the best way to provide more appropriate care. There is a need for further research as to how best to manage the transition from the prison setting to a more appropriate setting for the treatment of mental illness. Perhaps the pilots referred to by the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) might give us some valuable information.

We accept that health policies cannot hope to eradicate the problems of an entire society—that vision was shattered after 1948—but what health policies can do is to seek to support those who suffer in what can at times be an atomised and alienating society. That is why the Conservative party has decided to make mental health a central part of our health policy agenda. The issue must become a matter of public concern, not just private misfortune. An enlightened society is one that realises—as they have in many Scandinavian countries—that it is to the benefit of everyone for mental illness to be treated adequately, and, if possible, prevented.

I give the House this final thought: perhaps we need to bring back one other concept that we seem largely to have forgotten—the concept of sanctuary. We started out with Bedlam, then we had madhouses; Lord Shaftesbury gave us asylums, then we looked to the community. Now we must speak of what all the differing environments ought to provide—a sense of sanctuary.

Recently I visited a mental health counselling service in Aylesbury, where those involved described their office—particularly movingly, I thought—as a place where patients came to feel safe. That is a good guiding principle.

Last week I visited the Hillside clubhouse in Holloway. I am ashamed to say that I did not know about the clubhouse network, but I was struck from the moment I went through the door by the fact that those with mental health problems looked on the clubhouse as somewhere they could go to feel safe. It offered them companionship, constructive activity and the chance to go and get a paid job in the community. It supported them without compelling them. Everyone found their own level and progressed at their own pace. It was not somewhere they were forced to go but, equally, it was somewhere that would keep in touch if they stopped coming along. In short, it offered genuine care in a real community, and it was a sanctuary within an ever more complex society.

Concern about the social welfare of those in society who have no one to speak up for them and often cannot speak for themselves is an essential part of any programme for a truly national party. There can be few groups more vulnerable than those with mental illness. We have decided to make mental health central to our policy not because it is fashionable, and not because we have identified some interest group or section of the population whom we can make politically beholden to us as a consequence. We are not doing it because we see some short-term gain to be had by pretending to interest ourselves in so-called soft social issues for a few months. We are doing it because we believe that it is the right thing to do, and that is what politics ought to be about.

4.35 pm

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): I beg to move, in line 3, to leave out from "illness" to end and insert:

"notes the decades of under-investment which led to crumbling buildings, demoralised staff and inadequate treatment under the Conservative Government which left many of the most vulnerable in society without the care they need; supports this Government's investment in NHS mental health services to ensure better and faster care for people with mental health problems, including new community teams, more staff, improved acute care and new services for children; supports the full implementation of the Mental Health National Service Framework to ensure national standards are in place for the care and treatment of mental illness; recognises the massive contribution of carers and the Government's action to support them, and commends the Government's 'mind out for mental health' campaign to tackle stigma; and believes that improving mental health services should remain a key Government priority."

When I became Secretary of State, I said that our top clinical priorities in the national health service should be threefold—to secure improvements in cancer and cardiac services and also in mental health services. These are the clinical priorities set out in the NHS plan. Why? Because all three had suffered from decades of neglect and, in all three cases, large numbers of patients were affected.

For years, mental health services were the Cinderella of the NHS, despite the fact that, as the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) said, millions of people—perhaps as many as one in four of the population—face a problem at some point in their lives. Each year, 600,000 adults with serious mental health problems are cared for by specialist mental health services. Thousands more young people and tens of thousands of elderly people also receive care. For every individual with a serious mental illness, many others such as families, carers, friends and, indeed, members of the wider public are affected, sometimes—sadly—with tragic consequences.

The hon. Gentleman was right to stress that mental illness takes many forms. It is worth saying at the outset that despite public perceptions to the contrary, the overwhelming majority of people with mental illness are a threat to no one. Indeed, many mentally ill patients are among the most vulnerable in our community. Reducing the stigma of mental illness should, in my view, be a priority for any caring, civilised society. That is why I was pleased last year that my Department launched the mind out for mental health campaign. It is the first time that the Government have backed a public information campaign specifically designed to tackle such discrimination.

At the other end of the spectrum, however, there will always be some people with a serious mental disorder. Sometimes they do not recognise how ill they are; sometimes they are so disabled by their mental illness that they are not able to seek help, and sometimes they choose not to seek help. In a small minority of cases, people with a serious mental disorder will pose a significant risk to others but, more particularly, to themselves. In those circumstances, the Government's priority must be to protect patients, their families and the wider public both under the law and through the provision of appropriate services.

This much, then, is common ground between the Opposition and the Government and probably all parties. The difference lies in what various parties have been prepared to do about these problems and are now prepared to do about them. My right hon. and hon. Friends are more than happy to debate these issues with the Conservative party, because they know the difference between the warm words of the Conservatives in opposition and the grim reality of the Conservatives in power.

Mr. Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks) *rose—*

Mr. Milburn: For a serious debate, the hon. Member for Woodspring skated pretty lightly over 18 years in office. I think that he was a Minister for at least part of that time. I know that the hon. Gentleman wants to forget what happened then, but what happened then informs what goes on now, and the standards of care and services that people with mental health problems receive.

Dr. Fox: Is the Secretary of State really suggesting that the whole concept of care in the community as it was initially rolled out was not part of a consensus? If he believes that, he is quite wrong.

Mr. Milburn: I will be coming to care in the community in a moment. I think that it was a spectacular failure, for reasons that I will give, and I think that the hon. Gentleman is gradually coming to that view too.

It is worth reminding the House about the state of mental health services that we found when we came to power in 1997. The view not only among carer and patient groups but in the wider health service is that mental health services had been allowed to become the poor relation in the NHS. There were no national standards of care—not a single one.

Mental health law had been allowed to be overtaken by both developments in services and in the wider society. Care in the community had been a failure, not least because the policy was both indiscriminate and underfunded. Years of under-investment had left dedicated, hard-working staff in our mental health services with more than their fair share of run-down buildings, continual cuts in the number of beds and, of course, shortages of staff. Indeed, in 1997, two-thirds of health authorities did not even provide round-the-clock access to community mental health services. The simple truth is that mental health was not a priority then—but it is now.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): I do not for a moment doubt the right hon. Gentleman's commitment

[Mr. David Heath]

to this policy area, but the reality in my constituency is that we have seen the contraction of psycho-geriatric wards and acute mental wards into a centralised general hospital rather than the provision of such support across the community. That affects links between patients and their general practitioners and between patients and their own community and family. Is that part of the right hon. Gentleman's policy or is something still wrong with the funding arrangements for mental health trusts?

Mr. Milburn: On the provision of mental health services for older people—the point that the hon. Gentleman raised—as for provision elsewhere in the mental health service, the answer is not that one particular model of care is required. We need a spectrum of services to cope with the spectrum of needs; an elderly lady with severe dementia will have a different set of needs from those of a young child with depression. Our problem is that there are gaping loopholes and gaps in provision across the piece—whether in the acute sector, the community sector, crisis intervention or intermediate care. We need to plug all those gaps.

I do not advocate a single model of care as the answer to the problems in our mental health services—a range of provision is needed. The truth is that—as we set out in the national service framework that we published about three years ago—it will take some time to get there, so it is better to be straight and honest with people about that. We have started a 10-year programme and we are making progress, and I shall come to some of the details in a moment.

Mr. Fallon: The right hon. Gentleman talked about warm words and he says that he is making progress, but surely he must admit that it has taken two years since the end of the consultation process to produce a Bill and even that is only a draft. What is the framework for putting his warm words into action?

Mr. Milburn: I shall come to that in a moment. Not even the most devout proponents of the Mental Health Act 1983 would claim that it was a radical overhaul of the 1950s provision. Fundamentally, mental health legislation in the 21st century is based on a model that dates back to the 1950s, so it would be just as well, as we have this once in a generation opportunity to get it right, that we do precisely that—through consultation, Green Papers, White Papers and a draft Bill. I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would welcome that, because it provides a wider opportunity both in the House and outside to ensure that the provisions in the new Act are right and that we learn from some of the deficiencies in current mental health law.

Mrs. Joan Humble (Blackpool, North and Fleetwood): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the rapid closure of large mental institutions in the 1980s and the ejection of tens of thousands of people on to an unsuspecting community which was ill prepared to accept them has made his and the Government's job in building up new mental health services much more difficult? Does that not justify careful thought in order to ensure that the community is properly prepared for a genuine programme of care in the community?

Mr. Milburn: It is as true for mentally ill patients as for most patients that nobody actually likes being in hospital; nobody wants to be in hospital and people try to avoid it wherever possible. Sadly, for some people it will always be necessary, so we must get the range of provision right. Despite all the efforts in the 1980s and 1990s to make community care work, that one telling statistic, which I gave earlier, that in 1997 two-thirds of health authorities did not provide 24-hour access to community services, is a real indictment of the failure to implement what were undoubtedly good intentions. They were good intentions, but I am afraid that the world is paved with good intentions; deeds, rather than words, count in the end.

To get the range of services and provision right, three changes are necessary: first, changes in the law; secondly, reform to services, particularly with new national standards; and, thirdly, the right level of investment in mental health services. I should like to deal with each of those changes in turn.

First, on the changes to the law, I am publishing today a new draft mental health Bill and consultation paper, copies of which are available in the Vote Office. As I said in response to the hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon), our proposals have already been subject to fairly detailed consultation during the past couple of years, but I hope that the publication of a draft Bill will allow further detailed scrutiny to take place. I would certainly urge all right hon. and hon. Members who have an interest in mental health issues to engage in that process and, more particularly, those outside the House, too.

The current mental health provisions date back to the 1950s. They are, quite simply, out of date. They have failed properly to protect the public, patients or, indeed, the staff who work in our mental health services. For example, under existing mental health law, the powers to treat patients compulsorily are available only if patients are in hospital. However, the majority of patients today are treated in the community. Public confidence in care in the community was undermined therefore by failures not just in the services, but in the law, too. The policy lost public confidence because, in too many cases, neither the services nor the law properly protected either patients or the public.

Services have too often worked in isolation from one another. Too often, severely ill patients have been allowed to drift out of contact with mental health services altogether. Many patients have failed to comply with treatment. That is, I am afraid, a recurring theme in all the inquiries into the tragic toll of homicides and suicides that have taken place in recent years. Doctors have often been in the absurd position of having to wait until patients in the community become ill enough to require admission to hospital. That prevents earlier intervention to reduce the risks to the patients and, of course, the wider public.

In particular, existing legislation has failed to provide adequate public protection from those whose propensity to be a risk to others stems from a severe personality disorder. As a result, patients and the public alike have been put at risk; they have been denied the protection that they need. Every year, there are more than 1,000 suicides and 50 homicides involving patients who have been in touch with mental health services in the previous 12 months. That graphically illustrates the failure of the old legal framework, which is in desperate need of reform. Our proposals, which are the most far-reaching for decades, are designed to enhance the safety of patients and the public.

It may be of benefit to the House if I briefly outline the proposals in the draft Bill and the accompanying consultation paper. At the heart of the draft Bill is the need to ensure that there is a new focus on the individual patient. Under the current law, patients are defined and treated not on the basis of their individual needs, but depending on which category of mental disorder they have. That has led to a loophole in the Mental Health Act 1983, so that a small minority of dangerous mentally disordered people have been able to argue that they will not personally benefit from treatment. In some cases, they argue that their illness makes them refuse to take part in appropriate therapy sessions or to co-operate with treatment that could be provided for them.

Under the 1983 Act, patients in those circumstances would be discharged from treatment and even detention, although people in official positions—whether prison officers or police officers—know full well that they could pose a risk to others as well as themselves.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Milburn: Let me continue this point. I shall let the hon. Gentleman intervene in a moment or two.

The current system does nothing to protect those patients and it certainly fails to protect the public if a small minority of dangerous people with mental disorders in those circumstances go on to harm or even kill others or themselves. In the draft Bill, we shall introduce one broad definition of mental disorder and one set of tight conditions to govern the use of compulsory powers. If those conditions are met and treatment is available, compulsory powers may be used. That will close the loophole and ensure better treatment for dangerous mentally disordered patients and provide better protection for the public.

Similarly, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will have powers to direct those who are already serving prison sentences to be assessed and treated. Subject to the new mental health tribunal process, which I will describe shortly, it will be possible to detain dangerous people with severe personality disorders for as long as they continue to present a high risk to others. New services are currently being developed for that small but high-risk group of patients, and my Department and the Home Office are committed to providing more than £120 million to make them available to all who need them.

Dr. Harris: There is clearly a great debate to be had about the Secretary of State's definitions of mental disorder and mental illness, but I want to ask about his view of treatment. He seemed to imply that there was treatment for severe personality disorders. Does he accept that there is at least controversy about whether effective treatment exists, and that, notwithstanding good intentions, defining treatment as including the general term "habilitation"—which means, to an extent, teaching people how to behave—does not solve the problem, which is that he wants to detain people who cannot be treated?

Mr. Milburn: The hon. Gentleman is right: there is controversy. There is certainly not a set view in clinical circles.

Some interesting experimental therapeutic interventions have been made in the United States and Holland, for example, involving precisely the small cohort of patients whom we are discussing. We are trying to learn from the impact of those interventions. As I think the hon. Gentleman knows, we have already provided funds for pilot programmes at Broadmoor prison, and we plan other tests at Rampton and Broadmoor to try to ensure that the right range of treatments is available.

The hon. Gentleman could put his question in a different way, and ask what else we should do. Should we throw up our hands and say that there is nothing we can do? People in the system know fine well that although this is a very small minority of potential patients, they pose a substantial risk to themselves, their families and the wider public. Given those circumstances, what are those of us in decision-making positions to do? Are we to say there is nothing we can do, or try to close a patent loophole in the law?

I think it right for us to publish our Bill in draft: White Papers are one thing, but seeing legal, statutory proposals in black and white is quite another. I know that there is concern, and that there will be controversy, but I say in all candour that unless we do something we shall see more of the problems in our constituencies of which we are only too painfully aware.

Dr. Fox: What the Secretary of State is saying is important. He has rightly drawn a distinction between the draft Bill and the current legislation, pointing out that there is now a single definition of mental disorder and that the treatability criterion is being abolished. He says that he is doing this because a proportion of patients with severe personality disorders would otherwise pose a risk to the public. According to the Government's own research, what proportion of those patients might expect to be detained under new legalisation?

Mr. Milburn: That depends on the process, which I will describe in a moment.

As the hon. Gentleman probably recalls from earlier debates—I think my last statement to the House on the subject was made at the time of the White Paper's publication—we currently estimate that between 2,100 and 2,400 people make up the small cohort of potential patients whom we are discussing. Most are in contact with the criminal justice system, and the overwhelming majority are already in prison. We are revising the estimate, however, and it is likely to be revised upwards rather than downwards. Although the number is small, unless appropriate treatment and management are available there is a grave danger of precisely the problems that the hon. Gentleman mentioned in his speech.

Other changes in mental health law are needed. In the past, too many people with mental health problems were rightly removed from crumbling acute hospitals, but wrongly placed in the community with little support and poor treatment.

[Mr. Milburn]

Some lost touch with services, with tragic results for them and their families. Some started on a cycle of detention in hospital and discharge to the community, only to be forced back into hospital when a crisis hit. That revolving door is bad for patients and their families, and we intend to tackle it in the Bill.

We will do so by allowing compulsory treatment to be provided in the community, as well as in a hospital. That will allow earlier intervention to prevent a patient's condition deteriorating and so help to reduce the risks that patients may pose to themselves or to others. New orders will mean that patients subject to compulsory treatment, whether in the hospital or in the community, will have to comply with the terms of their treatment programme.

In his speech, the hon. Member for Woodspring asked about medication. I know that concerns have been expressed about that matter. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that it will never be appropriate, under the terms of the draft Bill, to provide compulsory medication in a person's home. Instead, orders will set out the form of treatment that should apply. For example, if a patient in a clinic refused to comply with the order, he or she could be readmitted compulsorily to hospital.

Mental health legislation, by necessity, must tread a delicate path between protecting those who are most vulnerable and ensuring public safety. In the draft Bill, the new powers that I have just described are balanced with additional safeguards for patients. Each patient will have an individualised care plan, on which any compulsory treatment will be based. Unlike now, those making decisions about compulsion will also have to consider the patient's wishes and feelings about his or her treatment and the views of his or her carers.

There will be proper safeguards, and patients will be helped to make use of them. Most significantly, all orders for compulsory assessment and treatment for more than 28 days will have to be authorised by an independent judicial body—the new mental health tribunal—and its decisions will be regularly reviewed. For offenders, of course, the initial decision to apply compulsory assessment and treatment will be a matter not for the tribunal, but for the courts.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge and Chryston): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way, and for his approach to these matters. In 1986, some of us managed to steer an Act through the House dealing with some of the issues touched on today. I remind my right hon. Friend of two things. First, that legislation provided that patients leaving long-term care would receive a proper assessment and a response to their needs. Secondly, and more importantly, it provided that advocacy would be crucial to a patient's rights. Will my right hon. Friend assure me that those factors have not been forgotten?

Mr. Milburn: They certainly have not been forgotten. I commend the work that my right hon. Friend did in 1986, and still does today, on many of the issues to do with the very difficult problems associated with long-term care for some of the most vulnerable in society, and with the role of carers. He is right about what must be included in the barrage of safeguards that we must put in place.

Removing a person's liberty is an extremely serious step to take. That might be the right thing to do in some circumstances, both for the individual and society, but the power must be balanced with new safeguards for the person involved. As is the case now, those safeguards will include the provision of free legal advice for those who need it. For the first time, people will also get the right to new independent advocacy services, which are intended to help them through what can be the rather byzantine maze of mental health legislation. Those free and independent advocacy services will be available to every patient who goes through the compulsory treatment process.

Mr. Hinchliffe: I listened carefully to my right hon. Friend's detailed analysis of the draft Bill in respect of the role of tribunals. He made it clear that tribunal decisions will be subject to review. A constituent of mine received a mental health tribunal decision more than a year ago, but it has not been implemented yet. How would the circumstances of a person like that man be affected by the new arrangements proposed in the draft Bill?

Mr. Milburn: I am not familiar with that case, although if my hon. Friend writes to me about it, I shall be happy to consider it. Let me say two things. First, under the draft Bill, the decisions of the mental health tribunal are binding on the national health service, and we would expect the national health service to act quickly to implement them. Secondly, there are safeguards, too. Compulsory treatment will be allowable for the first 28 days without recourse to the mental health tribunal, although the right of appeal to the mental health tribunal exists even during that period. Thereafter, the tribunal can make compulsory treatment orders, for up to six months in the first instance, for a further six months in the second instance, and, finally, for periods of 12 months and so on. Rights of periodic review will exist within that if the person concerned wants to challenge it or their carer has a view about it. I want to assure my hon. Friend that, all along, we have tried to balance safeguards with proper protection for the public.

Mr. Hinchliffe: I am not sure that I fully clarified my point. The patient to whom I referred was subject to a tribunal decision that he should be transferred from a particular hospital a year ago. He has still not been transferred. When the draft Bill becomes legislation, how will those circumstances differ? Who would ensure that that decision was implemented?

Mr. Milburn: First, that will be a decision for the tribunal. Secondly, however—this is an important further safeguard, too—as my hon. Friend is aware, we currently have the Mental Health Act Commission. The draft Bill proposes that we build on the work of the commission but give a new power to the new, independent health inspectorate that we envisage—the Commission for Health Care Audit and Inspection—which will have precisely the function of ensuring that the decisions of the mental health tribunal are carried out fairly, according to legislation. In law, the national health service will have to act following a tribunal decision. An additional failsafe exists, however, through the powers that will be accorded to the Commission for Health Care Audit and Inspection.

These are major changes to mental health laws. As I said, we are committed to consulting widely on them. We intend, however, to provide new safeguards for patients alongside better protection for the wider community. I believe that the changes are long overdue.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): The Secretary of State stresses the breadth of the consultation procedure, which I am sure that we all welcome. A procedure exists, however, whereby the Committee dealing with a Bill can go into a Select Committee phase to take evidence before moving to a Standing Committee phase. Have the Government considered whether it might be appropriate to use that procedure for this Bill? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. Before the Secretary of State answers, may I say to the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) that I am not entirely happy about the device that he is using now, unless he can satisfy me that it is purely and simply for diary purposes?

Mr. Milburn: I hope that the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon is not taping me, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) is tempting me to take on powers that I do not really have. In the end, those are matters for the business managers. The Government would certainly look favourably on the idea of referring the draft Bill to a Special Standing Committee. That would be helpful not only in terms of being able to examine it in detail, as we did with the Adoption and Children Bill, for example, but of taking evidence from many parties, some of whom will be happy with the provisions, and some not. If that is the hon. Gentleman's suggestion, I have no problem with it. I have no doubt that it can be discussed through the usual channels.

Mental health legislation, however, is only for the small minority of patients with a mental health problem that poses the gravest risk to themselves or to others. It is really important to keep that in mind and in perspective when debating these issues. I have no doubt that tomorrow, almost inevitably, the newspapers will be full of stories about the compulsory powers in the mental health Bill that we are proposing. However, we are debating a range of issues here today, and mental health law inevitably only ever affects a small minority of those patients with a mental health problem. It is important to keep that in mind when we debate these issues.

In the end, good quality care and treatment are key to making sure that most people with mental health problems never need to fall within the scope of mental health legislation. That is why, for the first time, the Government have laid down national standards for mental health services. Not surprisingly, the national service framework that we published three years ago has been widely welcomed, not just by clinicians and managers, but even more importantly, by carers and users of the services.

Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Will my right hon. Friend acknowledge that Government policy will have failed if the use of compulsion does not decrease in future?

Mr. Milburn: That is what we want. We must try, and are trying, to undertake two parallel processes. The first is to deal with the loopholes in the law that, admittedly, only ever affect a small minority of people and a small minority of patients, although with huge and sometimes tragic consequences. However, our effort overall must be to develop services that are capable, in an appropriate way, of dealing with people's problems without compulsion. That is why we are trying to build up services in hospitals as well as crisis intervention teams in the community, assertive outreach teams and some of the new services that are being made available for young people with the first onset of psychosis.

Normally such young people, who are among the most vulnerable in the community, are simply not dealt with at all. They often have to wait years to be seen. However, we now know that the model that is being rolled out in 18 local communities across the country works. It can provide quick interventional services and makes a real difference to those people. It prevents them from ever requiring hospitalisation.

As I tried to make clear earlier, the trick is to get the range of services right. Although the national service framework and the NHS plan are, by necessity, 10-year programmes—we must build up capacity and change the culture of the service—progress is under way. Last year was the first year in perhaps decades in which the overall number of mental health beds in the national health service rose rather than fell. There are more than 500 extra secure beds and 320 extra 24-hour staffed beds. Such services were never available in the past, but more of them are to come.

Clearly, everything cannot be done at once, because of staffing and capacity constraints. None the less, a range of services that gets early intervention into place and ensures that appropriate services for those who need them are available in primary and hospital care is in place across the country as a whole.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): The Secretary of State mentioned what he thought would be in the headlines tomorrow, but I am sure that he is aware that in the headlines today is the case of a 60-year-old mental patient who was raped on a mixed-sex ward. He will recall our exchanges in the past about mixed-sex wards, and that in 1997, the date for ending them was envisaged to be 1999. That went back to 2002, and then to the end of 2002. When will we see the elimination of mixed-sex wards in mental hospitals?

Mr. Milburn: If I were the hon. Gentleman, I would be cautious about drawing too much from an individual case in the national health service. I might be wrong, but my understanding is that the incident concerned happened to a patient who occupied a single room, not in a mixed-sex ward. I may be wrong about that, but if the hon. Gentleman is getting his information from the *Daily Mail*, he should be cautious.

Wherever the incident took place, it was appalling and almost indescribable. It raises profound questions for the NHS. It is worth remembering that there are some evil people out there and we must ensure that the right form of protection is available for patients without—this is something we want to avoid—turning all our hospitals into prisons. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman wants to avoid that too.

Dr. Lewis: The Secretary of State is partly correct. According to BBC news online, the incident occurred in

[Dr. Lewis]

a patient's room, but it is believed that a male went through a mixed-sex ward before reaching that room. If it had not been a mixed-sex ward, that person would have been spotted. In any case, the Government have stated for years that they would abolish mixed-sex wards, but they have not done so. When will they do that?

Mr. Milburn: In all candour, the hon. Gentleman is trying to draw too many wrong conclusions from one isolated terrible case. Let us examine carefully whether the incident involved a mixed-sex ward or not. It is my understanding that a member of the public came into the hospital and entered the lady's individual, single room.

We are making progress on mixed-sex wards. I think the hon. Gentleman is aware that we have targets to meet by the end of the year. I have no doubt that he will be the first to raise it if we do not meet them. However, I can assure him that we are well on target. If he wants to have a word with me after 31 December, we will contrast the progress that this Government have made in eliminating mixed-sex accommodation with the absolute failure to do anything about it when his Government were in power.

Providing the right range of services—whether in community services or acute services—requires investment. Until the Government came to office, no special funding was available for mental health services. When I hear the hon. Member for Woodspring railing against diverting mental health funding into other clinical areas, I am afraid that I also hear the sound of opportunism resonating with hypocrisy. He usually never misses an opportunity to argue the case against what he calls political priorities for funding certain services in the NHS—priorities set by Ministers. Mental health is such a service. I say that unashamedly. Under this Government, it is receiving special funding—I say that unashamedly, too—because it has a special need. Far from not producing results, the resources that it is getting are indeed producing results.

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire): Where is the money going?

Mr. Milburn: I did a bit of research before the debate. In the hon. Gentleman's area of North-East Hertfordshire, an assertive outreach team has recently been established to cover that region and a new rehabilitation project is providing high-level support to 12 people and lesser support to eight others. In addition, a new community mental health centre was established last year which offers day care and outreach facilities. A new assertive outreach team and a crisis resolution team are operating in area represented by the hon. Member for Woodspring.

I am sure that the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) is well aware of the opening of the Christopher unit in Chelmsford; it is a seven-bedded psychiatric intensive care unit. Older people's services in his area include a liaison nurse and a third consultant post. There is 24-hour access to those services for the first time. We have also provided drug and alcohol services and more appropriate premises.

The Conservatives ask where the money is going: it is going into front-line mental health services, which is precisely where we want it to go. Staff numbers are growing, too. There are 450 more psychiatrists, 1,700 more psychologists and more than 2,000 extra nurses working in mental health services. Services for patients with the most severe mental illness have been the first priority for investment, and rightly so.

The hon. Member for Woodspring rightly raised concerns about the standard of prison care, but as he heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle), progress is also under way in that sector. We can make further progress in the years to come, provided that—this is the crucial consideration—we are prepared as a society, as a Government and in this House to commit the necessary resources to correct the historical underfunding that has been all too prevalent in our mental health services.

It is certainly true that there is a long way to go to secure the world-class mental health services that our country should aspire to provide, but progress is under way, and as the NHS plan set out, there is more to come. I was pleased that the hon. Member for Woodspring quoted approvingly from the Wanless review, which refers to mental health. I am pleased that the Conservatives now acknowledge the importance of Derek Wanless's work, especially as the hon. Gentleman dismissed the report when it was published by saying that it had "completely missed the point."

The hon. Gentleman may find the odd paragraph here and there in the Wanless review with which he can agree, but he cannot—perhaps he will not—make the single commitment for which it calls: a commitment to a growing NHS with rising levels of investment not just for one or two years, but over a period of years.

It was that commitment to a growing and improving NHS that we made at the time of the last Budget, and it was precisely that which the Conservatives voted against. We chose to make the necessary investment in the NHS; they chose otherwise. This week they will the ends, with today's demand for an improvement in mental health services; next week, no doubt, it will be something else; and almost daily, Conservative Back Benchers demand more health spending in their own constituencies. It is worth reminding the hon. Member for Woodspring—and the House—that only a few weeks ago he led those same Conservative Members into the No Lobby to vote against the Budget that provides the means to achieve the ends that they claim to want.

Unless and until the Conservatives have the courage to support the investment that the national health service needs, their claims of conversion to a new form of compassionate, caring conservatism will count for nothing. I say in all candour to the hon. Gentleman that until then they will be judged not on their rhetoric, but on their record—their record of underinvestment when in office, and of opposing investment when in opposition. They can talk about caring until they are blue in the face, but talk is cheap; making the necessary investment in public services is not.

It is the Labour Government who have begun the process of transforming our mental health services. Taken together with the reforms and investment that we are making in mental health services throughout the country, the proposals that I have outlined today for new mental health laws will enhance the safety of both patients and the wider public. I commend those proposals to the House and urge my right hon. and hon. Friends to back the amendment in the Lobby tonight.

5.16 pm

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): There is clearly much with which to agree in both the Front-Bench speeches that we have heard so far and in the Conservatives' motion. Indeed, it is tempting to support everything in the motion. The only point of disagreement might be what is lacking from the motion—an even more candid analysis of the record of many previous Governments. None the less, I think that the motion on the Order Paper is one that my party can support.

The Government have made things difficult by proposing to remove some of the words in the motion and replace them with other equally important statements. That puts those of us who did not table an amendment for fear that it might not be selected, in the difficult position of wanting to support some of the thoughts expressed both in the motion and in the Government amendment.

The debate has ranged wider than the words of the motion. The change to the title of the debate is interesting. The hon. Member for Colne Valley (Kali Mountford) claimed that it was illegitimate for the Conservatives to change the subject of their debate, but I think that it is legitimate for them to have done so. They clearly thought that mental health was an important issue this week, perhaps because they knew that the Government were about to publish a draft mental health Bill.

The change on the Order Paper makes it appear that the Government advanced the publication of the Bill to today to allow us to have a debate on the Bill as well as on the Conservatives' motion. There are good and bad aspects to that proposition. It seems to me that the House has witnessed a reverse statement: questions were asked by Conservative Front Benchers before the statement was made, and parts of the Secretary of State's speech resembled the sort of prepared statement that he would give on the publication of a draft Bill.

I hope that we will be able to return in good time to the draft Bill and its provisions. I welcome the fact that the Bill is in draft form, but not that the whole process has been somewhat delayed. None the less, the Government ought to be commended on the fact that the process has been deliberative—deliberation is a separate issue from delay. I am pleased that the Bill is in draft form because we have significant concerns about its current provisions, to some of which we take exception.

In his speech and in an article in *The Independent* today, the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) analysed care in the community, describing it as correct in principle. I agree with him. I would go further and say that care in the community was a good policy. For many people—not only those who were in institutions and were released as a result of that policy change, but those who would have become new patients facing life, or at least long-term, incarceration in institutions—the policy of care in the community introduced by the Conservatives was a boon.

Is it correct to say that because there have been problems with care in the community, it has failed? I would argue that that is an unfair statement, because care in the community was never properly tried and it never had the required funding and resources. Clearly, in mental health more than any other area, the therapeutic environment is staff-rich. Many other conditions can be treated at arm's length from professional staff, with drugs alone or with surgery and little follow-up, but mental health needs a high ratio of professional staff to patients, not only to monitor drug therapy, but to offer the talking treatments and counselling that are becoming popular with patients and whose effectiveness is increasingly becoming evident.

That is why care in the community, which loses the economies of scale achieved by gathering people in institutions, should not be seen simply as a cash-releasing exercise allowing old hospitals to be closed and sold off and the overheads saved, and why it required not just existing funding, but additional investment, which was never made available. Despite progress in their thinking, the Conservatives have not accepted that analysis of care in the community.

In his article in *The Independent* and in his speech, the hon. Member for Woodspring said that he thought care in the community

"was implemented too quickly, often with inappropriate patient selection, and in too many places there was too little investment".

If he had ended with those words, we could have said, "And so say all of us," but he qualified them by referring to

"too little investment in training, finance and related areas."

I assume that "related areas" refers to the staff, psychiatrists, community psychiatric nurses, community care managers, and the organisation and services to support patients in the community.

I would not say that care in the community failed because of poor implementation. That appears to blame the staff or civil servants for what was a political decision to underfund the sector. I say that it was in large part due to a failure of funding and—these arguments have been well rehearsed before—the difficulty of communication between social services and health departments, particularly when both are short of money. I have made the point before that to describe the barrier between them as a Berlin wall is wrong—it would be more accurate to say a Berlin trench, with both digging for the resources. That applies not only to the Conservative Government, but to the previous Parliament.

I pay tribute to the work of the Zito Trust in drawing attention to the needs of patients in the community and the dangers that they pose to themselves and the public. Mike Howlett of the Zito Trust was quoted as complaining that part of the problem with the way in which some patients in the community have been managed is that dangers were not spotted. That is no excuse for detention of those with personality disorder, or for compulsory treatment, but it is an argument for better follow-up, more support for those patients and ensuring that they remain in touch.

I had a homicide in my constituency which occurred nine years after the patient was last in touch with mental health services of either kind, so it was not a problem of poor follow-up of a treated patient who was in the system. The patient was not in the system at all. There is not enough evidence to suggest that we need to go further than improving support. We should not be considering indefinite detention and other such policies.

The hon. Member for Woodspring also spoke—and I believe that others will speak—about the stigma attaching to people with mental health problems. We must recognise that, and regret stigma where we see it—in films and on television—in the portrayal of people with

[Dr. Evan Harris]

mental illness in stereotypical or caricatured forms. We must regret irresponsible newspaper coverage of events in the community and seek to persuade newspapers to look at the problem from both points of view, and not just to represent, as they see it, the views of the outraged public.

We in the House have a responsibility for the language that we use. I have often been embarrassed by language used in the House—including, no doubt, some of the language used by my hon. Friends. The hon. Member for Woodspring was provoked into describing, without justification, an intervention from a Labour Member as "imbecilic". The use of such words is part of the problem. The Secretary of State's predecessor sometimes became carried away and used heightened language about which I have expressed concerns to him. He did so, for example, in describing Opposition politicians as loony. That may have been worth a laugh at the time, and such language might sometimes have been merited—I am not speaking about those on my Benches—in terms of what he was trying to say. None the less, the use of such terms is part of the problem of increasing stigma. I hope that the Government guide themselves in line with their campaign to ensure that we are responsible in our use of language.

Mental health services have been described in this debate as Cinderella services. We need to analyse in a little more detail the reasons why they can be so described. It has always been difficult to argue for more funding for mental health at local and indeed national level, because it is not glamorous and the latest technologies are not found in this specialty. The status of professionals working in mental health has not traditionally equalled that of those working in acute medicine, emergency medicine and elective surgery, and in what is seen as life-saving surgery in general. That makes it is almost more important for Governments and more incumbent upon them to redress the balance and ensure that adequate funds are made available. We start from a position of gross underfunding of the mental health specialty. It was most prevalent in the Conservative years, but also existed in the first two—if not four or five—years of the current Administration.

We have a further problem in that there are no easy outcome measures. When the Government link funding or prioritisation to the measurement of outcomes, as they do in elective surgery and accident and emergency medicine in terms of trolley waits or general waiting times, the danger is that specialties such as mental health and care of the elderly, which are not easily outcome-measured, suffer because of a lack of political prioritisation, despite the words of the Secretary of State and despite the national service framework. If targets are based on those outcomes and health service managers know that their jobs are dependent on their meeting Government targets that have been raised to a level of political risk, such as those for waiting times and, even worse, waiting lists, there is a danger of diversion of resources from mental health to those other fields.

That is why I have argued—and I have done so consistently, in contrast with the Conservatives—against such central priority setting. I believe that funding should generally not be earmarked; that priorities should be set locally; and that when politicians, even under pressure from the Opposition or the newspapers, seek to set targets in certain areas, they must recognise that there will be a tyranny over the outcome measured in terms of time and resource allocation and prioritisation.

That is a problem. The Secretary of State will recognise that some of the resources that he meant to go into his priority of mental health were diverted into dealing with the here and now of deficits and waiting list targets, and that that funding was, and still is, being poached from mental health. It would be better to ensure that local priorities are set with input on public health and guidance from the Government, but not strict targets. There is a need to allow the bottom-up approach to ensure that resources are provided.

Within this particular Cinderella specialty—there are two such specialties: elderly care and mental illness—the elderly mentally ill are the Cinderella of Cinderellas.

Mr. Heald: The hon. Gentleman talks about money that the Government have earmarked not going into mental health services, which is a particular concern. However, is it not the case that he does not even believe in the earmarking in the first place, so the idea that the money would go into mental health is not correct?

Dr. Harris: The difficulty with earmarking is that there will always be something that is not earmarked, unless one centrally earmarks funding for every service. That is why I do not believe that the earmarking of funding is the right way forward. I hope that I have answered the hon. Gentleman's question. I believe that I have been consistent in holding the position that earmarking for the pleasure of allowing the Secretary of State to make announcements about his priorities does a disservice to neglected areas. However, I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman's interest in mental health, which has been even longer held than that of his hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring, if I may put it that way.

The elderly mentally ill are affected by shortages not only in acute beds, but in residential care and community care services, owing to the impact of the huge funding gap in social care. It is well recognised that social services departments now spend £1 billion more on social care than the standard spending assessment. The Government's failure to meet that gap means that other services are having to be cut. Until the Government put some of the new resources—more than they plan to—into social services, the false economy of beds being blocked will remain. As the Secretary of State knows, bed blocking is a phenomenon not only for acute hospitals, but for acute mental hospitals.

Mr. Milburn: On the £1 billion gap, is it Liberal Democrat policy to eradicate it?

Dr. Harris: Yes, it is. We were clear about that in our alternative Budget. If the Secretary of State looks at the detail, he will see that putting £1 billion of new money into the gap would prevent the inexorable rise in regressive council tax and facilitate the local development of services for growth areas instead of propping up the service. I do not want to be distracted too much into social care, but I assure the Secretary of State that my comments are not inconsistent with what we have said before.

A survey that we carried out in the past year showed that 72 per cent. of social services departments were unable to meet the demand for nursing elderly mental illness beds and that 68 per cent. were unable to meet the demand for residential elderly mental illness beds. Fifty-eight per cent. reported shortfalls in the provision of specialised dementia care and 62 per cent. reported shortfalls in provision for older people with challenging behaviour. In dealing with mental illness, we must recognise that we are also dealing with illness that presents as dementia, especially among the elderly. They are affected by underfunding in every budget on which they rely; they are the Cinderella of Cinderellas.

We have had a brief opportunity to look at the draft Bill. I hope that the Secretary of State accepts that we need to spend more time on the detail and that we can do so in Government time, perhaps in Westminster Hall. The Bill has two main flaws. It provides for too much detention without proper treatment, and for inappropriate treatment in the community without enabling people to get back into hospital when they need to.

Mr. Tom Clarke: Before the hon. Gentleman develops his argument, which he is doing very well, I ask him to focus on those people who, whether they like it or not, remain in the community, and who were the subject of the Donaldson report on chronic fatigue syndrome and ME. Does he agree that in so far as there is a psychiatric input—which is debatable—no time should be lost in referring GPs to the findings of that report, and that it would be a great mistake if the National Institute for Clinical Excellence was asked to spend too much time on it?

Dr. Harris: Not enough information on those difficult conditions is available to or absorbed by those in primary care, on whom the burden most falls. There have been reports in recent days about the amount of unnecessary paperwork that GPs have to get through, and I hesitate to say that they should do even more reading without some being taken away from them. The right hon. Gentleman's remarks are on the record. All hon. Members have constituents with chronic fatigue syndrome or ME, and we know what an ordeal they have to go through to get recognition of their condition, let alone the treatment and care that they and their families need.

Returning to the draft Bill, it is going too far to detain people who should not be detained for intervention that cannot in all cases be described as treatment. Again, we need more time to develop that, but the Secretary of State knows the arguments against the provisions.

It is important to hold a debate on compulsory treatment orders. There are arguments in favour of compulsory treatment and the Select Committee on Health made important points about it in its report in July 2000. We look forward to hearing the Chairman's views on the matter. The Health Committee was ambivalent and raised anxieties about it, but did not automatically rule out such a provision. The Government must show even greater recognition of the anxieties than the Secretary of State did.

It is feared that expanding the definition of mental disorder to include those with personality disorder, and expanding the definition of treatment to include habilitation—teaching people how to live independently—will mean that the definitions are too broad to reassure those of us who are worried that too many civil liberties will be lost in the name of public protection. It is worrying that the Secretary of State uses language such as, "If people refuse treatment, they will be compulsorily detained." If those people are deemed capable of refusing treatment, it means that although they may be mentally disordered, they may also be competent to decline treatment. If they do that, the Secretary of State will add an extra group of people to those who can currently be compulsorily detained.

The principles of non-discrimination and autonomy for people who are capable of giving and, importantly, refusing consent for treatment must be respected. Otherwise we enter new territory that is dangerous for Governments without greater support from key organisations such as the Royal College of Psychiatrists.

Mrs. Humble: Does the hon. Gentleman acknowledge that the anger and bewilderment of people in the community who are assaulted by neighbours must be weighed in the balance? The police will not act because doctors advise them that the person is not fit to plead, and the health service will not act because it claims that the person has an untreatable mental illness. The problem persists, and there is anger in the community.

Dr. Harris: I understand the hon. Lady's point. The Secretary of State dealt with the matter when he asked, with an expansive shrug of shoulders, what Governments can do when faced with the problem that she outlined, and talked about the difficulties in the current law of ensuring that such people are treated. I acknowledge that the difficulty needs wider debate. However, I believe that steps must be taken before we go down the path that the Secretary of State suggests.

First, we must provide greater community support and early intervention, which is not currently available. Many tragedies could be prevented not simply by detention, but by early detection and intervention, and greater support.

Secondly, we must understand the principle of reciprocity. I do not believe that people who are subject to greater powers under the draft Bill will recognise that they are being fairly treated until the Government provide enhanced treatment facilities. I hope that they will do that with the extra funding for the NHS so that there is no delay in getting a hospital bed, or, as the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) said, in getting out of a hospital bed into other treatment. There should not be a delay before allocation to a community health team. There should not be such a shortage of professionals that oversight is inadequate.

We have an additional duty to ensure that patients who are capable but threatened with compulsory treatment are not rationed out of health care. I am conscious of the time, and the debate could continue, but I wanted to draw attention, before Second Reading of the Bill that is now in draft form—I hope that it will be amended—to the fact we could hold significant debates on this issue.

The hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) made an important point about mental health in prisons. There are significant difficulties in prison, where all the problems in the community are writ large because there is a concentration of people many of whom have mental health problems. Despite the best efforts of those who work under siege in prisons, the health service facilities there are not adequate. The Government must pay greater attention to those concerns.

The problem of dual diagnosis has not yet been raised, although I am sure that all hon. Members will know that it is a major issue, involving mental illness coexisting

[Dr. Harris]

with drug dependency. It is prevalent particularly among the prison population, but also in the population of drug users outside. Whatever resources are needed for each of those groups, the problem requires a combination of behaviour that is mediated not primarily through the judicial system but through enhanced treatment.

The Secretary of State felt that many of the people who had caused problems in the community through horrific and tragic incidents had not been in touch with mental health services at the time, even if they had previously been. I would suggest that that is an argument in favour of increasing the responsiveness of existing mental health services, and that that has to be done before the Government pursue other options. Otherwise, in the words of a civil servant to a conference in 2000, we shall be dealing not with a

> "health act for vulnerable people in need",

but with a public safety Act.

I shall not repeat the points that I made in an earlier intervention about treatability, but I am concerned that the number of people subject to detention on the basis of personality disorder will be dictated not by medical evidence—particularly if the pilot schemes and trials do not give the results that the Government want—but by the treatment of those people by the tabloids.

In their joint statement, the Royal College of Psychiatrists and the Law Society have raised a number of concerns about the draft mental health Bill founded on the White Paper, some of which were mentioned by the hon. Member for Woodspring but others of which were not. Until now, I have not read a briefing by a royal college so critical of Government policy and couched in such strong terms, and I hope that the Secretary of State will have an opportunity to read it. The statement says:

> "The proposals"—

based on the White Paper—

> "would be costly and complex to implement. Government funds would be better spent in the provision of more effective clinical services for patients.
>
> The new Mental Health Review Tribunals alone would require the time of 600 (extra) psychiatrists. It would be impossible to recruit such numbers. Those in post would be diverted from direct patient care."

Many feel that they are now; the shortage of mental health professionals is severe. *[Interruption.]* I think that the Secretary of State just said, from a sedentary position, that he considered those views to be "drivel". That is an argument that needs to take place, with the Royal College of Psychiatrists and the Law Society on one side, and the Secretary of State's wishful thinking on the other.

The statement goes on:

> "It is right that new legislation should reflect the move from hospital to community care. But the proposals as they stand would introduce powers that are ethically dubious and practically unworkable. They take no account of alternatives such as the use of leave and discharge with treatment conditions."

That is an alternative that was proposed by the Royal College of Psychiatrists.

It is damaging and disappointing that the Government stand poised to implement the much needed updating of the Mental Health Act 1983 with what could be considered repressive legislation, and to lock up people with untreatable personality disorders indefinitely. The public must be protected from the risk of attack, but the best way to achieve that is to ensure that there are adequate resources in terms of psychiatrists, community psychiatric nurses, community care managers, drug therapies and talking treatments. The public, and, to a much greater extent, the mentally ill themselves, are at much greater risk from under-resourcing than from the absence of detention powers or compulsory treatment orders.

The Conservatives have claimed that community care has failed, but it was never properly tried, because it has never been given the funding that it requires. I hope that all hon. Members will recognise the desperate need for resources and for improving the morale of people working in the mental health service, and for those things to be done before powers that are too draconian are taken in legislation.

5.44 pm

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): I welcome this debate, and I would like to say that there has been much in all the three previous speeches with which I genuinely agree. I welcome the fact that the Government have introduced their draft Bill, and I look forward to the debates on it. It will form the basis for important, long overdue changes in mental health legislation.

The background to today's debate is interesting. My right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), the previous Secretary of State for Health, made the interesting comment, while he was still Secretary of State, that community care had failed, and today we have heard a possible confession from the Conservatives that their policies in the 1980s and 1990s on community care had failed.

In debates such as this, I find myself thinking about what went before. The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) referred briefly to lunatic asylums—the system of long-stay institutions that was in place not long ago. Community care is not a recent development; I had the interesting experience of working in community care in the 1970s, when it was getting under way. Reference has been made to Enoch Powell, and moves towards community care were being made as long ago as the early part of the 20th century.

I have a vivid memory of what I saw in those long-stay institutions. The implication of debates such as this—that there was a golden age of lunacy, in which all such people were happily looked after in nice places—is absolute nonsense. Frankly, those places, some of which I knew well, were not nice. I was familiar with some of the highly questionable treatments that were used, and I witnessed the gross denigration of human rights. I remember training as a social worker in the early 1970s with former psychiatric nurses. They told me about a particular Yorkshire institution in which competitions were held to see who could throw patients furthest down a ward. My plea is that we do not forget that the previous situation was not positive but appalling for vast numbers of people.

I have personal experience of discharging from hospital people who were deemed moral defectives—women who had spent their lives locked up in institutional care for doing nothing other than, say, having a child out of wedlock. That was a disgraceful and scandalous situation, which we should never forget. I met many others who were totally sane, even though they had spent their lives in institutional care. Indeed, other than the consequences of being institutionalised, they were no more mad than anybody in this place. Having said that, I have probably met more mad people in the Palace of Westminster than in all the years that I worked in various lunatic asylums and long-stay institutions.

The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon mentioned the Health Committee's mental health inquiry of 2002. It was a cross-party report, in which we stated that it was "misleading and unhelpful" to argue that care in the community had failed, but that

"it has failed for some individuals".

I readily concede that it has indeed failed for some. Like most hon. Members, I meet such people and I am very conscious of the need to address their difficulties. My personal view is that the vast majority of mental health patients get a better deal than that offered 25 years ago, and we should not forget that improvements have been made.

I commend the previous Conservative Government on the work that they did. Although I opposed many of their measures and had some practical concerns, the principle behind their policy was correct. They were going in the right direction and secured many achievements in community care. I congratulate the current Government, too, on many of their mental health policies, particularly the national service framework—a commendable initiative that is delivering genuine and long overdue improvements. However, I concede that several important problems remain, and in the brief time available I want to spell them out.

The resources question has been touched on. Money has been made available nationally, but it has not fed through to actual improvements in local mental health services. All of us—including, I suspect, Ministers—are concerned about that. I reiterate the point about funding discrepancies between health and social services. Commendably, through the Budget the Government have done something about that problem, which the Wanless report recognised. We now realise that such discrepancies have held back the development of alternatives for patients leaving hospital and returning to the community.

I also want to repeat my concern—I have expressed it on many previous occasions—about fragmentation of services and the lack of co-ordination between health and social care. I shall not reiterate the solutions that I have described many times before, but I hope that they come to fruition at some point during my time in this place. It is taking a long time to implement them, but I remain hopeful. The Government are gradually moving towards an integrated health and social care system. Such a system is necessary because problems such as mental illness do not slot neatly into a medical model or a social care model, but overlap both.

The lack of planning and co-ordination of services is obvious in my constituency, which contains male and female prisons. There is also a regional secure unit near my constituency. I visit each establishment and some of the special hospitals, and I see people who should be somewhere else, but nobody seems to ensure that such people move to where they should be. I welcome the steps that the Government have taken in linking special hospitals to local trusts. That is an important move forward, but I would welcome the Government being more radical and acting on the many reports that have suggested that we need to leave behind the models of special hospitals that we have used for many years and have more localised regional secure units. That is a politically difficult step, because no one wants one in their backyard. I have one in my backyard and I understand the difficulties, but that is the way we must go. I welcome the steps that the Government have taken in that direction, but we must go even further.

When the Health Committee considered mental health, the rights of patients concerned me greatly. We visited Broadmoor hospital, where we were told that 60 per cent. of the women detained did not need to be there and could be cared for in an appropriate environment within the community. That was very worrying, and we must ensure that our new mental health laws do something about that. At Ashworth hospital, we were told that a quarter of the male patients could be cared for more appropriately in the community. I commend *The Independent on Sunday,* which is running a series of articles that look in detail at the circumstances of some of those patients, because we need to be reminded that they are human beings. We should be concerned to ensure that our legislation will address their circumstances.

I am concerned that insufficient rigour is used when deciding where in the system patients would be most appropriately placed. That is why I intervened in the Secretary of State's speech to ask who will ensure that the decisions of mental health tribunals are properly policed. At the moment—and I mean no disrespect to the Mental Health Act Commission—I see far too many examples of people being left in completely unsuitable placements. I welcome the proposals for the inspectorate to examine that issue, and I hope that it will be able to join up provision in a way that does not happen now.

When the Minister winds up, I hope that he will address how we can square the principles of the national service framework—such as non-discrimination and combating stigma—with legislation that will primarily be focused on compulsion. That will present certain difficulties. On the matter of DSPD—dangerous and severe personality disorder—I would also welcome some clarification on what is a health issue and what is a criminal justice matter. Like the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon, I have some concerns about that difficult area, and we need to get it right. I am aware that the Government's position differs somewhat from that of the expert group that advised the Government on proposals for change in mental health law. I would also welcome comments on the consistency of the diagnosis of DSPD—we are talking about 2,400 patients—because I know many psychiatrists and they do not all agree on the diagnosis. We need to be careful when labelling people, or possibly locking them up for good, that we know what we are talking about.

Coincidentally, today I had a meeting with Young Minds, which was arranged many weeks ago. The young people I met made the point that we need to consider how we can prevent increasing numbers of children and young people from developing mental disorders. Their concern was that we do not make sufficient links between our health services and our education system. They see, as I do, children under immense pressure from league tables, examinations—I have a son who completed his GCSEs today, so I know full well the pressures on youngsters and schools—depression and parental break-up. Many factors

[Mr. David Hinchliffe]

are forcing young people into mental illness and the current system does not sufficiently address the need for prevention.

One of the issues that the Health Committee considered was the need to encourage far more user involvement in mental health services. We were impressed by some of the user initiatives that we saw in various places, which offered community-based alternatives to in-patient care. We felt that those initiatives should receive more support.

We have seen many positive developments in the past 25 years, for which successive Governments may claim credit. Although I accept that many challenges lie ahead, in my time in social work and working on policy development in this place, I have seen profound changes and it saddens me that we tend to forget how bad things were before the introduction of community care.

5.56 pm

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon): Just a fortnight ago tragedy came to east Devon with the triple suicide of Anne Harris, Shaun Sheppard and Jamie Hague, about which there has been much press speculation—not least in the papers today. Professor Rachel Jenkins, the director of the World Health Organisation collaboration centre at London's Institute of Psychiatry, commented that she had never heard of a triple suicide before.

I wish to set the record straight in the limited time available. None of the three was detained at the time under the Mental Health Act. They were informal patients at the Cedars unit of Wonford hospital in Exeter. That unit is an acute in-patient mental health facility for patients between the ages of 16 and 65, primarily from mid and east Devon, on short to medium-term admissions. People are generally admitted for a few days or weeks and on discharge, they are followed up by a care co-ordinator who is a member of the community mental health team. People are admitted with a range of mental health problems, including acute mental illnesses and longer term disorders.

The challenge for the staff is to provide quality care in a less restricted atmosphere. The situation can change from minute to minute, and the staff have to attempt a difficult balancing act. The staff are a multi-disciplinary team, including medical staff, mental health nurses, occupational therapists and psychologists. Patients all have an individual care plan that covers medication, individual therapy, activities and leave away from the unit.

I have spoken regularly to Valerie Howell, the chief executive of the Devon Partnership NHS Trust, and I am most grateful to her for keeping me informed. I was told today that the internal review will report by the end of July to the trust board and will be followed by an independent review, consisting of three independent people—probably a nurse, a doctor and a barrister. All the findings of both reviews will be made public and the families of the deceased, with whom, of course, our concerns lie, will be fully involved in them. The reviews will be open and, no doubt, provide lessons to be learned. I suspect that the main question will be whether the care and treatment package was correct and sufficient support available.

The two patients who were thought to have killed themselves a few days earlier were not in-patients of the Cedars unit, although they were out-patients from the same health authority. The police have to deal with the aftermath of these distressing cases, and in this instance, no blame should be apportioned to them. It turns out that the policeman who found the three at the top of the cliff had no training in negotiation, although it is doubtful whether he could have done anything at that stage had he had such training.

Professor Jenkins has pointed out that people with mental illness are at a greatly increased risk of suicide. One in six people with manic depression take their own lives. That is why I am pleased that the motion refers to

> "the lack of early intervention with the young".

It also expresses

> "concern at the rise in the suicide rate of those suffering from mental illness".

We have a responsibility to the most vulnerable in our society—those who sometimes, through no fault of their own, get left behind. I therefore welcome any measure that addresses that issue. It is with some enthusiasm, therefore, that I support the motion tabled by my right hon. and hon. Friends.

6 pm

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): I welcome the subject of the debate, because we should all work harder to ensure that the issue of mental health is brought out of the shadows and on to the Floor of the House more regularly. In past years, we heard statements on mental health in December 2000 and December 1998, and I welcome today's draft Bill.

I cannot help but recall that, in February 1996, when the Conservative Government made a statement, we were in opposition, pressing the then Secretary of State to halt further psychiatric bed closures until community services were in place. We were pressing for the implementation of a full care programme. We asked that Government to address staff shortages and to change the mental health funding allocation formula to ensure that cash ended up where it was needed. That went unheard at the time, which is why—despite the tone of the remarks from the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox)—I have to say that the new so-called "compassionate conservatism" is a rather shallow plant that lacks historic roots.

Dr. Andrew Murrison (Westbury): Does the hon. Gentleman share my concern at the closure of Elderly mentally infirm mental illness beds across the country, and particularly in my constituency, under this Government without a commensurate increase in hospital at-home provision?

Mr. Battle: The hon. Gentleman should go to the Library to study how we had care in the community by default because of the closure of beds under the previous Government.

Let us consider the future. There is still a deep fear of addressing the taboo of mental health and there is still a stigma attached to it. There is still a sense that although the brain is a wonderful organ, it is still not sufficiently understood, despite all our brilliant neuroscientists. We know little about its complex workings and connections as it integrates, at its best, the mind and the body.

We neglect mental health, and yet how often do we, as Members of Parliament, see people in our advice surgeries who are suffering from mental illness? People come to see us who literally may not have spoken to another person in the two weeks since they were last at our surgeries. People come to see us who are confused, worried about their medication or concerned about their treatment and records. With respect to the doctors in the House, none of us can deal with such problems, but we see that there is a real need in terms of mental health care, and it is increasing. In policy terms, we must not steer clear of the issue but, instead, move closer to it.

For centuries, people with mental health were locked away in Bedlam, in asylums and in institutions, and were forgotten. Now, according to Sane, the mental health charity, one in four of us will suffer some form of mental illness in our lifetimes. We should reflect on that.

We should welcome the more open interest in mental health issues in our society. There is an acceptance of the reality of mental handicap and mental illness that perhaps was not there 10 or 20 years ago. There is an increasing refusal to accept the traditional mind-body split, which implies that each could be treated separately. There is a greater contemporary emphasis on holistic approaches to mental and physical health.

The mental institutions to which my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) referred were closed in an attempt to provide care in the community. I worked in one such institution, in Meanwood Park, and I concur with my hon. Friend; they were not the right places for most of the people who were there. The problem was that when care in the community was introduced, there was neither care, in terms of back-up support services, nor community, in the sense of welcoming someone or offering local neighbourhood support. That left sufferers more isolated, neglected and unsupported than anyone else in society. The funding did not follow the mental health patient, as we were told it would at the time.

I welcome what has happened since then—for example, the Government's plan to increase the priority and significance of mental health, and the increase in investment. I welcome the work to tackle the problem of homelessness. We have a public information campaign and we have heard the announcement of a draft Bill, which deserves full consideration and wider public debate.

In my constituency, the health authority informs me that the rate of schizophrenia in our inner-city area is significantly higher than in other communities in Leeds. That will include post-natal depression, elderly people with dementia and Alzheimer's, people with phobias and people with eating disorders. However, people suffering from mental illness tend to end up at the bottom end, in privately rented terraced housing, small single bedrooms, low quality council housing and miscellaneous properties. They get the worst deal of all and they are up against it in trying to survive from day to day.

I spent a day with the Leeds community mental health trust, visiting day centres and talking to mental health workers and specialists working with those suffering as a result of alcohol and drug abuse. I also talked to patients. I would recommend such a visit to other colleagues, as it was worth while. I recall a young mother at one of the centres who told me that the centre was the only place that she could go where nobody judged her. That was important. We have heard the word "sanctuary" used earlier. Sanctuary is not only a place, but an attitude of mind towards others who feel that they are often accused, blamed, marginalised, dismissed and then written off.

One of the great innovations of the Government has been the reform of the NHS through the introduction of primary care trusts. We have to make sure that the variety of preventive health and social services, designed as a dynamic, supportive local network, work in practice and that each primary care trust gets an adequate budget to follow plans through at a local level. We can get agreement on priorities and objectives, and we can assess the needs. But if we assess that the local surgeries need eight mental health staff, it is not enough to provide funding for two, as has happened in Leeds, West. There are recruitment problems, but that is not all. We need to ensure that resources get to the front line locally. I hope that Ministers and the Department will continue to monitor in detail the reform processes that they have set in train to ensure that that happens.

I want to refer to three policy matters that we must take much more seriously. Colleagues have referred to prisons, and Armley prison is in my constituency. Some 80 per cent. of people in that prison suffer from mental illness and/or drug dependency and alcohol problems. Ten prisoners there today out of 1,247 have been sectioned under the Mental Health Act. Care in the community has come to mean, for many, care in custody.

I welcome the fact that Armley prison is one of the 10 prisons piloting the Government's new mental health in-reach approach. However, the scheme has been going for three months and has a team of seven; it should be nine. We need to follow this through so that the work of the Home Office and the Department of Health are linked. I also wish to refer to outreach, because we must ensure that when a prisoner leaves prison with mental health needs, he is followed through and receives support within the community.

I was involved in the establishment of the all-party group on epilepsy, which is well supported across the House. Some 500,000 people in Britain suffer from epilepsy. There was a report recently on people who have suffered sudden and unexpected death as a result of epilepsy, and it revealed that they were usually young adults. I thank the Minister for the reply that I received to my parliamentary questions of 20 June, in which she welcomed the national central audit of epilepsy-related deaths. The Department has promised to consider the recommendations and to develop a strategy and plan by September of this year. It is important that we treat epilepsy in the same way as diabetes, for example, and not leave it as a Cinderella illness. In the past, people with epilepsy were locked away in mental institutions.

May I make a plea for more attention to be paid to a real crisis area—that of suicides among young men? I have recently come across three such cases—in two cases suicide was attempted, in the third, tragically, the suicide was carried through. Will the Department of Health use its research resources to look at that policy and take it forward? The mental health needs of young men in an increasingly pressured and high-speed world are paramount.

Finally, proper support, assistance and treatment needs to be followed through to help people help themselves. That implies that the wider community assists as well, which means that the care plans referred to in the draft

[Mr. Battle]

Bill will be vital. With proper back-up and the involvement of patients, they could be the focus and centre of the Bill. As a result, we might not fear mental illness as we have in the past but, as a society and through our institutions, we could properly care for sufferers and at last treat them as equal citizens in our society, as we treat anyone else with health needs.

6.11 pm

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): Time is very limited, but I welcome the opportunity to make a brief contribution to the debate.

There is a wide range of mental health problems, including anxiety disorders, attention deficit disorder, dementia, depression, eating disorders, mood disorders, obsessive compulsive disorders, personality disorders, psychotic disorders—including schizophrenia—self-harm, sleep disorders, stress disorders and substance abuse. I am sure that all of us, at various times, have come across those problems in our constituencies. Mental handicap, of course, has its own special problems. One is aware of the love and affection that people with special needs engender in their carers and next of kin.

We must remember that mental illness does not affect a different category of person. As has already been pointed out, one in four of the population suffers from some form of mental illness—and that definition does not even take into account questions of mental fitness. All of us are less than mentally fit at various times. Like physical illness, mental illness should be regarded as a normal part of life. However, that does not mean that it is not stressful for all involved. We recognise that mental illness and lack of mental health impose immense stress and pressure on carers. I am sure that we all wish to pay tribute to those who help people suffering from a mental health problem.

In some cases, mental health problems can be extreme. It is extraordinary that one third of all young men between the ages of 16 and 18 who are sentenced in court are diagnosed with a primary mental disorder. It is even more extraordinary that 70 per cent. of prisoners have mental illness or suffer from drug abuse. That leads to two conclusions: first, there should be a major new initiative, involving the national health service, to care for the mental health of prisoners. The second conclusion, which is not directly related to this debate, is that we must reconsider the treatment of heroin abusers. Locking them up in prison cannot be the answer if they have access to heroin in prison, and leave prison with greater problems than they had when they entered it.

In 1999 the Government promised to introduce a mental health Bill. It took until December 2000 to produce a White Paper, and now we have a draft Bill, which I welcome. I also welcome the Secretary of State's response to my submission that when the Bill has had a Second Reading—I am sure that we all wish it well on that occasion—it should be sent to a Special Standing Committee, so that all the issues can be considered on a non-partisan basis. The Bill would effectively go before a Select Committee, during which members of the Committee could cross-examine experts and form a view before considering it in a Standing Committee. That would be entirely appropriate.

The problems in the national health service include a shortage of psychiatrists, an acute shortage of psychiatric beds, a shortage of social workers in psychiatry and a shortage of people who can treat the large number of people who suffer from dementia. About 5 per cent. of those over 65 suffer from dementia, as do 20 per cent. of those over 80. Those elderly people are unlikely to see a psychiatrist at all.

My greatest sympathy is reserved for the young. In some cases of acute mental illness, young people have to wait a long time to see a psychiatrist. The waiting time in my constituency is 18 months. This is a matter of resources; we need more resources for psychiatrists, and the latest modern drugs.

The time constraints are severe tonight, but I welcome the chance to have made this brief contribution. The debate will have served its purpose if it pushes the Government to give a higher priority to mental health services, and helps all of us to regard mental health care as an important part of the national health service that is worthy of debate and support.

6.16 pm

Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Today's debate has been interesting and enlightening. I agree with many of the comments made by previous speakers, and congratulate the Conservative party on making mental health the subject of this Opposition day debate.

There is much consensus between Government and Opposition on this issue. It was, after all, a Conservative Secretary of State for Health who coined the term "spectrum of services", acknowledging that there had been a failure to put adequate services in place in the community. It is sad that the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) did not acknowledge the failures of the Conservative Government. I agree with much of the Opposition's motion, but I am sad about its failure to acknowledge the positive progress that the Government have made. They have made the vision of the spectrum of services a reality by increasing the number of assertive outreach teams, improving talking treatments and psychology services and investing in the physical infrastructure in our acute wards.

There will be considerable investment in new mental health services in Birmingham. An acute hospital that is not very old is to go. It was provided in the late 1980s, and when I went there, I was appalled at the lack of therapeutic atmosphere in the building. It was a very constrained building that had obviously been subject to a great deal of cost cutting. At last we will get new services; many will be for in-patients, provided locally rather than at the main hospital base. The Government are making that investment. The Conservatives are right to say that we have a long way to go, but it is churlish not to acknowledge that great progress is being made.

I have not yet had an opportunity to look at the draft Bill, but I welcome its publication. I agree with the hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) that it should be subject to Special Standing Committee procedure. It is now nearly 20 years since the last major piece of mental health legislation. The draft Bill represents the opportunity of a lifetime, and we must ensure that we get it right. We must ensure that we balance the emphasis on public protection—which I think is over-emphasised—with people's right to receive appropriate care. That right is not in place at present. Every time we use compulsion it is an indication less of failing in the individual than of failing in the services provided for people in need.

The Government are initiating a 10-year programme to build up capacity. Goodness knows, more money is needed, and we must be vigilant in ensuring that money allocated for mental health services is not diverted to deal with other pressures. However, no matter how much money we put into services, it is also essential that we have enough staff with the necessary skills.

We do not have enough staff at the moment. The Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health has pointed out that in the existing establishment, one in eight positions is vacant. If the ambitions of the Government, expressed in the national service framework and other plans, are to be realised, we shall need an additional 8,000 staff—a 12 per cent. increase.

Psychiatry is a Cinderella service in more ways than one. It is not attractive to newly qualified graduates, and we need to ensure that it becomes more attractive. One reason why people shy away from mental health services is the culture of blame in our society, which creates problems in many services, including social work. Because of the stresses and strains on a service, things go wrong—and it is too easy to blame individual clinicians or social workers for their mistakes. That is not to deny that bad mistakes are sometimes made, or that there is some culpability. In many cases, however, people are working against the odds and we should acknowledge that.

We must deal with the blame culture, and we should move away from too much emphasis on public protection. The only time there is any great publicity or press interest is when a tragic event, especially homicide, occurs. In that context, it is commendable that the Opposition have initiated a debate on mental health when that type of public interest is not current. It is also commendable that they have adopted mental health as one of their priorities; it is already a priority for the Government, so there is much consensus, on the basis of which we can move forward.

At the last meeting of the all-party mental health group, we discussed mental health appeal tribunals. We heard about patients who had to wait more than 20 weeks for their case to be reviewed by a tribunal. The Royal College of Psychiatrists has pointed out that the process is extremely staff-intensive. A mental health appeal tribunal chair told the all-party group about the constraints on the tribunal service, including the shortage of psychiatrists to serve on the panels and the fact that the psychiatrists who have to provide reports for the tribunal are over-stretched.

The White Paper proposed automatic referral to a mental health tribunal after 28 days of compulsory treatment; my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State suggested that the Bill would include such a provision. There is concern, however, that even more psychiatric time will be taken up in dealing with the process, so there is a danger that there will be even more delays in the system. The Government need to consider that point.

Although there is consensus among us, omitted from many contributions to the debate was the need to make the experiences of users of the service central to its provision. We should have respect for them and involve them in decisions about their care. A survey carried out by the National Schizophrenia Fellowship showed that a quarter of mental health service users did not even have the opportunity to discuss their medication, while 62 per cent. said that there was no discussion of any possible alternative.

I am pleased to acknowledge the report produced recently by NICE, which made it clear that the choice of anti-psychotic drugs should be made jointly by the patient and the clinician. The report also noted that the use of atypicals should be a primary consideration, and there should be an end to postcode prescribing of such drugs. Compliance with medication is an important issue, and the use of the more modern drugs must be more widespread. Those drugs are not new; they came out 10 years ago, and it is one of the great failures of our service that they were not taken up.

Advance directives should have higher status; they should be given statutory recognition. If treatment is to be compulsory, the people who make such decisions should take into account the wishes of patients, who should have had the opportunity to express those wishes when they had the capacity to do so. Consideration of such wishes should be a statutory obligation, and patients should be encouraged to carry crisis cards.

The social security system is important to the well-being of mental health service users. I urge Ministers in the Department of Health to ensure that they have input to the development of services by the Department for Work and Pensions. Compulsion causes great stress to people who are already suffering from mental ill health. I draw the attention of the House to early-day motion 1345, which notes the poor availability of benefits to long-term patients, who receive only about £15 a week. The chief executive of the mental health trust in my area has pointed out that she has to use valuable trust resources to subsidise patients who cannot afford such basic needs as haircuts and shoes.

Carers are important. Too often, confidentiality is given as an excuse for excluding them. Obviously, if a service user expressly wishes to exclude relatives, that wish should be respected—although questioned. However, family members are too often excluded by default, because clinicians and service providers do not discuss the needs of the whole family with the service user. We must give greater priority to the involvement of carers. People who suffer from mental ill health, as well as those who suffer from personality disorders—the distinction is sometimes blurred—have often experienced trauma in their lives, and family members can help to provide support and enlightenment.

We need joined-up services. We need good services that take into account the fact that many mentally ill people also suffer from alcohol or drug abuse. Too often, services are either not provided at all or are provided separately, without appropriate links.

More and more health and social services are being provided through partnership arrangements. However, that means that when people want to complain about a service, there is no single point of reference. The local government ombudsman deals with complaints about social services, while the health service ombudsman deals with complaints about the health service. Will the Government consider appointing an ombudsman specifically for mental health service users and their carers?

[Lynne Jones]

Much has been said about stigma. We will not be able to give priority to mental health services until we deal with the stigma. The hon. Member for Woodspring began by saying that in mental health we accepted services that would not be acceptable in any other aspect of health services, and he is right. Too often, people are afraid to speak out about their experiences; they hide their feelings under the carpet.

One day, the shame attached to visiting a psychiatrist will be no greater than the feelings that people have when they visit any other medical practitioner. People will seek help when they need it. They will be able to talk about their experiences. Indeed, they will be proud of their ability to do overcome all the problems associated with mental ill health in our society. Their family members will not suffer the stigma of having someone with a mental illness in their families. The Government are putting in place the policies to achieve that, and we all have a role to play in ensuring that the day when people can talk about their experiences comes sooner rather than later.

6.31 pm

Hywel Williams (Caernarfon): I, too, welcome this debate. I have a long-standing interest in this issue; I am a former social worker, approved under the Mental Health Act 1983. May I say immediately that I was disappointed to find that clause 9(4)(b) of the draft mental health Bill notes that the applicants will not be approved social workers, but approved mental health professionals? When I looked at the explanatory notes, I saw that those approved mental health professionals are

> "to undergo training and have a set level of understanding of mental health legislation and in assessing the non-medical aspects of treatment."

However, I see no reference to civil liberties or to non-discriminatory or non-oppressive practices, and that is a disappointment.

I worked under the previous legislation—the Mental Health Act, which has already been mentioned—and I know very well the weaknesses of the mental welfare officer system applied under that Act. I also know very well the weakness in relation to the independence of mental welfare officers. We now have a once in a generation opportunity to reform mental health legislation. I welcome the draft mental health Bill and look forward to contributing to debates on it.

Care in the community has not been the failure that some people claim. Care in the community has been underfunded. It has not been afforded sufficient priority, and the particular difficulties and opportunities of providing services in rural areas, of which I have great experience, have certainly not been properly addressed. However, it would be ludicrous not to accept that there have been failures, and we need to learn lessons from those mistakes. It is right to pay tribute to people, such as Mrs. Zito, who have suffered and to those who have done so much to draw attention to those failings and to remedy them.

One can understand the Government's wish to consider the safety of the patient and others as a key factor. That is a key factor, but it is not the only one. Care in the community is, and will remain, the first choice most of the time for most of the people with mental health problems. That is a matter of practicality, as well as one of principle.

I hope that some of my concerns will be addressed in the legislation and the developments that flow from it. I am concerned about the quality and the quantity of services in rural areas. After all, we are seeking equality of service throughout the United Kingdom. There are particular costs and difficulties in rural areas—for example, in gaining access to day facilities and to proper assessments if and when compulsory measures are considered. Any new legislation must take account of those issues; it must not be framed only with the urban context in mind. Securing equity of service to rural dwellers requires substantial additional investment in rural services, and we will look for assurances about that specific extra investment from the Government.

Lastly—I should say that I have heavily edited my speech, but hon. Members will have the benefit of hearing my opinions at another time—I am particularly concerned about language issues. I share that concern with hon. Members from other parts of the United Kingdom where there is a measure of societal bilingualism, such as parts of Scotland, and with black and ethnic communities, where many people who could be subject to compulsory mental health treatment may not speak English as their first language, if they speak it at all.

Proper communication is essential to a proper assessment. In fact, the 1983 Act requires that social workers interview patients in a suitable manner. However, the code of practice under that Act clearly takes an ability to speak English as the given context. Other languages are seen as just that—they are other—despite the Welsh Language Act 1993, under which Welsh and English are treated equally. The code of practice apparently suggests that the answer to language problems is to find an interpreter.

Most Welsh or Scots Gaelic speakers can also speak English, but when dealing with highly personal problems, such as mental health issues, they would prefer to use their own chosen language. I am sure that that is the case for speakers of so-called ethnic languages. If I were suffering from a mental health problem, I would need an interpreter, although I think that I am perfectly capable of conducting myself in English. I would prefer to be interviewed in Welsh, and I am sure that that would be infinitely more productive.

Any new legislation and any new code of practice must respond to that issue and ensure that own-language provision becomes easily accessible, which involves rights to advocacy and assessment. Welsh should be used on the same basis as English in the mental health services without remark or hinderance, and I hope that the Minister will give an assurance on that in summing up.

6.36 pm

Valerie Davey (Bristol, West): I will be brief and just make one main point. The basic premise on which I approach health matters is that prevention is better than cure. I want to refer to the work that the Government have started—I hope that it will continue—with young people. Taking up the theme that my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) touched on, I contend that prevention work would be best applied to that issue. No one wants to label such children. I am thankful that relatively few children need acute treatment, but we must not ignore those who do, and the Channel 4 television programme, "Young Minds", has recently added to our awareness of the issue.

Last week, a small group of hon. Members from the Select Committee on Education and Skills visited a remarkable school in Moscow, where, among other things, we met a permanent member of staff—a psychiatrist. The work that she does with not only individual children but the parents, families and the community at large, as well as 200 other teachers, spoke to us of a very important role. She is working with other such people in Denmark and Belgium, but not in Britain. We could learn lessons from that preventive work.

Those with serious mental illness often say that their childhood experiences have led to their developing mental illness later in adulthood. So, in working with children, we should be more aware of the climate in schools, families and communities that leads to mental health, and I ask the Minister, given her previous work, to link up with the work on health that is being done in the Department for Education and Skills to ensure that, to echo the words of the Government amendment, there will indeed be "new services for children".

6.39 pm

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire): We have had an excellent debate on what everyone has agreed is an important and topical subject. Let me first refer to what was said by the hon. Member for Bristol, West (Valerie Davey). It is true that concentration on children's services and early intervention are vital, which is one reason for the reference to early intervention in the motion.

The great frustration for the party in opposition is that all its members can do is talk about issues. Part of the privilege of standing at the other Dispatch Box is the ability to do something. I agree with the Secretary of State that deeds, not words, count. Nevertheless, choosing the subjects to be debated can enable us to make a difference. Nearly everyone who has spoken today has agreed that simply by raising the subject of mental illness the Opposition have done something worth while.

As the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) has said, as the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe)—Chairman of the Select Committee—has said, as the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Lynne Jones) has said, as my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) has said, and as so many others have said, the stigma attached to the issue of mental health is one of the biggest obstacles to changing the way in which mental health services are delivered.

I agree with the hon. Member for Wakefield that the old system of asylums was awful, and had to be changed. He defended care in the community, as did the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Hywel Williams). I do not believe, however, that anyone could accept that that policy was implemented adequately. I have talked to carers and others who experienced its implementation. It is impossible to justify the inappropriate placing and the turning away of so many people, and the fact that the facilities they needed were not available. I still defend the liberation of tens of thousands of people who did not need to be in long-stay mental institutions, but we must recognise the realities of what happened.

As the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak said, we must recognise progress where the Government have achieved it. Today, after five years, we have a draft Bill on mental health. I am pleased that we have it, but five years is quite some time for us to wait for a change in the law that was promised so long ago. I am also pleased that it has now been decided that atypical medicines will be available to schizophrenics, but that too has been a long time coming. It has taken two years for the National Institute for Clinical Excellence alone to act.

There has been progress. It is, however, the job of Oppositions to hold Governments to their word—which we are trying to do—and also to talk to those involved with mental health. It is our job to go and see what is best practice, what works and what does not, so that when the time comes for us to present our policies they are well informed and based on practice.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. David Lammy): When will that be?

Mr. Heald: Unfortunately for us, we must wait three years, or possibly four, before we can sit on the other side of the House and present our policies; but I look forward to that day. I am determined that when it comes, our policy on mental health will be one of which we can be proud. The Secretary of State should not be complacent.

We have important questions about the Bill, and we want answers. We want to know whether the compulsory treatment in the community to which the Bill refers means that medication will be given only in a hospital setting. The Bill mentions a clinical setting. What exactly does that mean?

What is the effect of the changes made since the White Paper to treatability and the definition of mental disorder? Do they mean, as was suggested by the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris), that those with personality disorders will be detained indefinitely, or can the Minister promise us that reassuring new safeguards have been introduced? Will she also answer a question put by my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox)? What will the Bill do to improve arrangements for the transfer of those with mental illness from prison to more suitable settings? That is one of the major issues of the day.

Then there is the issue of sanctuary. Let us not forget the experiences described by my hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Mr. Swire). He told us of a tragedy in his constituency involving a triple suicide. Such incidents make us realise what a priority mental health is when vulnerable people are at risk. I welcome the Government's target of a 20 per cent. reduction in the number of suicides over 10 years, but the fact is that the number has risen by 1 per cent.

The Secretary of State is right to be pleased about movement on crisis resolution teams, but halfway through the period he identified—2000 to 2004—there are 52 of them. He promised that by 2004 there would be 335. He is nowhere near halfway there, at the halfway stage. He promised that there would be 77 more this year. Will there be? He promised that there would be 50 early intervention teams by 2004. So far there are 16. He is not halfway there, but he is halfway through the time. Only 4 per cent. of local teams have established complete services of the sort that was promised. The Audit Commission has complained that less than half the number of specialist teams for the elderly are present in the areas where they are needed.

[Mr. Heald]

We were promised 700 extra workers to give carers respite. As far as we know, none have been appointed. We were promised 1,000 new primary care workers; there is not even a system enabling those who are there to be counted. The Secretary of State laughs. The fact is that he promised that by 2004 every prisoner would be seen and given a care plan on leaving prison. Here we are in 2002, and what has the Secretary of State done? He has changed the target: he now says that that will happen by 2006. We were told that there would be such services in every prison. In fact the Government aim to provide them in only 70 prisons—70 out of 136—by 2004. That cannot mean "every prisoner".

There are gaps in provision. Where is the money going? Day by day, we hear that money is not reaching the front line—money that was promised. We know that last year £10 million promised for child mental health was simply reallocated for general expenditure. We heard in the Chamber recently from my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) that Wiltshire faces cuts. Some of us attended a recent event organised by the Zito Trust, where its latest report on prescribing was to be unveiled. A consultant from Shropshire said that he faced cuts there as well. We have been lobbied about cuts in Manchester, and we have heard evidence of cuts in Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire and North Cumbria.

It is all very well for the Secretary of State to twit me and say that we have had some extra services in North Hertfordshire. I am grateful for that and so are my constituents, but we are still two consultants short. Whatever area the Secretary of State mentions, he does not give the complete picture. He says that the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring has been given extra services, but the hospital is being closed. Right across the country the money is not getting through. It is no good having targets if they are not met.

It is the Opposition's job to do what I am doing now—to push the Government, and make them keep their promises on mental health. We have a duty to do that, because we are talking about trying to help the most vulnerable members of society. I want the new Bill to recognise that carers and other users of the system want conditions allowing them, as far as possible, to consent to treatment. We will read the Bill carefully, but the Secretary of State should be in no doubt about this: we want a Bill that will improve conditions for those who experience the tragedy of mental ill health, and that is not what the White Paper promised originally. If the Secretary of State has moved in our direction, we shall be pleased.

Above all, the issue is about human rights as well as money. When it comes to preferences for treatment, we want the Bill to ensure that patients and carers are at the centre of what is proposed and planned. We want the mental health sector to have the dignity that for so long it has not had. That means that when people suffering from mental health problems present themselves at hospital, they will not be turned away—as happens in one out of three cases at the moment.

6.50 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Jacqui Smith): Like other hon. Members who have spoken in this debate, I am grateful for the opportunity that it has afforded to focus the House's attention on this very important topic. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health pointed out, it has been high on the Government's agenda since we first published the "Modernising Mental Health Services" White Paper in 1998.

I hope that it has been apparent in the debate that the Government share the concern expressed by Opposition Members and many other hon. Members about those in society who suffer from mental health problems. The concern is shared by hon. Members of all parties, but although I do not want to cast aspersions on the conversion of Opposition Members, my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) described compassionate Conservatism as apparently having no roots. Given the numbers of Opposition Members present, it does not have many branches either.

The hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) was right to express concern about homeless people who also have mental health problems. I remind him that it was not a Labour Minister who described the difficulty of stepping over the homeless to get into the opera. The Opposition's conversion to concern about the vulnerable and people with mental health problems is relatively recent.

We share the concerns of those who have expressed their anxiety about mental health problems. However, we do not share the analysis of the causes.

Sir Michael Spicer (West Worcestershire): Will the Minister accept that a Labour Minister started the process of closing mental hospitals on a large scale in the 1970s? That happened to the detriment of my constituency, where two mental hospitals were closed in the 1970s.

Jacqui Smith: In fact, the hon. Member for Woodspring—in a rare mood of contrition—claimed that a Conservative Government were responsible for that, and apologised for it.

We share Opposition Members' concerns about mental health services, but we point the finger at the decades of underinvestment by the previous Administration. That led to crumbling buildings, demoralised staff and inadequate treatment. We inherited that legacy of neglect when we came to power, and we have been addressing it with vigour ever since.

We set out our agenda in 1998. Our aim was to modernise mental health care and social care, to provide new investment for reform and to ensure a modern legal framework to support effective treatment outside as well as inside hospital. We are delivering on that agenda.

All over the country, services are being reconfigured to meet the standards set out in the national service framework for mental health, to ensure better and faster care for people with mental health problems. New community teams have been established, and there are more staff and improved acute in-patient care. Of course, the scene will not be transformed overnight, and we would all like services to progress further and faster. However, across the nation, local implementation teams and front-line staff are working hard to improve mental health care. We do them a grave disservice if we fail to recognise how far they have come already, given the low base from which they had to start.

We are investing in mental health services, with £329 million set aside to support our NHS plan commitments. That money for the future was described by Opposition Members as "reckless" when we first allocated it, and they voted against it. With the draft mental health Bill that we published today, we have started the process that will lead to the 21st century legal framework that we need to underpin 21st century services.

The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) raised concern—

Mr. Heald: Will the Minister give way?

Jacqui Smith: No. *[Interruption.]* There is a limited amount of time left, and I want to make progress.

The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon rightly emphasised that mental health legislation needs to strike a careful balance between the protection necessary for patients and the public, and the safeguards that are in place. I can reassure him that we will continue to develop services in the community to ensure that the provision exists and is covered by modernised legislation.

I do not understand where the claims by the Royal College of Psychiatrists about the extra consultants needed for tribunals come from, but I am willing to work with the royal college to ensure that the tribunal plans work effectively.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) rightly emphasised the need for closer integration of the NHS and social services departments. I am sure that, like me, he welcomes the fact that three out of four of the first care trusts in the country are focusing on mental health services.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield also emphasised the need to move out patients who no longer need to be in high-security hospitals. We are making progress on our target to move 400 patients out of special high-security hospitals and into more appropriate care.

My hon. Friend also raised the important point about the tension between non-stigmatisation and the Bill's efforts to deal with the most severely ill. When hon. Members look at the Bill in more detail, they will see that it balances its broad definition of mental disorder with tight conditions, and that it massively increases the safeguards for patients. I believe that the Bill strikes the correct balance between the protection of patients and the need to safeguard their rights.

Several hon. Members spoke about the need for greater user involvement. I agree with them, and massive advances are taking place around the country in user involvement in the development of services.

The hon. Member for Caernarfon (Hywel Williams) spoke about the principles underlying the Bill. The code of practice will set out the principles and their application.

Mr. Heald: Will the Minister give way?

Jacqui Smith: No.

Those principles will be that patients will be involved in decisions about their care, that the decision maker will have to demonstrate the minimum level of intrusion, and that decisions need to be taken in a fair and open way. I can assure the hon. Member for Caernarfon also that the role of the approved mental health professional will be covered in the necessary training.

The hon. Member for East Devon (Mr. Swire) and others raised the issue of suicide. My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West highlighted the high incidence of suicide among young men. The Government are undertaking consultation on a national suicide strategy, with active proposals to tackle the problem. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West about the emphasis on primary care.

The hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) rightly emphasised the wide spectrum of mental disorders, and spoke about child and adolescent mental health services, which were also mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, West (Valerie Davey). I agree that we need to ensure that the extra £105 million invested in child and adolescent mental health services develops those very specialist services. I can also assure my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, West that the work that the Department is carrying out already with the Department for Education and Skills continues. We aim to ensure that the links between professionals to support young people are forged at school level and at local level. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Lynne Jones) rightly recognised the progress made, and also emphasised the need for more staff. Users have a particularly important role to play, especially as support, time and recovery workers.

Mental health is at the heart of the Government's investment and reform in the health service. All of us will have been touched by mental health problems in ourselves, in our families and in our friends. As my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak pointed out, many will successfully recover and help to challenge the stigma and discrimination that have too often blighted patients' experience and service development.

Today, the Opposition have pledged plenty of sympathy and even some contrition, but no policy and no money. That is why they can never deliver better mental health services, and why they can never be trusted to support the ill and the excluded in our communities: only this Government can, and only this Government will. I commend our amendment to the House.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 187, Noes 317.

Division No. 282] **[7 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
(NE Fife)
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Curry, Rt Hon David

Djanogly, Jonathan
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Goodman, Paul
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas
(Macclesfield)
Wishart, Pete
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Dr. Julian Lewis and
Mr. David Wilshire.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baird, Vera
Barron, Rt Hon Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas
(Newcastle E & Wallsend)
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles
(Norwich S)
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack
(Copeland)
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay

Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hume, John
Hurst, Alan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie
(Welwyn Hatfield)
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
[illegible], Malcolm
W[illegible], Rt Hon Alan
(S[illegible]sea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Jim Fitzpatrick and
Mr. Jim Murphy.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House expresses its deep concern at the plight of those who suffer mental ill-health and notes that almost every family will have experience of some form of mental illness; notes the decades of under-investment which led to crumbling buildings, demoralised staff and inadequate treatment under the Conservative Government which left many of the most vulnerable in society without the care they need; supports this Government's investment in NHS mental health services to ensure better and faster care for people with mental health problems, including new community teams, more staff, improved acute care and new services for children; supports the full implementation of the Mental Health National Service Framework to ensure national standards are in place for the care and treatment of mental illness; recognises the massive contribution of carers and the Government's action to support them, and commends the Government's 'mind out for mental health' campaign to tackle stigma; and believes that improving mental health services should remain a key Government priority.

Zimbabwe

7.14 pm

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): I beg to move,

That this House deplores the deteriorating political, economic and humanitarian situation in Zimbabwe; condemns the continuing violations of basic human rights committed by the Mugabe regime; reaffirms the view that following the rigged presidential election in March the current Zimbabwean government lacks legitimacy; regrets the failure of Her Majesty's Government and the EU to implement sanctions and exert effective pressure on the Mugabe regime to hold new free and independently monitored presidential elections; recognises the growing politically-induced humanitarian suffering in Zimbabwe, and its effects on her neighbours; and calls on Her Majesty's Government to take effective action to build an international coalition to apply whatever pressure is necessary, in line with the Harare Declaration, to restore democracy in Zimbabwe through fresh Presidential elections.

This debate should have taken place a long time ago, and it should also have taken place in Government time. Zimbabwe is not a far-off land about which we know little; it is a land that we know all too well. Zimbabwe is in crisis. Her people are suffering—suffering from starvation, suffering from a breakdown in the rule of law, suffering from the loss of basic democratic freedoms, suffering from a systematic violation of human rights and suffering from a vote-rigging despot who uses intimidation and lawlessness to impose his will upon his people.

If we were talking about Kosovo or Bosnia, the Prime Minister would rightly insist on our moral duty to intervene to save the people from tyranny, dispersal and torture. If we were talking about the Indian sub-continent, the Foreign Secretary would be jetting in to exercise persuasion and economic muscle to restore normality. If we were talking about the middle east, prime ministerial envoys would be whistle-stopping around the region seeking support for political action to deal with the crisis. But we are talking about Zimbabwe, yet from the Government there has been silence and inaction.

Until Question Time this afternoon, there had been no recent statements in the House on Zimbabwe and there has been no evidence of the creation of the international coalition to bring pressure to bear on the Mugabe regime that was promised by the Foreign Secretary when he told the House that an international coalition was

"exactly what we have been seeking to put together and have, indeed, put together."—[*Official Report*, 21 March 2002; Vol. 382, c. 449.]

He could have fooled me. He certainly fooled the people of Zimbabwe.

It is starkly indicative that it has taken the Opposition to bring this matter to the Floor of the House. I have accused the Government of dithering over Zimbabwe, but I confess that I am wrong. Since March, there has not been enough action to merit the description "dithering." There has only been silence, broken astonishingly last week on 20 June when the Foreign Secretary claimed, as he did earlier today, that sanctions were working and that Zimbabwe's Government were experiencing—I think these are the words he used—isolation from the rest of the world. Who does he think he is kidding? Certainly not the people of Gib—*[Interruption]*—Zimbabwe, or of Gibraltar; certainly not the people of Zimbabwe.

Let me say to the Foreign Secretary that the people of Zimbabwe feel a sense of betrayal that Britain has turned its back on them and that it is afraid to take on the Mugabe regime. They see the Government ensconced in their well-practised mode of supine inaction. Many Zimbabweans to whom I have spoken recently believe that we no longer care about what happens in Zimbabwe. I can only tell them that Conservative Members care passionately.

Hugh Bayley (City of York) *rose*—

Mr. Ancram: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman cares passionately, so I shall be delighted to give way to him.

Hugh Bayley: I have taken an interest in Zimbabwe for a long time. When the right hon. Gentleman's party were in power, Mugabe wiped out the opposition party, ZAPU, and 10,000 Zimbabweans were butchered in Matabeleland. What protests did the right hon. Gentleman's Government lodge; what sanctions did they apply; and why did they later invite Mugabe to Britain on a state visit?

Mr. Ancram: I do not understand whether the hon. Gentleman is suggesting that that is any reason to ignore what is happening in Zimbabwe today. I count 10 Labour Members in the Chamber for this debate, and that is a sign of how much the Labour party cares about what is happening in Zimbabwe.

We know that the crisis in Zimbabwe is getting worse. It is important that not only the House but the country should know about what is horrifyingly growing unchecked in Zimbabwe. We cannot turn a blind eye to it and we cannot afford to be squeamish. Our motion refers to the

"deteriorating political, economic and humanitarian situation in Zimbabwe"

and to

"the continuing violations of basic human rights".

The truth is stark. According to the report of the independent Physicians for Human Rights, between January and April this year, there were 961 documented cases of torture. There have been many more since then.

Some of the cases are horrifying. A Movement for Democratic Change supporter was attacked three times. Eight months pregnant, she was kicked so badly in the groin and lower abdomen that she suffered internal bleeding for which she was prevented from getting treatment. Subsequently, her eight-day-old baby was physically abused by Mugabe's thugs while she was gagged to silence her screams. She was told by them that her baby should die because it was "MDC property".

Documented cases of torture include severe beatings, mutilation by fire, whippings, permanent disfigurement and crippling, much of it taking place in the custody of the police or the military. One victim in May was abducted in front of the central police station in Bulawayo and taken to a militia camp. He was accused of being an MDC supporter. A flaming log was taken from a fire and forced against his feet. His mutilated feet were then beaten. A former policeman accused of being MDC was beaten about his head with a metal bar and then more generally with sjamboks by ZANU youth militia. When he complained to the police he was told:

"anyone suspected of being MDC will be beaten up".

The fact is that the police turn a blind eye to such torture and abuse, probably because more than 90 per cent. of such cases emanate from the actions of persons linked to the Government—the army, the police, the militia, the veterans groups. There is little fear of repercussions because the Government have let it be known that grants of clemency and amnesty will be forthcoming.

An apologist for Mugabe told me the other day that I should not be too censorious about what was happening in Zimbabwe because "This was Africa". Such comments are a slur on that great continent. The abuse is not African; it is the abuse of a fascist dictatorship. The international community can no longer stand by and let it happen.

After elections in March that were internationally judged to be rigged and stolen, the Foreign Secretary told the House:

> "we do not recognise the result or its legitimacy."—[*Official Report*, 14 March 2002; Vol. 381, c. 1035.]

I hope the right hon. Gentleman will confirm that that remains his position.

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): Yes.

Mr. Ancram: I am grateful for that. Mugabe and his henchmen have ridden roughshod over democracy in Zimbabwe. It is worth recalling that the principles of the 1991 Harare declaration—this is ironic—state:

> "We believe . . . in the individual's inalienable right to participate by means of free and democratic processes in the society in which he or she lives".

Yet two days after the elections, Mugabe laid formal charges of treason against the leaders of the MDC. Between January and August this year, the Parliament will have been closed for all but two days in May, when legislation was pushed through without consultation or debate.

In terms of the law, Mugabe has ignored any rulings that did not suit him. On 9 April, a senior Government official, George Charama, said that it was the intention of the Government to ignore rulings by the court which were not in the Government's favour. The contemptuous Government reaction to the Supreme Court ruling that the Public Order and Security Act did not apply to certain internal meetings of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions only helps to corroborate that.

Press freedom and freedom of expression are also under attack. The draconian Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act has already allowed the arrest of more than a dozen journalists on various charges. Poets, too, have been jailed under that legislation for poetry critical of Mugabe.

Zimbabwe's economic outlook is even bleaker. The violent land-grabs continue. Yesterday, 60 per cent. of Zimbabwe's remaining white farmers were told to close down. Many of them will not even be allowed to complete the essential grading of the tobacco that used to provide 30 per cent. of Zimbabwe's foreign currency. Agricultural output has fallen 67 per cent. from last year. Farmers are being dispossessed and their labourers are losing their jobs and watching helplessly as their families face hunger and homelessness.

Unemployment has soared to 70 per cent. Business closures are rife. Everyone is suffering except for those who are in Mugabe's pocket. Inflation has now reached 122 per cent. Skilled people are leaving Zimbabwe. Wildlife, so essential to the tourism industry, has been devastated, including the rare black rhino. The dire economic crisis is beginning seriously to damage neighbouring economies as well.

Then there is the Mugabe-created and fuelled humanitarian crisis. Some 6 million people face malnutrition in Zimbabwe. The United Nations estimates that Zimbabwe needs 1.5 million tonnes of food aid, including 1.3 million tonnes of corn. Mugabe cynically and dishonestly blames the white imperialists, but the blame lies firmly on his shoulders. He is even blocking grain imports from the port of Beira.

Home production has been devastated by the land-grabs. Andrew Meikle, chairman of Commercial Grain Producers, projects a harvest of only 498,000 tonnes this year compared with 1.47 million last year and 2.1 million in 2000. Wheat is expected to run out by the end of the month. The crisis is massive and it is politically induced. My hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) will have more to say on that in her winding-up speech.

The horrifying truth is that Mugabe is using starvation as a political tool. He is primarily responsible for his people's hunger. The PHR report vividly describes how the feeding plan in Midlands school has been altered to keep MDC children from obtaining food. A ZANU-PF councillor is chillingly reported as having said:

> "even if stone was to melt, MDC children will not get the food because it is ZANU food".

While our Government may say little, others have spoken out. USAID head, Andrew Natsios, describes Mugabe as tyrannical and predatory. Mary Robinson, the UN Human Rights Commissioner, has accused Mugabe of being primarily responsible for the hunger and deprivation afflicting Zimbabwe. Mugabe may blame drought, but the truth is that his people go hungry alongside full dams with the waters unexploited.

We must make no mistake about it: the crisis and the evil are real, and real international action is urgently needed. It simply does not wash for the Foreign Secretary to say, as he did at Question Time today, that action is being taken. The right hon. Gentleman has to answer some central questions. What has exclusion from the councils of the Commonwealth achieved? How many meetings has Zimbabwe been excluded from? Will it still attend the Commonwealth games at the end of next month? Will any Zimbabwean Ministers attend those games? What message will that give to Mr. Mugabe?

Then there are the EU targeted sanctions which the Foreign Secretary apparently believes are isolating the Zimbabwean Government. I thought that Mugabe and senior members of his regime were supposed to be banned from travelling. In the words of the Foreign Secretary in January, that policy was "clear, unanimous and unambiguous"—so clear, apparently, that Mugabe was able to attend the United Nations in New York; so unanimous that Grace Mugabe was recently able to go shopping in Spain; and so unambiguous that police chief Augustine Chihuri was able to attend a meeting of Interpol in Lille in May, and Mugabe, with offensive irony, was able to attend a UN conference on world hunger in Rome a few days ago. Dr. Olivia Muchena, Minister of State in the Vice-Presidents' office, a former Deputy Minister of Agriculture, is allowed to travel

[Mr. Ancram]

at will. Kumberai Kengai, ex-Minister of Agriculture, is receiving medical treatment in the United Kingdom. Why is the travel ban list not comprehensive? The asset freeze includes Mugabe, individual members of the Government of Zimbabwe and any natural or legal persons, entities or bodies associated with them. But only 20 individuals are named in the travel ban.

It is time that the Government faced the facts. EU targeted sanctions are not working. The author of the recent International Crisis Group report described the sanctions as a joke. He went on to say:

> "Britain and the EU talk tough and do nothing. They threatened Mugabe that if he stole the election they would come down hard on him. Mugabe must be laughing at them."

What an indictment!

The sanctions regime needs to be strengthened both in scope and extent; it needs to encompass more targets; and it needs to be given more bite. I would like the sanctions regime to include the immediate families of those who are on the banned list. Why has the EU perversely postponed further consideration of such an urgently needed review of the sanctions until 22 July? Ministers met—what was it, a week and a half ago? Did they not consider at that time whether the sanctions were working? Last week's General Affairs Council conclusions contained one page about Zimbabwe and not a single action point.

The Government have lost the plot on Zimbabwe. The overriding objective must now be to secure new, fresh, independently monitored presidential elections. Any fudged and artificial compromise between ZANU-PF and the MDC that falls short of that would be a victory for Mugabe's dishonesty and his despotic behaviour, and the MDC are right to reject it.

Tony Baldry (Banbury): My right hon. Friend has said a lot about the EU, but is this matter not also a test for Africa? Today, the G8 is discussing in earnest the New Partnership for Africa's Development. If NEPAD is to have any substance or meaning, surely the heads of Government of other African states should bring pressure to bear on Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe is a test of whether NEPAD will work for Africa.

Mr. Ancram: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point, which I intended to make a little later in my remarks. I fully agree with him. The coalition I mentioned could bring pressure to bear on NEPAD's African members to exert pressure through NEPAD. I think that that would have a substantial effect, so it is one of the things that we would like to see being done in the coming days.

We should no longer expect Mugabe to listen to reason. He mocks the British Government's rhetoric and the Prime Minister's high moral pronouncements. He now believes that he can literally get away with murder and that we will not react, but I tell the House that the time has come when we have to act. Of course we should not try to act alone: we have to build a powerful international coalition to meet the challenges of what is now an incipient rogue state. With ourselves, such a coalition should include the European Union, the United States, the Commonwealth and, most important of all, South Africa and its neighbours, along with Nigeria.

The coalition's objectives should be the re-running of the presidential elections, democratically conducted and independently monitored and refereed, if necessary involving further talks between ZANU-PF and the MDC to negotiate the means of setting such elections in process. The coalition must be strong and cohesive enough to exert on Mugabe the political, economic and, if necessary, military pressure needed to achieve its objectives. It must be bound together by an understanding that failure to deal with the crisis in Zimbabwe threatens the whole region and will make international economic support for the region less practicable.

Mr. Straw: Just now the right hon. Gentleman mentioned military pressure, and in his preliminary remarks he made a reference to Kosovo. Is he suggesting that we should either unilaterally or multilaterally take military action against the Mugabe regime?

Mr. Ancram: No, I am not. At this stage I do not wish to rule anything in or anything out in judging what is necessary to bring sufficient pressure to bear on Mugabe to hold fresh elections. However, if the coalition is to be effective, it must have the means—whatever means are necessary—to achieve its objectives. For that reason, I mentioned the three areas of economic, political and military pressure very deliberately in that context.

The coalition must have strong and clear aims. In African terms, it should aim to isolate Zimbabwe diplomatically if the violence and intimidation do not cease, and it should persuade countries such as Libya to cease the material help that they currently give to Zimbabwe, which only serves to encourage Mugabe. In Commonwealth terms, the coalition should seek to secure the implementation of the Abuja agreement of last September in respect of the rule of law in Zimbabwe and the proper transfer of land. *[Interruption.]* The Secretary of State for International Development says, "We have tried," but I do not believe that we have tried hard enough. I want a coalition that can bring real pressure to bear. In EU and US terms, the coalition should extend targeted sanctions to directors and top officials in ZANU-PF affiliated businesses and strengthen the freezing of assets against them. The sanctions must be made effective in ways that they currently are not.

At the same time, the coalition should make the public in southern African aware of current levels of corruption in Zimbabwe. It should implement the recommendation of the UN panel on the illegal exploitation of natural resources in the Congo to make Mugabe face up to the realities of Zimbabwe's crisis. As I said in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry), at the G8 summit, progress on the NEPAD initiative should be linked to stronger and more credible efforts by African Governments to resolve Zimbabwe's crisis.

The time for appeasement and empty rhetoric is over. Supine inaction must now be replaced by action—*[Interruption.]* The Foreign Secretary returns to his usual theme: in the past when I have called on the Government to stop talking and start doing, he has always responded by accusing me of offering no plan for action. If he had been listening for the past few minutes, he would have realised that I have laid out a clear pattern of action that a coalition can and should take.

Time is running short. If disaster is to be averted, the Government can no longer afford to look the other way—the problem will not resolve itself. Hiding behind the alibi of our colonial past to excuse our inaction will no longer wash. Yet again, I call on the Government to cease the hand-wringing and the empty rhetoric, and to stand up against dictatorship for democracy and the rule of law.

I remind the House of what the Prime Minister said at his party conference last October, when he told the country that he would heal the scars of Africa:

"if Rwanda happened again today . . . we would have a moral duty to act there",

and added that he would

"not tolerate . . . the behaviour of Mugabe's henchmen".

The Government must now demonstrate that the Prime Minister's words are more than mere rhetoric. Let us see action—and let us see it now, before it is too late.

7.37 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"expresses its grave concern at the abuse of human rights and suppression of freedom of expression in Zimbabwe, the increase in poverty arising from the policies of the ruling party, and the impending humanitarian crisis in the country; reaffirms the view that the outcome of the recent Presidential election does not reflect the will of the Zimbabwean people; recognises the need for Land Reform but also recognises that this needs to be done responsibly; welcomes the actions taken on Zimbabwe by Her Majesty's Government in co-operation with the EU, the Commonwealth, the US and others; further welcomes the efforts of the Governments of South Africa and Nigeria to facilitate dialogue between ZANU (PF) and MDC, and deplores ZANU (PF)'s withdrawal from these talks; further welcomes the Government's commitment of £32 million to humanitarian relief in Zimbabwe outside official channels; and calls on the Government to encourage other donors to stand by the people of Zimbabwe at this difficult time."

I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) and the Opposition for organising this debate in Opposition time. The fact that it is the first Opposition debate devoted to a foreign affairs subject for two years illustrates the difficulty that the right hon. Gentleman had in persuading his right hon. and hon. Friends in the shadow Cabinet to agree to it. That is emphasised by the fact that the Leader of the Opposition takes almost no interest in Zimbabwe or, indeed, in Africa.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): Will the Foreign Secretary give way?

Mr. Straw: No, of course I will not.

The Leader of the Opposition has made only one foreign policy speech in the whole time that he has occupied that post—getting on for a year. In that speech, on foreign policy and the world, there is not a single reference to Zimbabwe, still less to the rest of Africa.

The speech that we have just heard from the right hon. Member for Devizes is long on indignation and almost wholly devoid of action. He says that his agenda for action beyond what we are already doing is to rule nothing in and to rule nothing out. I thought that he gave away his real interests when, in a slip of which Freud would have been proud, he said that not even the people of Gibraltar would be fooled by what we are doing. That illustrates only too well that he could as well have applied his speech to Gibraltar as to Zimbabwe, despite the entirely different circumstances.

Mr. Turner: How many people have been murdered in Gibraltar?

Mr. Straw: None as far as I know—or if they have, the Gibraltar police have investigated. I merely point out the fact that the right hon. Member for Devizes made an extraordinary but highly revealing Freudian slip.

What we heard today, and what we hear from the right hon. Member for Devizes each time the issue is raised, is the usual incantation in which he calls for the establishment of an international coalition, including members of the Commonwealth, the European Union, the United States and countries in southern Africa, to take effective action against the regime. When we have achieved exactly that—in the Commonwealth, with Zimbabwe's suspension, and in the EU, with targeted sanctions against the ruling party and the military—the right hon. Gentleman has scarcely been able to hide his disappointment.

This morning, as he has so often done, the right hon. Gentleman made similar remarks on the radio to those that he made this evening, describing what is unquestionably a profoundly dire situation, and implying that all that rests between peace and harmony in Zimbabwe and the current circumstances is what he describes as inaction by the British Government. Would that that were the situation. When put on the spot, as the right hon. Gentleman was this morning, and asked what Britain could realistically do, given its history with Zimbabwe, he said:

"I think we shouldn't try to do anything on our own . . . this is a situation which has wider implications than just within Zimbabwe."

He went on to say:

"I would like to see now an international coalition put together which would put pressure on Mr. Mugabe's regime and make sure that a number of things are done."

What the right hon. Gentleman does, which is a deception of the good people of Zimbabwe, is to make the wish the deed. The wish is straightforward: that we move quickly to new elections, which are properly monitored at every stage and which Mugabe and his henchmen do not steal. The wish is that that regime have an agricultural policy which allows the farmers to do what they are dedicated to and skilled in—that is, planting and growing crops—rather than the current circumstance. The wish is that that regime sign up, in deed as well as in words, to the Harare principles and allow the judiciary to operate properly, observe human rights and ends the arbitrary arrest and detention of Opposition spokespersons and journalists.

We share those wishes. The question is how they can be achieved. That can be only by an international coalition and international co-operation. I wish we could have gone further in some respects. The constraint is not the desire or the wish of the United Kingdom, but the need to ensure that we get together an international coalition.

Let me remind the House of the steps that we are taking, both bilaterally and with our partners in the Commonwealth, the EU, the US and countries in the region to encourage reform and avert further disaster in Zimbabwe. Bilaterally, we have introduced a range of sanctions, including an arms embargo and a reduction in

[Mr. Straw]

development assistance to the Government of Zimbabwe, to ensure that the regime cannot divert UK funds for its own ends.

However, in recognition of the scale of the economic disaster engulfing the country, we have increased our own humanitarian relief to Zimbabwe, but our aid moneys go direct to impartial groups such as non-governmental organisations and Churches, ensuring that those most in need, rather than ZANU-PF insiders, benefit. In the past 12 months we have committed £10 million in humanitarian assistance. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development, who will wind up the debate for the Government, announced last week £45 million of further assistance for the region, of which we expect almost half to go to Zimbabwe.

Over the past 12 months, we have promoted international action against Mr. Mugabe's regime. I noticed that when my hon. Friend the Member for City of York (Hugh Bayley) asked the right hon. Member for Devizes about the cosy relationship that existed under the Thatcher Government and, I may say, the Major Government, the right hon. Gentleman's answer was devoid of content. The record of the previous Government, once the noble Lord Carrington had ceased to be Foreign Secretary, was not altogether a creditable one, to put it mildly.

That continued through the astonishing blindness that the previous Government showed in the mid-1980s when, as my hon. Friend said, 10,000 people in Matabeleland were slaughtered, and the reward that President Mugabe received for that was a state visit, which gave him the most astonishing endorsement of his actions. Much more recently, when the President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons, my right hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), was Foreign Secretary, throughout the period that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development has held her post, and since I have held my present post, President Mugabe's principal complaint about the current Government was that we have not been easy to deal with—unlike the previous Government, we have been told repeatedly, who turned out to be remarkably easy to deal with. That is a charge to which I and my right hon. Friends are only too happy to plead guilty.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): The Foreign Secretary and I were both in the House in the mid-1980s. There is some merit in his criticism of the Government whom I served at that time, but I have a clear memory that there was next to no mention from those on the Opposition Benches of what was happening in Matabeleland. There was certainly no Supply day debate, and the only person who comes out of it with any credit is my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Sir Nicholas Winterton). We do not need any lessons from the Government on the dreadful tragedy of Matabeleland.

Mr. Straw: As I have said before, the record of the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Sir Nicholas Winterton) is one which stands starkly in the House. He has taken a consistent approach to the matter, and I give credit to him, as I have done before. I admire the frankness of the right hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay) about the record of the previous Government, which stands in stark contrast to the attitude of the right hon. Member for Devizes, who speaks from the Opposition Front Bench on Foreign Affairs.

As to our position, I am happy to go through the record, but I expect that it will transpire that we raised the issue at the time. It was the party of the right hon. Member for Bracknell who were in government, and they did nothing about it. Yes, we are in government now, and I shall run through the efforts that we have made in response to the flagrant breach by Mugabe and his people of the Harare principles, and the even worse humanitarian disaster into which the country is being plunged by that regime.

We have strongly supported regional efforts led by South Africa and Nigeria to establish a dialogue between ZANU-PF and the opposition MDC. One of the critical things that we had to do was to end the myth that Mugabe had so cleverly perpetrated, that he was involved in a bilateral dispute between him, President Robert Mugabe, the leader of the freedom fighters in the whole of Africa, and the former unpleasant colonial power, the United Kingdom. It has taken considerable effort, persuasion and diplomacy by the British Government—particularly by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development and by my predecessor—which I have been happy to follow, to build up the confidence of the other African nations about our good faith in respect of Africa as a whole, and to assure the Governments, particularly the leading Governments such as South Africa and Nigeria, that we are doing that not as some post-colonial exercise, but out of our commitment to the peoples of Africa, whatever their race, colour or creed.

In addition, the European Union has adopted a package of targeted sanctions against the leadership of ZANU-PF. The measures imposed in February this year include a travel ban, an assets freeze and a ban on arms sales. The EU applicant states, the United States, Switzerland, Norway and New Zealand have since adopted similar measures, but in the case of the US, ones that do not go quite as far.

Mr. Ancram: The Foreign Secretary accused me earlier of not having put forward any suggestions. I made a suggestion specifically about extending the list of those against whom sanctions would be applied. Can he confirm that that is his intention when he meets his EU colleagues again at the end of July?

Mr. Straw: We will indeed review the operation of sanctions when we meet on 22 July. There is a strong case for an extension of the measures, but I will not give specific notice of what I have in mind, for the simple reason—*[Interruption.]* I am very happy to brief the right hon. Gentleman on the usual terms. The more specific notice that is given of what we have in mind, the easier it will be for the regime to take pre-emptive action. I would have thought that that was astonishingly obvious to everybody—apparently except him.

Of course we want the sanctions to operate in the most effective way. The right hon. Gentleman asked me about the fact that Mugabe and some of his people had attended a number of international meetings. That was made clear in the terms of the common position that the EU adopted earlier this year. When such common positions are overridden by treaty obligations such as those arising from the United Nations charter, the treaty obligations will take precedent. That is no different from what has happened with regard to the fact that the United States has imposed the most powerful sanctions against Cuba ever since Fidel Castro took power, and banned Fidel Castro and his Government from travelling to the United States. I wonder whether any Opposition Members know how many times Fidel Castro has travelled to New York in apparent breach of that ban in order to attend the General Assembly of the UN. If anyone would like to tell me the number, I shall happily give way.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): Forty.

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman mentions that number from a sedentary position. [HON. MEMBERS: "You sent him a note."] I will not tell hon. Members what the note said—*[Interruption.]* I am extremely happy, however, for the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) to see the note; indeed, it is being passed to him.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde) *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I hope that the right hon. Gentleman wants to give me the answer.

Mr. Jack: I am sorry that the Foreign Secretary has reduced this debate to an auction of information. I speak as somebody who does not know a great deal about this matter, but I am desperately worried about what constituents of mine who work in Zimbabwe are telling me about the situation there. They convey to me a sense of impotence and a feeling that whatever is contained in the list of sanctions appears currently to have no effect on Mugabe. We are currently facing the final takeover of white-owned farms. What comes next? More importantly, what advice has he received, especially from African leaders who might understand Mugabe better than we do, about what will make this man come to terms?

Mr. Straw: That is the issue. Of course I understand the right hon. Gentleman's frustration; everybody shares a deep frustration. If only it were possible simply by wishing for an international coalition to end the damage that Mugabe is doing, it would be done. If it were possible to do "what happened in Kosovo", which the right hon. Member for Devizes airily cited as something that we should be doing in Zimbabwe, it would be done. However, it is irresponsible to cite that example as a criticism of the Government and the international community and neither to rule it out nor rule it in. Everybody knows that the suggestion that we embark on a bombing campaign, as we had to do in Kosovo for 78 days, comes from fantasy land, and it would be deceiving the people of Zimbabwe to pretend otherwise.

The right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) asked what would happen next; I will tell him. The situation is likely to go from a terrible situation to a worse one. That is the point that we are making powerfully to our partners, especially those elsewhere in Africa, so that they can increase the pressure that they are already exerting on the Mugabe regime and recognise that this is a disaster in which they have moral responsibility, just as we do, for the poor people of Zimbabwe and of the rest of southern Africa who are being so severely damaged by the regime.

On the other point made by the right hon. Member for Fylde, it is worth while to embed in the minds of Opposition Members the issue about Fidel Castro. Tough sanctions have been taken by the United States in respect of Cuba, and Cuba is the first to say that they are tough. There is a travel ban on its leaders, but on 41 occasions, Fidel Castro, in apparent breach of those sanctions, has gone to New York to speak to the General Assembly of the UN.

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North and Sefton, East): At length.

Mr. Straw: I am sorry to tell the House that I will speak at slightly less length than Fidel Castro can usually be expected to do in a short speech.

The position on the sanctions imposed by the United States on Mugabe and the rest of the 20 is the same. They have been put to very considerable inconvenience and also humiliated, as they are not treated as visiting dignitaries or heads of state. As I mentioned in Question Time earlier today, we know from the criticism of them inside ZANU-PF that they are desperate for the sanctions to be lifted because we have gone to the heart of part of their corruption. I am offended by seeing Mrs. Mugabe going to Madrid, no doubt to spend thousands of pounds shopping while the people of Zimbabwe are starving. *[Interruption.]* I hope that the people of Zimbabwe find out about exactly what she is doing. Yes, I understand the point about the extension of the sanctions, but if we are to be effective, we must also ensure, as the right hon. Member for Devizes said, that we get other members of the European Union on board.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): Surely the moral of the tale about the United States and Castro is that the sanctions did not work, as the United States did not get what it wanted by imposing them. Will the Foreign Secretary give the House some indication of what pressures he would like to place on this evil regime to get rid of the starvation, murders and bestiality if he could get all the partners that he needed in the coalition to agree with us? Will he set out to the House what he would like them to do that would bring this man to account?

Mr. Straw: What I would like to happen is clear. I would like President Mugabe to recognise the error of his ways and the disaster into which he has plunged Zimbabwe. I would like him to leave office, allow elections to take place immediately, stop interfering with humanitarian relief, get the farmers, whether they are white, Indian or black, back on to the land, respect the rule of law and allow this wonderfully prosperous country—*[Interruption.]* I am asked how that would happen, but that is the point. I say to Opposition Members that the issue for the international community is how we do this. That is the truth of it. I have not sought at any stage to pretend that there is some magic wand waiting to be used.

Mr. David Borrow (South Ribble): Does my right hon. Friend agree that we in this House need to have some recognition of what influence we can have in this situation and accept that Britain's role, however active and vigorous, will not solve the problems on its own? The key players in making changes in southern Africa are the neighbours of Zimbabwe, and the Republic of South Africa in particular. Without the Republic of South Africa moving, there is very little that he and his colleagues can do.

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend's observation is accurate. To suggest that we could take action without an alliance

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and coalition from Africa, and South Africa in particular, would be a pretence, as such action would bilateralise the dispute, make us ineffective and make any international coalition almost impossible to achieve.

One of the many things that we have done is to secure a situation whereby the decision on the suspension of Zimbabwe from the councils of the Commonwealth was taken not by us, not by the Commonwealth ministerial action group, of which the United Kingdom is a member, but by a troika of the current chair of the Commonwealth, Prime Minister Howard of Australia, and two key members—President Obasanjo of Nigeria and President Mbeki of South Africa. It is hugely to their credit that they made the decision that they did once the Commonwealth observers found that the elections had been neither free nor fair.

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): As the Foreign Secretary knows, the G8 and NEPAD have a close relationship and there is an opportunity for the Prime Minister to raise this matter. What will he say to the G8 about bringing direct influence to bear on NEPAD to build the coalition to take the process forward?

Mr. Straw: The Prime Minister will discuss Zimbabwe with his colleagues in the G8 and with African leaders. Last week, I had a long meeting with Foreign Minister Zuma of South Africa. All the African leaders understand the disaster into which Mugabe is plunging the continent, especially the sub-continent. If the leaders of South Africa, Nigeria and all the other countries in southern African thought that there was a magic wand for saving not only Zimbabwe, but southern Africa, they would have followed that through. One of the tragedies of the situation is not only what Mugabe has done to the Zimbabwean economy—gross domestic product declined by 10 per cent. last year, unemployment is running at 70 per cent., inflation stands at 122 per cent. and the industrial sector is collapsing—but the damage that is being done to the rest of southern Africa, including, in particular, South Africa. The decline of the rand—although it has recently improved, it went down by 31 per cent. in the past year—is almost wholly attributable to the damage done by the Mugabe regime.

Sir Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): The situation facing the wonderful people of that once prosperous country in central southern Africa is catastrophic. I receive daily e-mails and faxes about their suffering. Is it not time to consider different ways of tackling the problem? Earlier today, during Question Time, I floated an idea that was responded to, but not positively enough. Would not someone like the modern father of central southern Africa, Nelson Mandela, be a figure around whom a group of countries could bring pressure to bear on Zimbabwe, and perhaps also on Libya, which continues to fund and to support Mugabe? If that were done, the international community, including Libya, could unite to bring about a change of Government in order to do something for the people of Zimbabwe, about whom I practically cry because of their suffering.

Mr. Straw: I am happy to discuss the hon. Gentleman's proposal regarding the involvement of President Mandela. My own sense, which is shared by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development, is that if President Mandela felt that he had been able to act as a positive intermediary in the situation, he would have done so. It is a lamentable commentary on Mugabe and his isolation that none of the offers of intermediation has positively been taken up. President Mbeki and President Obasanjo said that they would help to broker a constructive dialogue between ZANU-PF and the MDC, but that offer has so far been refused. However, I am happy to pursue the idea and to have it drawn to President Mandela's attention.

Libya's route back into the international community partly depends on its showing a responsible attitude towards Zimbabwe and in respect of Sierra Leone. We are aware of that, and it is a point that has repeatedly been made to Libya in the dialogue that is taking place.

I know that other hon. Members wish to speak, and I shall therefore shortly draw my remarks to a close. One of the excuses that Mugabe has used in respect of Zimbabwe is to blame the current famine entirely on drought. It is true that drought has played a significant part in the failure of the maize harvest, but there is no doubt that policy failures—not least the mismanagement of the exchange rate and the chaotic land reform programme—have greatly exacerbated the situation. That is illustrated by the following figures. The United Nations estimates that Zambia and Malawi, which have suffered similar droughts, have lost one quarter of their food production capacity, but that figure rises to three quarters in respect of Zimbabwe. The UN declares that

> "current government policies in Zimbabwe pose formidable constraints"

to a resolution of the crisis. The UN World Food Programme estimates that as a result almost half the population—up to 6 million people—will be unable to meet their minimum food requirements in the next 12 months.

The tragedy is that a year ago Zimbabwe still had a chance to return to the path of sustainable development. When I became Foreign Secretary a year ago, some of my first contacts were with my South African and Nigerian counterparts. At that time, we agreed there was still a prospect that Zimbabwe could rehabilitate itself. So last September at Abuja, Commonwealth Ministers, including myself, set out, with Mr. Mugabe's agreement, a clear road map for Zimbabwe—via the Harare principles—back to prosperity and international respect. Tragically, ZANU-PF did not grasp that opportunity. In the run-up to the presidential election, the regime pressed ahead with its land reform programme, intimidated and even killed members of the Opposition, and implemented further measures to curb freedom of speech. That culminated in a stolen presidential election, which compounded the country's isolation. Since then, the regime's actions—ranging from further restrictions on the media and harassment of the legal profession to further violence against the Opposition and intimidation of those who work in the farming sector—suggest that it has no plans to change course.

That is why we have to continue, with international agreement where appropriate, to strengthen the measures taken against Zimbabwe. I say to the right hon. Member for Devizes, who asks me to advertise a long list, in advance of international agreement, of the measures that could perhaps be taken, that the only people who would be comforted by such a pre-emptive list would be members of the Mugabe regime—especially if it transpired, for various reasons, that it was not possible to ensure that each of the measures was implemented in full. I promise the House that we are aware of the continuing need to ensure that the existing measures that have been taken are made as effective as possible and that they are strengthened where appropriate.

This debate takes place as world leaders in the G8 are gathering to agree, we hope and believe, a new partnership for African development—an area in which my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for International Development and the Prime Minister have been in the lead for some time.

As far as the rest of Africa is concerned, it is worth noting that on the whole the story has been one of much better news than in Zimbabwe. Africa has huge problems—poverty, lack of educational and employment opportunities, hunger and low life expectancy are still the fate of many in African countries—but there are signs that democracy is taking root. In 1975, Africa had only three elected leaders—today there are more than 30—and there are no military governments in sub-Saharan Africa. Ten years ago few people—least of all those in the Conservative party—believed that South Africa would emerge from the shadow of apartheid with a tolerant, multi-racial government. Thanks to British intervention, last month the people of Sierra Leone were able to vote in an election free from the threat of violence and intimidation. Had we turned a blind eye, as some suggested, to the plight of that country, its people would now be suffering a fate worse than that of Zimbabwe.

There has been a breakthrough in the world's largest conflict in the Great Lakes. The Democratic Republic of Congo ceasefire has held for nearly 18 months. There is further to go, and I am glad that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development will visit the region between the end of July and the beginning of August. Prompt action by the Government prevented an outbreak of hostilities between Uganda and Rwanda last November. There are promising signs of economic growth throughout Africa. More than 20 African countries achieved a growth rate of 4 per cent. last year. Zimbabwe's decline stands in stark contrast to that better news.

Within the limits of our influence, we shall do all that we can to promote efforts by the international community, especially leaders of other Governments in the region, to return stability to Zimbabwe. That has been our goal since the beginning of the country's slide into chaos three years ago. Thanks to our diplomacy in the past 12 months, the involvement of the Commonwealth, the European Union and the United States, we have been able to show that the issue is of international concern.

Human rights abuses and violations of the rule of law have made Zimbabwe an outcast in the region and the wider world, thus belying Mr. Mugabe's claim that his country is a colonial victim. I am confident that the international community will continue to unite in condemning what has happened and working together to ensure that the true voice of the Zimbabwean people is heard and that there is a pathway back to peace and prosperity for that benighted land.

8.11 pm

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): The collapse of Zimbabwe's economy has been well documented in the debate. However, it is worth reminding ourselves briefly of its scale. As we have heard, inflation is 122 per cent., almost two thirds of the population are unemployed, foreign direct investment has decreased from $430 million in 1998 to $4 million in 2001, and gross domestic product in 2003 is predicted to be half that of 2001. The impact on the people of Zimbabwe is almost incalculable. The economic impact of Mr. Mugabe's policies extends beyond the borders of his country to affect the whole region. It has deeply damaged investment and the tourism on which so many of the surrounding countries' economies depend.

The ordinary people of Zimbabwe are the victims. A country that was once the granary of southern Africa is reduced to receiving food aid from Britain, the European Union and the United Nations. Today we see the absurdity of farmers being forbidden by law to work their land, while the spectre of famine hangs over the country. We also understand that the food aid that is admitted is used for political purposes. Baroness Amos told the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs that World Food Programme aid is subject to Government and party distribution networks.

That underlines many of the points that the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) made, perhaps more dramatically, when he spoke about the extent to which mere membership, or even suspicion of membership, of the Movement for Democratic Change is sufficient to provoke the most terrible atrocities.

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): The World Food Programme would not allow food aid to be used for political purposes. Attempts are being made to do that, and we are all struggling to thwart them in the coming crisis. The World Food Programme is not colluding in those efforts. We are all doing what we can to resist the political manipulation of food aid.

Mr. Campbell: I am grateful for that assurance from the Secretary of State, who pays considerable and close attention to such matters.

The political environment in Zimbabwe is no better. Press freedom has been extinguished, intimidation is commonplace and the Government's opponents are vilified and persecuted. Journalists stand trial under repressive and self-serving legislation, and judges are intimidated and subsequently "persuaded" to leave office. The talks brokered by Nigeria and South Africa between the governing party, ZANU-PF, and the MDC have broken down because ZANU-PF insists that the MDC should abandon its legal challenge to the March election result. It sometimes appears that ZANU-PF is the only institution in the world that believes that that election could legitimately be described as free and fair.

The internal crisis has the capacity to spill over into the region if citizens of Zimbabwe, displaced by famine or fear, seek refuge in neighbouring countries where they will add to the existing economic and social burdens induced by what we might call the "Mugabe effect".

In the cloistered calm of the Chamber, we should not forget the countless instances of terror to which many citizens of Zimbabwe have been subject. For example,

[Mr. Campbell]

let us consider the episodes of personal pain as families are forced to shoot their dogs and then their cattle, made to pack their belongings into a couple of suitcases, run the gauntlet of Mr. Mugabe's thugs and so make their escape from land that has been in their family perhaps for generations. Not only the whites suffer the consequences of such actions. Black families who have worked on farms, sometimes for generations, are uprooted and sent on their way so that Mr. Mugabe's political objectives can be achieved.

I suspect that in 20 years' time, someone reading the two opening speeches would note a difference in flavour but not in substance. The analysis is relatively easy; providing solutions is infinitely more difficult. We have a duty to ourselves, and especially to the citizens of Zimbabwe, to be realistic. The range of action available to us is affected, even circumscribed, by numerous factors.

The right hon. Member for Devizes mentioned military intervention, although I am not sure about the extent to which he was prepared to pin his colours to that idea. My party has not been slow when we have believed it necessary to urge such intervention, sometimes against the prevailing views of the Labour party and the Conservative party.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Like Thorpe.

Mr. Campbell: Indeed. If Mr. Jeremy Thorpe's suggestions had been executed as swiftly as they might have been, some of the current problems, and especially some of the difficulties that the Labour Government experienced with Mr. Ian Smith, might have been avoided. In Kosovo and Bosnia, Lord Ashdown, as he now is, never displayed any slackness in urging military intervention.

Before we raise the possibility of military intervention in this case, however, we should ask ourselves several searching questions. The distance between here and Zimbabwe is considerable, and the size of the country is also considerable. We could not look for host nation support from surrounding countries, and I doubt whether we could expect regional political support in the current climate. Could we achieve UN endorsement? Which counties would offer to be allies in any attempt to intervene militarily? Those questions are fundamental, and we should at least ask them and ascertain whether we can provide adequate answers before we discuss military intervention.

Let us consider whether to broaden economic sanctions. Wholesale sanctions would undoubtedly damage the lives of ordinary people. Some will say that there were sanctions in the days of apartheid—the days of South Africa at its very worst—but there is an important distinction to be drawn there. Throughout that period, the African National Congress was saying to the outside world, "Please impose sanctions." So far, I have heard no suggestion from Mr. Tsvangirai's party, the MDC, that it would wish for a wholesale regime of sanctions to be imposed, because its members understand—current events make this issue all the more acute—that the need for the continuation of humanitarian assistance is fundamental.

The right hon. Member for Devizes referred to the Commonwealth games, in which I have a passing historical interest. It is worth remembering that when the Gleneagles agreement was implemented and sporting sanctions were applied, it was because those who were representing South Africa were being chosen along racial lines. I have a clear memory of going to compete at the White City stadium, and there were two teams from South Africa: a team of white faces wore green and gold; the team of black faces wore black and gold blazers as an alternative.

There is no evidence that teams in Zimbabwe are chosen on the basis of colour, and it would not be right to keep the Zimbabwean athletes who have been selected for the Commonwealth games in Manchester away from that opportunity. The opportunity to take part in a Commonwealth games in which the colours are as varied as the countries represented there will perhaps be a more illuminating experience for them than if their country were banned. I agree with the right hon. Member for Devizes, however, that there should be no question of any Minister in the Mugabe Government coming to Manchester and seeking to take advantage of the hospitality that the protocols of the Commonwealth games will undoubtedly permit.

The road to be taken has to be political. The hon. Member for Macclesfield (Sir Nicholas Winterton) made an interesting point about the need to engage such dominant figures as Nelson Mandela, but there is quite a lot of anecdotal evidence to suggest that Mr. Mandela and Mr. Mugabe have never seen eye to eye. There are also those who argue that it was not until Mr. Mandela had been replaced by Mr. Mbeki that Mr. Mugabe felt bold enough to embark on some of the conduct that we have seen recently, simply because he feared—and, if I may say so, was intimidated by—Mr. Mandela's robust embrace of a multilateral approach to the problems of South Africa that is a long way from what is currently on offer in Zimbabwe. Archbishop Tutu—another dominating figure—has been unrestrained in his criticism of Mr. Mugabe. The hon. Member for Macclesfield has made an interesting proposition, but we would have to be satisfied in advance that there was at least some hope that influence might be able to be exercised.

No, it has to be the political road, and that is not glamorous or dynamic; it is painstaking. The hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) was absolutely right to say that we must use every opportunity, and the New Partnership for Africa's Development offers an opportunity to say to the African states that surround Zimbabwe, "You have a duty in this. You have a responsibility not to us, but to your own citizens, who are directly suffering the consequences of Mr. Mugabe's behaviour."

It is right that we should target more members of ZANU-PF and its associates. There should be selected sanctions, perhaps at lower levels of that part of society over which Mr. Mugabe holds sway. We should be making efforts to seek a settlement in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, through the United Nations, and to get the Zimbabwean troops out. What is Zimbabwe using the conflict in the DRC for, if not as a much needed opportunity to obtain illegal foreign exchange? We should be encouraging Nigeria and South Africa to reconvene the talks between ZANU-PF and the MDC, and to get them back on track. We should also do everything that we can through the United Nations to ensure that aid and assistance are depoliticised; I acknowledge the undertakings made by the Secretary of State for International Development in her intervention a moment ago.

We should also underline—not only for the people of Zimbabwe but for those round about—the fact that land redistribution is a legitimate objective, but it must be carried out in a properly recognised legal framework, with proper compensation, in accordance with the terms of the Abuja agreement. We should also make it clear that the return to full participation in the Commonwealth will not be a formality. It will depend on credible and sustained evidence of a return to—and an intention to maintain, without equivocation—the principles of the Harare declaration.

We should also use Zimbabwe as an example to promote reform of the procedures of the Commonwealth, so that it will be possible to take much earlier action in future. There is an argument that if the Commonwealth had been able to take earlier action, it might perhaps have been able to stop Mr. Mugabe embarking on this course of action.

None of those proposals will grab the headlines, but I believe that, taken together and pursued with diligence, they will make a difference, and it is that course of action that Her Majesty's Government ought to be following.

8.26 pm

Tony Cunningham (Workington): The 2002 presidential election was a symbol of everything that democracy is not. The campaigns leading up to it were marred by political violence. At least 30 members of the Opposition were killed in the first quarter of 2002, and there were many reported cases of members of the Opposition having been attacked and tortured. Fear and intimidation were very much the order of the day. I agree with the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) that it is easy to stand here in the Chamber and describe what is happening in Zimbabwe, but that the reality is absolutely horrific and abhorrent to us.

The election was deemed neither free nor fair by a broad swath of international opinion, including the Southern African Development Community parliamentary forum and the Commonwealth. It is true that African countries reacted in various ways. Some, including Senegal and Ghana, were critical. Others, such as Tanzania and Namibia, judged the election to be free and fair. I have said before from these Benches that we need all the countries of Africa to join together to isolate this particularly abhorrent regime.

The poll was characterised by systematic torture, rape and violence, overwhelmingly against the Opposition by the ruling ZANU-PF party. There was manipulation of both the electoral administration and the count, and draconian restrictions on freedom of speech, movement, association and assembly. The Zimbabwe regime attacked the judiciary and harassed the independent media. The pursuit of such actions justified the imposition of sanctions by the European Union and the United States before the election. I think that we all welcomed the decisions made by New Zealand, Switzerland and Norway to follow suit after the election, and the Commonwealth's suspension of Zimbabwe from its councils on 19 March.

The Foreign Secretary told Parliament that

"we do not recognise the result or its legitimacy".—[*Official Report*, 14 March 2002; Vol. 381, c. 1035.]

I believe that he was absolutely and unequivocally right to say that, as I am sure that many hon. Members and colleagues would agree. Indeed, recent developments reveal how the internal situation continues to deteriorate. ZANU-PF has withdrawn from the inter-party dialogue, which is now in limbo. Violence continues against the MDC, particularly in rural areas. Because of the manipulation of the media and the way in which the media is controlled, we can only imagine what is happening in some of those far-flung areas.

The Zimbabwe Government's Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act is being used to squeeze the independent press, and an American correspondent working for *The Guardian* is currently on trial for "publishing a falsehood". Is it not a huge irony that this regime, which has no legitimacy whatever, and has cheated its way to power, is in a position to arrest a journalist for publishing a falsehood?

The formal economy is the fastest contracting in the world, and Mugabe's land policy is contributing to worsening food shortages As has been said, 6 million people already require food aid. That number could increase to almost 9 million—three quarters of the population—by this autumn, yet the dams are full. Irrigated food production is possible, but Government policy will not allow commercial farmers to plant, and price controls make commercial production uneconomic.

The British Government are right to declare their commitment to work with the Zimbabwean civil society. Non-governmental organisations and Churches remain under great pressure, and there is evidence that Mugabe may be moving against them in the not too distant future. I therefore pay tribute to the immense courage of the many Churches, church men and women and NGOs who are trying to do what they can to protect innocent civilians in Zimbabwe. We must be alert to the likely politicisation of food aid by ZANU-PF. By avoiding Government channels, we can ensure that food goes to all those in need. We have to ensure that Zimbabwe's Government do not take responsibility for, or any credit whatsoever for, the food aid provided. We must also remind people that it is Mugabe's own policies that are damaging Zimbabwe.

The British Government's position on the Mugabe Government is well known: we recognise states, not Governments. However, like much of the international community—including the Commonwealth observers—we have made it clear that we do not recognise the outcome of the elections as a free expression of the will of the people of Zimbabwe. Having said that, the Government continue to have diplomatic relations with Zimbabwe. On 21 March, the Foreign Secretary told the House that he had received no representations to the effect that it would be helpful to reduce, or break off, diplomatic relations with Zimbabwe.

As I said during today's Foreign Affairs questions, the British high commissioner for Zimbabwe is a constituent of mine; indeed, he grew up in, and went to school in, Workington. Before becoming high commissioner, he was the British ambassador to the former Yugoslavia. He did a superb job there, and he and his staff are doing a fantastic job in Zimbabwe. All hon. Members will doubtless pay tribute to the work that they are doing.

Britain is far from alone in its opposition to the Zimbabwe regime, but it is a powerful voice within that multilateral foreign policy. The EU's policy echoes that

[Tony Cunningham]

of the UK Government. When the Barcelona European Council convened in March, EU heads of Government agreed that

"these elections cannot be judged as either free or fair."

Furthermore, the EU decided to dispatch a high-level troika to confer with countries of the Southern African Development Community region on European concerns about Zimbabwe. On 15 April, the EU decided to impose a moratorium on bilateral ministerial contacts with Zimbabwe until further notice, excluding the conduct of political dialogue to promote democracy, human rights, the rule of law in Zimbabwe, regional security and—of course—humanitarian needs.

The EU has already imposed targeted sanctions on the Government of Zimbabwe, and at Barcelona it agreed to consider additional targeted measures. I hope that such sanctions are imposed on the Government of Zimbabwe, and do not hurt the Zimbabwean people, who are already suffering enough. Of course, sanctions have to be enforced multilaterally if they are to be effective. The idea that sanctions are not working is nonsense. If they were not hurting the Zimbabwean regime, why would Mugabe and his acolytes be trying so hard to give the impression that they are having no effect?

EU policy towards Zimbabwe is kept continually under review, and the Foreign Secretary tells me that it will be discussed again in the near future. As has been said, Britain sees a case for extending the list of targeted individuals, but the matter is one for the EU as a whole to decide.

Ministers agreed that

"these targeted sanctions are aimed solely at those whom the EU judges to be responsible for the violence, for the violations of human rights and for preventing the holding of free and fair elections in Zimbabwe".

We have already considered measures such as a travel ban on named members of the regime, freezing their assets, and banning the export of arms and equipment that could be used for repression. Claims that the travel ban is ineffective are unfounded; indeed, it is having a real impact. On three occasions since February, senior Zimbabweans, including Mugabe, have been refused permission to enter the EU.

Critics point to the presence of Mugabe and his officials in Rome between 10 and 13 June as a mockery of the travel ban. Permission was twice granted for individuals to attend meetings of international bodies in Europe. I shall not rehearse the argument that the Foreign Secretary has already made about Cuba. Fidel Castro banned is banned and subject to sanctions, but he still attends UN meetings in New York. In referring to some 40 visits by Fidel Castro to the USA, the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife was about right.

Mr. Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford): Does the hon. Gentleman not recognise that the ability of people such as Olivia Muchena, who was at the heart of agricultural policy, to fly into this country—she was here a couple of weeks ago—flouts the spirit of the ban, if not the letter of it? That is what grates with people in Zimbabwe.

Tony Cunningham: I do not disagree, and it is clear that we must tighten up the regime. However, the policy forms part of an international ban on the travel of Zimbabwean citizens, and I hope that the ban will be extended further.

No one doubts that the presence of such individuals is extremely distasteful, but as I said, we must accept that EU partners—such as the US and Switzerland, in the case of the UN—are bound by their treaty obligations. We have made it clear that the terms of entry for these individuals should be as restrictive as possible.

The British Government welcome the decision of the Commonwealth troika to suspend Zimbabwe from the Commonwealth for one year, and I pay tribute to South African President Thabo Mbeki, President Olusegun Obasanjo, of Nigeria, and the Australian Prime Minister, John Howard, for taking this decision in consultation with Commonwealth Secretary-General Don McKinnon. Critics suggested that the group had insufficient powers, but they have been proved wrong. The suspension is evidence of the Commonwealth's ability and willingness to bite when its principles are at stake.

On the point raised by the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife, disputes over participation in the Commonwealth games are a matter not for the British Government, but for the Commonwealth Games Federation, which will take a decision in consultation with the Commonwealth secretariat. I agree wholeheartedly that the difference between Zimbabwe and South Africa is huge. I hope that the Zimbabwean team will indeed attend the Commonwealth games, but I also hope that the Government will raise the issue of Zimbabwe with Commonwealth leaders and Ministers when they are present in this country.

EU and Commonwealth measures against Zimbabwe have been clearly and deliberately targeted at those responsible for the policies of the Government of Zimbabwe. As I said, it is not our intention to penalise the ordinary people of Zimbabwe. In fact, the reverse is true, and in that regard I again pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development. Our aim is to help the poor, who should not be hindered. Indeed, this year we expect to provide some £18 million-worth of assistance for Zimbabwe for HIV/AIDS and the rural poor.

Of course, we keep our aid programme to Zimbabwe under review. Britain has no desire to worsen the economic hardships of the people of Zimbabwe by cutting essential support for the rural poor and victims of AIDS. We sometimes read that AIDS is devastating the poor people of Africa. Well, that disease is not affecting only the poor of Africa. A third of all doctors in Africa are dying from AIDS. It cuts across the social spectrum and is the worst disease that we have seen in my lifetime. We have to look back to plagues in the past to find a comparison.

We remain committed to helping the poor of Zimbabwe who are suffering from the double impact of economic collapse and HIV/AIDS. Cutting all aid would hurt the very people who have suffered most through economic mismanagement, but would have little impact on the Government. I am proud to remind the House that the UK imposed a national arms embargo on Zimbabwe in May 2000, and the EU followed suit on 18 February 2002. We intend to enforce that embargo rigorously.

I have outlined some of the policies—which are all carefully devised and responsible—that we have adopted in response to the despicable actions of the Zimbabwean leadership. My notes contain criticisms of the previous Conservative Government for their relationship with the Zimbabwean regime stretching back to 1982–84, when 10,000 people were killed in Matabeleland, the revelations of the "Panorama" programme and details of the visits during the Major years. However, I would prefer it if we all joined together to find solutions to the problems of Zimbabwe, so I will not continue with that part of my speech.

Mugabe is a man for whom I—and, I am sure, everyone else—feel utter contempt. Our policy is driven not only by a need to stand up to that repressive dictator but by a vision for much-needed structural social change in Zimbabwe. The right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife mentioned land reform. The idea that is being pushed in Zimbabwe is that we oppose land reform or achieving a fair distribution of land. I remind the House that land reform in Zimbabwe is the bedrock for development. At the time of Zimbabwe's independence in 1980 the best agricultural land was owned mainly by large commercial farms, many of more than 1,000 hectares. Poor families were crowded into less productive communal areas, on land holdings of less than one hectare.

I support the British Government's belief that land reform is central to Zimbabwe's progress. Britain has been a strong advocate of effective and well managed land reform in Zimbabwe ever since independence. A more equitable distribution of land is essential to reduce poverty and to contribute to the country's long-term economic and social future. To be effective, such reform must be carried out within the rule of law. It must be transparent and fair, and within a well managed economic policy framework that contributes both to poverty reduction and to Zimbabwe's economic prosperity.

The UK has a long tradition on both sides of the House of supporting land reform in Zimbabwe. I wish to put on record the fact that that support for land reform proposals goes back to the start of independence. Between 1980 and 1985, the UK provided £47 million for land reform, with £20 million as a specific land resettlement grant and £27 million in the form of budgetary support to help to meet the Zimbabwean Government's own contribution to the programme. The land resettlement grant was signed in 1981 and substantially spent by 1988. The UK land resettlement grant for Zimbabwe finally closed in 1996 with—unbelievably—£3 million still unspent.

The UK Government sought proposals from the Zimbabwean Government on spending the remaining balance. A further technical mission by the Overseas Development Administration in 1996 resulted in new proposals for UK support for land reform. The Zimbabwean Government responded towards the end of 1996, but no agreement was reached before the UK general election on May 1997.

In September 1998, with UK encouragement, the Zimbabwean Government hosted a land conference in Harare, involving all major international donors and the multilateral institutions. Issues raised in the 1996 ODA report were considered at the conference. The UK participated constructively and endorsed the basic principles of land reform agreed at the conference, as did the Zimbabwean Government. Those principles included the need for transparency, respect for the rule of law, poverty reduction, affordability and consistency with Zimbabwe's wider economic interests. The 1998 conference agreed a two-year inception phase, during which Government resettlement schemes would be tried alongside ideas from the private sector and civil society.

In May 1999, consultants began work to identify ways in which the UK Government could provide further support for land reform in Zimbabwe. Terms of reference for a follow-up visit were agreed with the Zimbabwean Government in September 1999. Work on UK support for land reform in Zimbabwe was interrupted by the illegal farm occupations and the subsequent violence in the run-up to the 2000 parliamentary elections.

The United Kingdom remains willing to support a land reform programme that is carried out in accordance with the principles agreed by donors and the Zimbabwe Government in 1998. That is also the position of the broad donor community. It should be pointed out that we are not imposing any new conditions. In the absence of a Government-led programme that we felt able to support, the Department for International Development established in March 2000 a £5 million land resettlement challenge fund to support the private sector and civil society-led resettlement initiatives. Unfortunately, the Zimbabwe Government have not allowed such private sector initiatives to proceed. They have instead pressed ahead with their fast-track resettlement programme, which is totally unacceptable.

When a group of the Commonwealth Foreign Ministers—including those of the UK and Zimbabwe—met in Abuja in September 2001 to discuss Zimbabwe, they agreed again that land reform must be implemented in a fair, just and sustainable manner, in the interests of all the people of Zimbabwe. They agreed that any reform programme should be on the basis of the United Nations development programme proposals of December 2000. The Government of Zimbabwe agreed to honour the principles enshrined in the Harare Commonwealth declaration: to prevent further occupation of farm lands; to restore the rule of law; to take firm action against violence and intimidation; and to honour the freedom of expression.

At that meeting, the UK reaffirmed its commitment to a significant financial contribution to such a land reform programme and gave an undertaking to encourage other international donors to do the same. In November 2001, the Government of Zimbabwe amended the Land Acquisition Act to allow them to allocate land without giving owners the right to contest the seizures. That contravenes not only the letter, but the spirit of the agreement at Abuja. How on earth can we believe anything that the Zimbabwe Government say when they signed up to an agreement at Abuja and immediately walked away from it? *[Interruption.]* I am coming towards the end of my speech.

Regrettably, the credibility of Abuja has been damaged by Zimbabwe's scant regard for its commitments. Since independence, the United Kingdom has provided more than £500 million in bilateral support for development in Zimbabwe, more than any other donor. We should be justifiably proud of that. In total, the wider donor community has provided more than $2 billion in assistance. The UK continues to provide annual support for emergency relief and to alleviate HIV-AIDS suffering. The UK has also contributed to development in Zimbabwe through the international financial institutions. It is interesting to note that the UK funds around 18 per cent. of EU spending.

[Tony Cunningham]

In essence, the UK Government have always been open to discussion on the subject of land. They have honoured their Lancaster House commitments and remain willing to contribute to a land reform programme in Zimbabwe that would lead to a sustainable improvement in the lives of Zimbabwe's rural poor.

It is ultimately the lives of the impoverished citizens of Zimbabwe that are threatened by the tyrannical policies of Robert Mugabe, who has no legitimacy whatever. I am sure that we would all agree that the sooner he goes, the better, not just for Zimbabwe, but for the entire region.

8.48 pm

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): I will not attempt to emulate the length of the speech of the hon. Member for Workington (Tony Cunningham), every word of it read, and bearing all the hallmarks of a Government handout. However, we can completely associate ourselves with his remarks about his constituent, Mr. Donnelly, who has served with enormous distinction. What has been said about him recently is disgraceful, and on that subject the hon. Gentleman carries the House with him.

I feel extremely embarrassed when I stand to speak in this debate tonight in an almost empty Chamber. I think of those people who voted in the March election by a majority to rid themselves of a tyrant. What would they think if they were here tonight in this Parliament and saw the numbers of people in the Chamber debating their future? It behoves each one of us to reflect on that and to say something about it to those who are not here.

I am always delighted to see the Secretary of State for International Development on the Front Bench. She knows that I hold her in high regard and we have campaigned together in the past on issues such as Bosnia. I shall always be pleased and proud that we did so. However, I say to her that it is a pity that the Foreign Secretary made his speech and then left the Chamber. It is important that a degree of urgency and importance, currently not apparent, be attached to this grave crisis.

I have an apology to make on behalf of the other members of the Foreign Affairs Committee, which is looking into the subject of Zimbabwe. Because of a meeting of the Commission of the House of Commons, I could not go with them on a visit to Copenhagen—but for which they would have been here. I will try, somewhat inadequately, to speak on their behalf. The Foreign Affairs Committee has maintained a degree of bipartisanship on all issues of foreign policy, which we should always seek to do. The right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) was right to say that although there was a difference in tone and rhetoric between the parties—and I understand why my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) said what he did in his admirable speech—there is not much difference between the two parties on the Front Benches. We certainly share an abhorrence for this distasteful, tyrannical and appalling regime.

I have an interest to declare, as editor of *The House Magazine*. I commend to all right hon. and hon. Members a letter that we published this week from Dr. Alan Megahey. I published it because I know him well. He is an old friend of mine—we were schoolmasters together, nearly 40 years ago. Dr. Megahey was for 10 years the rector or headmaster of Peterhouse, which is one of the great schools of Zimbabwe—multi-racial, I hasten to add. He has an intimate knowledge of the country and since he came back—he is now a country parson as well as a scholar—he has maintained his contacts.

Dr. Megahey wrote a letter to the magazine which I was glad to publish and from which I would like to quote. He says that four years ago he wrote a biography of the great Humphrey Gibbs, the man who stood up against Ian Smith. In that biography was a foreword by one Robert Mugabe, extolling Humphrey Gibbs and describing him as

> "a Christian, a farmer, a political leader and statesman",

who

> "stood for compassion, humanity, fairness and justice".

My friend Alan Megahey continues:

> "Mr. Mugabe now presides over a country where racism, inhumanity, corruption and injustice reign. Yet Parliament seems to give scant attention to the scandal of what is happening in a country which has such close links with the United Kingdom."

I make no criticism of the Secretary of State but would simply say something, through her, to the Prime Minister. The right hon. Gentleman has made much of his role as international statesman, and in many of the things that he has done and said he has had my total and unqualified support. The way in which he behaved after 11 September last year was exemplary; he behaved as a true Prime Minister of a country facing a crisis. His role in helping to bring about the international coalition will earn him a special place in the history books. However, a Prime Minister who subsequently made the speech that he made to his party conference last year—already quoted by my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes—should devote a higher priority to the people of Zimbabwe, and I hope that after tonight's debate he will. In a moment I will make some specific and, I hope, helpful suggestions. However, it behoves the Prime Minister and his Government to attach an importance to this issue that they have not hitherto.

In his letter, Alan Megahey talks about a report by the Commercial Farmers Union. He refers to the list that it has published of those who have "acquired" farms, which I referred to earlier today at Question Time. He says:

> "These include ministers, MPs . . . the Commissioner of Police, Zimbabwe's permanent representative at the UN, and the President's two sisters and his brother-in-law, among others."

I will not weary the House with it, but I have here a list of people, which runs to several pages. They are all people of eminence in Zimbabwe—not the downtrodden and deprived, who indeed deserve to be the beneficiaries of land reform—they are the fat cats of a society that is being absolutely crippled by the corruption of its leaders. It is important that we put that on record.

I do not want to talk for too long about the tactics of the people who go on to those farms, but I offer an example sent to me by Dr. Megahey. He told me of a farm built up over a lifetime's work; the people were forced out and the farmer said that, on the first day of the invasion,

> "We took the following injured workers to hospital . . . Rushion who suffered chest and head wounds from being hit by an axe . . . Herbert who suffered back wounds from being beaten with a fan belt . . . James who had leg wounds from being beaten with a bicycle chain . . . Tawanda . . . bruised ribs from being hit with a fan belt . . . Phinias . . . bruises around his back and waist from a baton".

The list goes on. Those were not white people being hit by those who were fighting back against the colonial oppressors—they were black farm workers who depended for their livelihood on someone whom one might describe as paternalistic; but that farmer was a good and concerned employer and they wanted to stay with him.

Such events have been occurring in place after place throughout that beautiful country. As has already been said, what used to be the granary of southern Africa is becoming a wasteland, despoiled by those who rule it.

It is not only farming that has been affected; my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes referred to the tourism industry. Zimbabwe is a beautiful country where most of us would love to take our holidays, but how many tourists are queueing up to visit the Victoria falls as I speak?

Mr. Mark Hendrick (Preston): Like many Conservative speakers, including the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram), the hon. Gentleman sheds great heat on the issue but very little light on any solutions they would make, if in government, which the Labour Government have not already proposed. Today, we saw a display from the right hon. Member for Devizes that showed no way forward whatever.

Sir Patrick Cormack: I am sorry that I gave way for that rather pointless intervention. I am not generating a lot of heat; I am reasonably calmly retailing some of the facts in the documents before me, because they should be on the record of the House. In a moment, I shall come to what we would do, but perhaps I could be allowed to say one or two more things.

The tourism industry has been almost destroyed. Wildlife is in danger. On another level, as my friend Dr. Megahey points out,

"cows, sheep and pigs are being killed (often hideously), sometimes simply for food, often as political warnings by the 'war veterans'".

The end of my friend's letter is an answer to the hon. Gentleman:

"But Parliament seems not to be fully informed, or if informed, not concerned. Partial suspension from the Commonwealth and selective sanctions against ministers and their families are mere pin-pricks. Meanwhile the murder and mayhem go on, and people are starving."

Certainly, it is right that Parliament should be informed and that we should address those things. What are we going to do about them? As I said, I hope that the Government will invest the situation with a new sense of urgency. Of course I accept that there cannot be crude military intervention. That is not practical.

The House will recall that the BBC is banned from Zimbabwe. When the notable reporter, Mr. Fergal Keane, came before the Foreign Affairs Committee recently, he made it plain that, in his view, we were not attaching a high enough priority to the situation. We should be stepping up broadcasts to people in Zimbabwe, to let them know just how appalling we think Mugabe is and what a terrible tyrant he is.

The Foreign Secretary should go to South Africa and hold urgent consultations before 22 July, which is a month away. We should not wait until then; the right hon. Gentleman should get on a plane this weekend and go to speak to President Mbeki. He should also go and see former President Mandela.

I understood why the Secretary of State for International Development had her reservations when my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Sir Nicholas Winterton) made his suggestion, but another name has not been brought into play. It is that of a man who did have a good rapport with Robert Mugabe, a man for whom I have enormous affection and respect—the former secretary-general of the Commonwealth, Emeka Anyaoku, who is now in very active retirement. He is president of the Royal Commonwealth Society, and he is often in London. I believe that he is one person who might, just possibly, be able to talk some sense to Mugabe. It is worth trying.

What we need is a sense of mission and purpose, and the British Government, as well going to South Africa, should convene an urgent conference on Zimbabwe. We should try to act as the catalyst to bring world opinion together in a way that we perhaps have not done at the moment. I do not doubt for a moment the sincerity of the Foreign Secretary's expressions of repugnance. He believes every word that he says—I mean that—but we need urgency. A few initiatives must be taken quickly. We should not wait until 22 July—two days before the House rises for the summer recess—and we should have at least one report from the Foreign Secretary on what his initiatives have achieved before then. I urge the right hon. Lady to talk to him about that.

If the Foreign Secretary is so committed to other international travel—as the hon. Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall), who is a Parliamentary Private Secretary, seemed to indicate—another senior Minister should be deputed to deal with this issue. It is a crisis of monumental significance. By the end of this year, half the population of 13 million will be in danger of starvation. The right hon. Lady is nodding; she knows that to be true. We have seen the most callous and appalling manipulation of an election in recent years. Mr. Mugabe has put himself in the same league as Milosevic and Saddam Hussein by the way in which he has acted. That is the sort of man we are dealing with.

The Government have set great store by supporting the International Criminal Court. I happen to be one of those who has some sympathy with the reservations that the Americans have on that. Nevertheless, the Government and the House have approved it, so let the Government say that this is the sort of man who should be indicted before the court and let the people of Zimbabwe be told that. Let us give what moral support we can to those brave people who queued day after day to cast their votes; and a majority of them almost certainly voted against the tyrant.

It is sad that more hon. Members are not present in the House tonight, but I am very grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes for proposing this subject for debate. I think that the debate should have taken place in Government time, but I shall let that pass—we are debating it—and let us draw comfort from the fact that there is very little difference between those on the two Front Benches and that not a single hon. Member could defend Mugabe's actions with any credibility.

So let us move forward with greater speed and a greater sense of urgency. Let us take some of these diplomatic initiatives immediately. Let us try to enlist the services of people such as Emeka Anyaoku. Let us do everything that we can to ensure that, before the House rises on 24 July,

[Sir Patrick Cormack]

we have heard a positive report from the Foreign Secretary, standing at the Dispatch Box and reporting on progress achieved.

9.4 pm

Hugh Bayley (City of York): I had not originally intended to speak in this debate, but I am prompted to do so by a number of hon. Members' contributions and, indeed, by the response to my intervention from the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram). I am pleased to see that he is still in his place. I congratulate the Opposition on initiating this debate, and I agree with much of what the right hon. Gentleman said about the horror of the human rights abuses. No hon. Member would disagree about condemning the catalogue of atrocities that was described by the right hon. Gentleman, by my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Tony Cunningham) and by the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir Patrick Cormack). Nor would I disagree about the need to increase pressure, in any way we can, on President Mugabe and his ZANU-PF co-leaders.

The right hon. Member for Devizes was correct in telling me that the Conservative Government's failure to respond to Mugabe's repression in Matabeleland in the early 1980s would be no excuse for a failure to respond now, and he was right to raise the issue in the House. While all cases of torture or political killing are equally horrific, however, it is important to recognise the scale of a problem.

The Human Rights Forum, a Zimbabwean non-governmental organisation, estimates that between January 2001 and 14 May this year 146 people have been killed in political violence. That is a shocking, terrible figure, but it is not the 10,000 who were slaughtered in Matabeleland when Mugabe was trying to make the Zimbabwe leadership a Shona-only leadership rather than the partnership that existed, during the Patriotic Front's struggle for independence, between the Shona ZANU and the Ndebele ZAPU liberation movements.

What all of us, on both sides of the House, must resolve to do is to work with our friends in Africa in every way we can to stop the death toll from rising into the thousands this time—to stop it from rising, heaven forbid, as high as it did in the early 1980s. The fact remains, nevertheless, that more people will die from hunger in Malawi than will die from political violence in Zimbabwe, more will die from hunger in Zambia than from political violence in Zimbabwe, and more will die from hunger in Zimbabwe itself than from political violence there. A child who dies of hunger, whether south or north of the Zambezi, dies in the same way. We as a Government must respond to a crisis that exists in many southern African countries.

There is no doubt that Mugabe's land reform programme has made the food shortage crisis in Zimbabwe much worse, but let us not forget that other factors are involved. It would be wrong to blame solely the land reform for the problems of hunger. Poor economic policies are also to blame. The official Government exchange rate—the rate that Ministers pay to obtain foreign exchange with which to buy bottles of whisky—is 50 Zimbabwean dollars to the pound. The street value—the market rate—is 750 Zimbabwean dollars to the pound. That is what others must pay. Those economic policies destroy local production. Who will buy Zimbabwean produce when people have to sell for 10, maybe even 15, times its real price?

There are bad economic policies, bad agricultural policies, and drought. I returned from Zambia a few years ago with photographs of the Victoria falls. The Shona call them "mosi oi tunya", which means "the mist that thunders". But when I was there, there was no mist, no thunder, and no water. One of my photographs was exhibited in the Upper Waiting Hall a couple of years ago—a photograph of the Victoria falls as a dry cliff. Drought is certainly a problem: we are not talking just about economic policies.

Clare Short: My hon. Friend is right—there is drought—but drought does not become famine without misgovernment. That was the great finding of Professor Sen. A drought crisis that could be handled otherwise may become a famine owing to misgovernment. In that sense; if people die it is political.

Hugh Bayley: I agree. I have said myself that the policies of Mugabe's Government make the drought much worse. It is not just a Zimbabwean drought, however; it is causing hunger in a number of countries in southern Africa.

Hunger is also a consequence of the slow progress on land reform since Mugabe came to power. Land reform needs to happen, but it must be based on the rule of law, and not be achieved through violence. Above all, it must distribute land to poor, rural, landless people, and not to the cronies, supporters and leaders of ZANU-PF. It must be backed up by good policies on agriculture and rural development, so that smaller farms will be productive and support people in Zimbabwe.

Recently, I attended the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association's conference here. I was quizzed in a debate with association members largely from African states about the UK's policy on land reform. We have made a commitment to use development assistance to support land reform if the basic conditions that I set out earlier are met—that is, that land reform benefits poor, landless people rather than Government elites, and that it is provided in a transparent and legally based way.

Hon. Members of all parties have asked what can be done to change what is happening in Zimbabwe. They want to know how we can ensure free and fair elections, respect for human rights and just land redistribution, and how we can address hunger. I share the Opposition's view that we should toughen sanctions. The right hon. Member for Devizes proposed extending targeted sanctions to the families of top Zimbabwean leaders, and said that they should not be confined to top leaders only. He also suggested that the targeted sanctions be extended to other leaders, especially business leaders who are ZANU-PF supporters.

I do not think that Government Front-Bench Members would disagree. On 13 June, *The Daily Telegraph* reported that those proposals were precisely the ones that the Government intended to take to next month's EU meeting. However, we must accept that the proposed changes to the sanctions regime—important but modest as they are—will not change things overnight. We must learn the lessons of history. After Ian Smith made his unilateral declaration of independence, we the British imposed tough sanctions. So why did Smith's illegal regime last so many years? It was able to import what it needed for survival—most importantly, oil—through Mozambique and South Africa. Those neighbouring countries did not impose sanctions.

The lesson is clear. If the EU is alone in imposing sanctions, they will not be effective. To coin a phrase, we will be waiting years, not months, before the sanctions bite. We need to impose sanctions that are supported by the Southern African Development Community and the neighbouring southern African countries.

The right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) was right to say that political action was not particularly glamorous, but that it was necessary. A sanctions policy that is not supported by neighbouring African leaders will not have the effect that we seek. The hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) is also right, and I shall end soon so that he can tell the House more about why the New Partnership for Africa's Development is an important part of the answer.

The Government must bring more pressure to bear on the Mugabe Government. We need to get famine aid flowing throughout the region, and to get good development assistance working in neighbouring states—in part to show people in Zimbabwe that good development assistance working constructively with other Governments can bring benefits. People in Zimbabwe would then be able to appreciate that a country under a Mugabe-type regime is unable to make the progress possible for other countries.

In addition, we must seek the resumption of party-to-party talks with the Opposition in Zimbabwe. We must restate our commitment to land reform, according to conditions that are transparent and fair, and which help the poor. We need to investigate where the assets of ZANU-PF are held abroad, and to use our aid to support trade unions, non-governmental organisations and other opposition bodies in Zimbabwe. Those are the things that we need to do to build a coalition that forces the change that Members on both sides of the House want.

9.15 pm

Tony Baldry: As is often the case, I am largely in agreement with the hon. Member for City of York (Hugh Bayley), my colleague on the International Development Committee, although I want to share a few points with the House to put the issue into a slightly broader context.

Jim Morris, the executive director of the World Food Programme, came to brief the International Development Committee last Monday. I want to read to the House the note of the informal meeting:

> "James Morris gave a brief overview of the situation in Southern Africa. There were 12/13 million people at risk of loss of life in six countries (Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, Lesotho, Mozambique and Swaziland). Half of those at risk were in Zimbabwe and a quarter in Malawi. The six countries would need 1.6 million tonnes of grain, which WFP would bring in through Tanzania and Mozambique."

A rather stark sentence follows:

> "The work was set to become the WFP's largest undertaking."

I suspect that what we are about to see in southern Africa will dwarf the humanitarian aid effort that has been required in Afghanistan. The Secretary of State for International Development shakes her head, but she can tell us whether that is so when she winds up. With 12 million to 13 million people at risk of loss of life, however, I do not think that the executive director of the World Food Programme would use those words lightly. He went on to tell us:

> "In Zimbabwe the operating environment complicated the problem. Zimbabwe had suffered the worst drought in twenty years. Land reform had seen a weakening of commercial farming and growth in small holdings . . . yields had dropped, mainly because less irrigation was being used. There were 850,000 displaced people within Zimbabwe."

Interestingly, he added that

> "33,000 tonnes of grain were shipped from the US of which 18,000 was intended for Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe failed to complete the paperwork and it had to be redirected."

In southern Africa, we are about to face a famine of horrific proportions. Whereas Zimbabwe used to export food to neighbouring countries, the whole of that area now suffers from the prospect of substantial loss of life. That is also against a background of the scourge of AIDS. Let us consider this horrific figure: a quarter of the education budget in Malawi goes to pay for the funerals of teachers who have died from AIDS.

This is a test not just for us but for the whole of Africa. We have heard a lot about the New Partnership for Africa's Development. When President Mbeki introduced, with President Obasanjo and others, the NEPAD concept in October 2001, he said:

> "We are agreed that we must strengthen democracy on the continent; we must entrench a human rights culture; we must end existing conflicts and prevent new conflicts. We have to deal with corruption and be accountable for all our actions."

In an article in *The Washington Post* the other day, President Museveni of Uganda wrote that

> "we Africans must do more to put our own houses in order. Here again, there is a growing consensus between the donor countries and the developing world. President Bush has pledged substantial amounts of new development assistance for countries that are opening their markets, improving governance, and encouraging economic and political freedoms."

He continued:

> "African leaders agree. In the New Economic Partnership for African Development, a plan endorsed by the Organization of African Unity, African leaders have committed to many of the same principles described by President Bush and have embraced full responsibility for eradicating poverty and placing their countries on a path of sustainable growth".

As part of NEPAD, African leaders have agreed on a peer review system whereby African countries will judge other African countries—but more than peer review is required.

NEPAD is being discussed in Canada, and African countries are asking us and other G8 countries for substantially more investment in Africa for infrastructure and other projects. I hope that that will be forthcoming, but there is a quid pro quo. There must be a partnership, and part of that partnership means that African countries collectively will have to exert pressure on those who are failing. I suspect that there is substantially more that those countries could do to bring pressure to bear on Mugabe and on the regime in Zimbabwe. We must make it clear to our colleagues in Africa whom we wish to support that this is a test. We and those who want to support them will watch closely to see how they face up to that test.

9.20 pm

Mr. Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford): I am aware of the pressure of time, so I will try to curtail my remarks.

This is a timely debate and I join those who congratulated my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) on calling for it. This week, the Zimbabwean Government are trying to shut down 3,000 family farms and, one week ago, further attempts were made to curtail freedom of speech in that country. The debate also comes at a time when there is growing and worrying evidence of sanctions failing.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir Patrick Cormack), I was disappointed by the content and the style of the Foreign Secretary's speech. I hope and am sure that the Secretary of State for International Development will be able to be more comprehensive and thorough.

The House will be familiar with the fact that the sanctions that are being imposed at present are supposedly smart. Although they may be smart in theory, the way in which they have been implemented has proved to be remarkably dumb. For example, the much-vaunted travel ban is already in tatters.

Members have already heard how Mr. Mugabe, accompanied by several other Ministers, flew into Rome on 9 June under the guise of attending a United Nations conference. It is ironic that it was a conference on food production. That was not an isolated incident. In late May, Augustine Chihuri, the police commissioner, travelled to Paris for an Interpol conference. Joselyn Chiwenga, the wife of the army chief, has been reported as visiting Britain earlier this month along with three Zimbabwean Ministers. As we have heard, Grace Mugabe has applied for and been granted a tourist visa by the Spanish Government. Worst of all, Olivia Muchena flew into Gatwick recently. She is a member of the ZANU-PF cabinet and the very woman who, as a deputy Minister, was responsible for the fast-track land-grabbing policy that is at the heart of the problem.

Each incident represents a deliberate flouting of the letter or the spirit of the ban. For those reasons, I hope that the Secretary of State for International Development will answer these questions in her winding-up speech. Why are the Government not implementing sanctions against people such as Mrs. Chiwenga? Have Ministers complained to the Spanish Government about the visa for Mrs. Mugabe—and if not, why not? Why has the United Kingdom not included people such as Mrs. Muchena on the list of responsible people, given that she had direct responsibility for the policy that is at the heart of the problem?

At the beginning of Question Time this afternoon, the Foreign Secretary said that the travel ban policy would be humiliating. In one sense, he is right. It is humiliating for this Government, for the European Union and for the people who are still in Zimbabwe to watch the ban being flouted.

The Government have made requests for us to come up with a policy for them. Although that is a generous offer, I can only bring some early thoughts to it. I shall briefly summarise them. First, the Government need to implement the sanctions and travel ban effectively. That means stopping existing abuses and, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes rightly said, widening the net.

Secondly, we need to show not just people here but people in Zimbabwe how corrupt the Zimbabwean Government have become. There is a wonderful opportunity for the British, American and European authorities to expose the assets held by ZANU-PF officials abroad. It is vital that we show the Zimbabwean public and the people in neighbouring states how the regime is bleeding Zimbabwe dry.

Thirdly, we need to encourage both South Africa and Nigeria to become more assertive in their demands. I hope that the Secretary of State will respond to that specific point. Finally, Colonel Gaddafi has been mentioned, and he is the principal provider of oil to Zimbabwe. The Government need to persuade Libya to use its considerable leverage to good effect. Clearly I do not expect the Secretary of State to give an open response to that; I simply ask the Government not merely to note the points raised but to act on them.

9.26 pm

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): This is an important debate. I was disappointed that the Foreign Secretary started his speech with one or two cheap points about why the Leader of the Opposition has not spent more time discussing this subject. There is one simple reason for that: we have an extremely competent shadow Foreign Secretary who has been at the forefront of these issues for the past year. Hardly a day has gone by when he has not mentioned something related to Zimbabwe, and it has been raised a number of times in every Foreign Office Question Time and International Development Question Time. I think I am right in saying that we have had no fewer than three Adjournment debates on the subject, all initiated by Opposition Members. We have not been sitting idly by. The Leader of the Opposition has given us a great deal of encouragement to keep Zimbabwe at the top of the agenda. The Foreign Secretary's comments were cheap indeed.

We have heard some excellent speeches. My right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) listed a catalogue of truly wicked incidents. One of the most moving speeches, however, was by my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir Patrick Cormack). I am sure he moved all of us when he went right to the heart of the tragedy in that beautiful land.

We all know that the elections were a farce. Every independent observer condemned them as a sham. They have brought utter shame on the ruling party and are an insult to democracy. Robin and Jennifer Plunkett, a couple who own a farm in Zimbabwe near the Mozambique border, sent me an interesting video, which I passed on to my right hon. Friend, which documents numerous examples of outright intimidation, fraud and ballot rigging. Lest anyone should have any doubts about the reports of those elections in the world media—and there may have been some exaggerations—the video made it clear to me beyond peradventure that they were a total sham.

No one can accept the result. Mugabe has no legitimacy whatsoever. He is a political pariah who has completely demeaned himself and brought misery to his people who were denied the right to vote him out of office. The man is a wicked tyrant. My right hon. Friend was right when he said that our key priority must be to have a rerun of those elections as soon as possible.

A number of hon. Members mentioned the appalling famine in southern Africa. The once great country of Zimbabwe was the bread basket of that region and it boasted proudly of its food exports to other countries. However, its food production is now a quarter of what it was 10 years ago, as my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) explained, and that is mostly attributable to Mugabe's confiscation of productive farms. The pretence of handing the land over to landless peasants has long since disappeared. As several hon. Members have made clear, those farms have been handed to Mugabe's cronies.

The latest ludicrous order preventing farmers from farming stems from an amendment made last month to the Land Acquisition Act. Those who carry on farming after the 45-day period will either be fined or imprisoned for two years. I gather that an appeal is to go to Zimbabwe's High Court. We must all hope and pray that it is successful.

In Mugabe's actions we see the politics of a madman. My hon. Friend the Member for Banbury, the Chairman of the International Development Committee, told the House that there is famine in southern Africa—for example, in Malawi. In an excellent article that appeared in *The Daily Telegraph* two days ago, the journalist Neil Darbyshire made it crystal clear that the dislocation and ruination of farming in Zimbabwe is part of the cause of the appalling famine in Malawi.

Action is needed. Last week, the Brussels think tank International Crisis Group forecast increasing unrest and an impending clampdown by Mugabe. The report's author, John Prendergast, said:

> "Britain and the EU talk tough and do nothing: it is a joke."

It is an extremely unfortunate joke, because the sanctions are not working. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk) emphasised, the travel ban is not working. It must be extended across the board to every single ZANU-PF politician and their families.

My right hon. Friend the shadow Foreign Secretary made it clear that freezing bank accounts has yielded only a pitiful sum—£76,000 to date. We know that there are millions of pounds in bank accounts around Europe, and I hope that the Secretary of State for International Development will explain why more has not been frozen. Why is more not being done in that respect?

There are strong arguments in favour of other types of action, and I have a suggestion. What about imposing a ban on Air Zimbabwe? The airline is obviously still flying and its aircraft are not being impounded. A ban would not hit the ordinary people of Zimbabwe, but would hit the politicians and Mugabe's cronies. Yes, it would also hit various business men who are doing their level best in difficult circumstances to run their businesses, but surely, when push came to shove, they could make alternative arrangements, probably via South Africa. The symbolism of banning Air Zimbabwe would be extremely powerful. That very suggestion was made by a couple of leading American politicians only two weeks ago.

There is need for other action, because we are talking about a brazen bully. Mugabe is laughing at the west. I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes that there is a crucial role for South Africa and Nigeria to play, especially in putting pressure on Libya and giving Thabo Mbeki more stomach for getting involved. He has to take a position and start taking risks. Politicians have to take risks.

There is no question of Britain acting alone, but we should in no way be ashamed of our former colonial involvement in Zimbabwe. We should be proud of what was done under British rule. We bequeathed a sense of fair play and justice to that country, and sooner or later its people will say, "Enough is enough." They will rise up and depose the monster. Then, Zimbabwe will again be on the path to peace, prosperity, justice, observance of human rights and, above all, freedom.

9.34 pm

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): The debate did not start off on a good footing. I must register disappointment at the tone adopted by the Foreign Secretary at the beginning. However, the debate has improved as we have gone along and it entirely vindicates the Opposition's choice of the subject for one of our precious Supply days.

From all parts of the House, we have offered the Government a number of suggestions for measures that might be taken. The most recent suggestion, from my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham), is not such a bad one. *[Interruption.]* When the Foreign Secretary is listening, I hope that his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development will convey to him the large number of suggestions that were made during the debate about what else he might do. The tone adopted by the Foreign Secretary was that of an apologia for inaction. As we heard subsequently, there is a good deal more action that could be taken.

As many hon. Members said, the situation prevailing under President Mugabe is a tragedy, not just for the people of Zimbabwe, but for the whole region. That fact alone makes the Government's failure to engage more proactively even more lamentable. We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry), the Chairman of the Select Committee on International Development, that 13 million people in southern Africa are on the brink of starvation. Zimbabwe, which should be able to export food to feed them, is itself dependent on food aid. If the international community had acted sooner and more decisively, they might not be facing the prospect of hunger and starvation this summer—a situation that will get worse as stocks expire.

Let us not shy away from the fact that accounts of the unfolding horrors in Zimbabwe, more than any other country in Africa, are turning up in our postbags. Only this morning I received one from a Zimbabwean farmer, begging me to pass on this message to the Government:

> "The situation in Zimbabwe has not been solved and it should not be swept under the carpet. The Zimbabwean people must not be let down by the International Community again".

I am sure that all hon. Members have received e-mails and letters in similar vein.

President Mugabe is culpable. His mismanagement of the economy, his violent and illegal theft of people's land, his blatant and sometimes brutal manipulation of the recent elections, and the continued violent oppression of ordinary Zimbabweans have all led a once prosperous country to the brink of ruin. As for Robert Mugabe's stewardship of the economy, we heard various measures of the state of the economy. According to the Economist Intelligence Unit report, it has shrunk by 25 per cent. since 1998, and unemployment is approaching 75 per cent. That is an indictment of any Government's role.

[Mrs. Caroline Spelman]

Scarce food supplies are so expensive that many Zimbabweans cannot afford to buy enough to eat. The UN has estimated that 1.5 million tonnes of food aid will be needed. We welcome the fact that the Government have said that 32 million tonnes of humanitarian relief will be made available to Zimbabwe outside the official channels, but I would like to hear from the Secretary of State for International Development how the safety and security of those official channels can be guaranteed, in the light of the actions of Mugabe and his henchmen.

The people are not so much living as enduring what their appalling Government have inflicted on them. The country's ability to square up to the drought has been severely affected by President Mugabe's governance. Crops have not been planted, and the yields of those that have been is pitiful. The maize crop is only 20 per cent. of normal, and wheat yields are down 40 or 50 per cent. There has been no maize meal in the shops for six to nine months. People have been getting by on stocks of wheat, but those are about to run out. There is a bread shortage looming, and in a muzzled country, people are afraid to protest.

Most hon. Members will agree that land reform was needed in Zimbabwe. We had a long history lesson from the hon. Member for Workington (Tony Cunningham) on how the land reforms came about—so long that our second Back-Bench speaker got in only at 9.15 this evening. The important point is that Britain had a key role in bringing forward those land reforms, and we have a responsibility to see that they are implemented as originally conceived. Yesterday, nearly 3,000 farmers were made to surrender their farms. Any farmer who continues to farm his land faces the prospect of a lengthy prison sentence, and 60 per cent. of the white farmers who were working the land two years ago will have to stop. Zimbabwe was once the bread basket of southern Africa, but it now presents us with a begging bowl.

Mugabe's response to the crisis has disgraced him even further in the eyes of world. The approach of the Government of Zimbabwe to food assistance has ranged from absolute negligence to outright obstruction. For Mugabe, food is power and a vehicle for political control. At the moment, behind the scenes, a power battle is taking place between Harare and the UN over who controls food distribution in Zimbabwe. The Government of Zimbabwe are using food to reward their allies and punish their enemies. As usual, it is the weakest and most vulnerable who suffer. A fortnight ago, a food distribution agency run by local churches and supported by the Catholic Fund for Overseas Development was closed down by war veterans loyal to Robert Mugabe. Some 40,000 people, many of them children, were denied the food on which they had depended. My right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) referred to one school in Zimbabwe whose feeding plan has been altered to keep MDC children from obtaining food.

When the Government of Zimbabwe are not being obstructive, they are being negligent. According to a written answer I received from the Secretary of State for International Development, there is "no credible national plan" to address food shortages in Zimbabwe. NGOs and agencies that wish to distribute food are hampered by the lack of any coherent plan from a Government who do not care about the plight of their own people. Robert Mugabe is intent on fighting a war not simply against the white minority, but against the whole country, and the world watches him as he does so.

The Prime Minister is at a meeting of the G8 in Canada in which a topic for discussion will be the New Partnership for Africa's Development. The partnership represents a new model for working in Africa. It is a vehicle to promote just and democratically accountable government in Africa, but one of its first tests is Zimbabwe. I think that I speak for many hon. Members in saying that, at the moment, it is simply not working. My hon. Friend the Member for Banbury reminded us of the contribution made by President Museveni to *The Washington Post*, in which he said that Africa must do its part. As my hon. Friend said, Africa tries, but must do more, to exert pressure.

Presidents Mbeki of South Africa and Obasanjo of Nigeria are the main architects of NEPAD, but they were too slow to condemn Mugabe and have been ineffective in restraining his political excesses. However, we should at least be grateful that they condemned Mugabe, as other African commentators were considerably more reluctant to do so. That has serious implications for NEPAD. South African election observers initially declared the election result valid. A South African police Minister allegedly tried to persuade observers of the elections in Zimbabwe that they were credible and legitimate. Before the close of voting, the head of the Nigerian observer team said:

> "It will be very difficult for anyone to come and tell us that it was not free and fair".

The President of Kenya was one of the first to congratulate Robert Mugabe. The poll result was also quickly welcomed by the Presidents of Namibia, Zambia and Tanzania, and the Organisation of African Unity said that the results of the election were

> "transparent, credible, free and fair".

That is in stark contrast with the way in which the Foreign Secretary described the conduct of the elections to this House on 12 March, when he said:

> "there has been every sign of ZANU-PF-backed violence and intimidation, right up to the close of polling, as well as many reports of irregularities, including a shortage of polling booths in urban areas, and harassment of opposition election agents in rural areas."—[*Official Report*, 12 March 2002; Vol. 381, c. 740.]

Two days later, he told us:

> "we do not recognise the result or its legitimacy."—[*Official Report*, 14 March 2002; Vol. 381, c. 1035.]

How could the Foreign Secretary argue in his speech that Mugabe should legitimately be able to attend meetings of the UN if he does not recognise the legitimacy of that Government?

Since the election, land-grabs have continued and reports of human rights abuses and torture persist. The freedom of the press remains curtailed and the independence of the judiciary suppressed, and the humanitarian situation continues to decline. If NEPAD is a new model of working partnership with Africa, the situation in Zimbabwe leaves me very concerned indeed. If NEPAD is to be seen to be effective, peer pressure must be made to work. At present, there is little evidence of that.

Many hon. Members share the belief that more concerted action by the Government and the EU could have prevented the situation from getting this far. The EU's travel ban has proved to be humiliating for us, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk) pointed out. Politics is about perception, and the perception is that that ban is not working.

The powerful message that the Government should take from the debate is our strong sense that they have failed to act and have allowed a festering situation to go from bad to worse. On 2 October, in his speech to the Labour party conference, the Prime Minister warned that there would be

"no tolerance of . . . the activities of Mr. Mugabe's henchmen in Zimbabwe".

How does the Government's failure to restrain the theft, corruption and intimidation by Robert Mugabe and his associates square with that pledge of zero tolerance?

I receive countless letters and e-mails from people in Zimbabwe who feel let down and abandoned by Britain. Why, they ask, did Britain allow the situation to get this bad when it was clearly deteriorating under our noses? The Prime Minister wears his passion for Africa on his sleeve, but, when it comes to Zimbabwe, what has that passion achieved? The Government made a great song and dance about having an ethical foreign policy, but their handling of Zimbabwe has destroyed the trust in them to deliver it.

9.46 pm

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): The whole House has agreed that the situation in Zimbabwe is a terrible tragedy. The Mugabe regime is systematically wrecking its economy, brutalising its people, stealing elections and causing enormous suffering to its people. The situation is likely to get much worse in the next few months, and I fear that there will be a very serious famine.

There is agreement across the House, as the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) said, but the difference between us and Her Majesty's official Opposition is that they seem to have forgotten about power so quickly that they think that there is a magic wand that can put the situation right. They believe that Her Majesty's Government have the power to go in anywhere in the world to stop the disgraceful wreckage of an economy such as that carried out by the Mugabe regime, which gets ever worse as time goes by. The UK does not have that power—if only—and we never did.

The Opposition motion

"calls on Her Majesty's Government to . . . build an international coalition to apply whatever pressure is necessary . . . to restore democracy in Zimbabwe".

In fact, we have been doing just that since 1997. I say to the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir Patrick Cormack) that I have attended to the situation in Zimbabwe weekly—maybe fortnightly—ever since 1997. It has gone from bad to worse. I knew how bad it was in 1997—there was not a genuine programme of land reform—but no one could have predicted this wreckage or that anyone would do that to their country. We tried to take step after step, but it has got worse. There has not been a failure of attention or a failure to take action.

The truth is that we cannot fix everything across the world in every tragic situation. We have to do all that we can, whenever we can. To pretend that we can fix it when we cannot is dishonest, and is no help to the people of Zimbabwe or anyone else. We have led in building the international coalition that has left Zimbabwe increasingly isolated. The International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the African Development Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development are no longer disbursing funds in Zimbabwe. Denmark and the Netherlands are withdrawing from it, and most other EU states are providing limited assistance through non-government channels. The European Commission is not disbursing the ninth European development fund programme. Zimbabwe is suspended from the Commonwealth and the elite face sanctions from the EU and the US.

All that is equivalent to an international coalition putting pressure on the Government of Zimbabwe. Unfortunately, it has not halted the Mugabe regime's determination to wreck its economy. Even today, when the country faces famine, further action is being taken to prevent farmers from farming. It is unbelievable that any Government, whatever their motivation or lack of decency, would go on wrecking and wrecking like that. The international community is doing all that it can to stop that. We share the Opposition's frustration. We have given Zimbabwe a high priority and we shall continue to do that.

Remember the Balkans and how long it took to deal with Milosevic. Remember the unilateral declaration of independence. A Labour Government under Harold Wilson were in power then. They were determined to prevent UDI and bring Zimbabwe to democracy, and they were not always fully supported by Conservative Members. In the end, Zimbabwe came to democracy and it will return to it. I fear that that will happen through famine; the rage that it causes in the country will ultimately tear down the regime. There will be horrendous suffering in the process, and we must do everything in our power to relieve it as much as we can.

As many hon. Members said, the case for land reform in Zimbabwe is overwhelming. I was surprised by the assertion of the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham) that he was proud of everything that Britain had done in Zimbabwe. The land was stolen from people and UDI was a shame. Land reform must be principled and done according to law; it must prioritise the people who live in communal areas. We have made it clear that we would support that, as would the international community.

President Mugabe turned against such reform. I believe that he saw power and support for him slipping away in his country. He lost a referendum, and that gave him a shock. He therefore returned to the rhetoric of his heyday, when he was at his most popular and took over the country. What were the two main principles then? Land and beating the UK. He went back to beating that drum, believing that the people of Zimbabwe would support him. There has been complete loss of contact with reality, and all the ensuing consequences.

The UK has supported the overwhelming case for land reform since independence. We have fulfilled our commitments under the Lancaster House agreement. For most of period since independence, the Conservative party was in government. The UK has disbursed £500 million in bilateral aid and a considerable further sum through the multilateral system.

However, when President Mugabe started on the wrecking track, he set out to persuade neighbouring African Governments that the UK was resisting justified

[Clare Short]

land reform. He went back to the rhetoric of independence and he fooled neighbouring countries for a time. I believe that that time is coming to an end, but he banged the drum of the independence fight. He was a hero in Africa in those years, and he confused the current debate there by using some of the rhetoric of that struggle to portray the UK as the monster, and suggest that we were committed to the white farmers, not the people of Zimbabwe. The confusion may arise partly because the record shows that that was sometimes true.

Attitudes are changing. As the Governments of Africa witness what is happening to Zimbabwe, they are no longer confused and they are increasingly moving against Mugabe. However, the approaching tragedy will cause enormous harm to many people.

I do not have time to respond properly to all the speeches. I understand and share the rage of the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram), who said that he would rule nothing in and nothing out. We are doing everything in our power; all suggestions are welcome. There is no magic wand.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Tony Cunningham) that we should pay tribute to the brave Zimbabweans who stood for hours, indeed days, to vote in an election when they were being brutalised. We should express our respect for their courage in the circumstances that they faced.

I emphasise to the hon. Member for South Staffordshire that we have given Zimbabwe a high priority. Perhaps we should have debated it in the House more often, but it is difficult to express everything in debates. For example, many organisations are trying to deliver food and they face resistance, but I will not name them in answer to hon. Members' questions because if they appear in *Hansard*, they will experience even more difficulties in Zimbabwe. However, I shall always write to hon. Members or discuss such questions with them.

I saw Chief Anyaoku recently. We can contact him again to find whether he believes that he can do anything. Let us be clear: we have tried and tried and tried. Persuading President Mugabe to be rational and care for his people seems impossible. We shall go on trying, but it is difficult. The powers of the International Criminal Court are not retrospective, and therefore not relevant to the subject that we are discussing.

I stress to the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) that I shook my head about Afghanistan because the extent of the crisis there is similar. Before 11 September, 5 million people in that country had to be fed daily. The number increased to 6 million, then 7 million. It is now up to 12 million as we turn the country round and get it resettled. I am not, therefore, saying that there is not a monstrous crisis emerging in southern Africa because of the situation in Zimbabwe; it is on a comparable scale.

As for NEPAD, Zimbabwe must, of course, be discussed in the context of that partnership, but we cannot hold a whole continent—the poorest continent in the world—hostage to the misbehaviour of President Mugabe. We must engage with African Governments who are reformers in driving forward the reform agenda, and try to get them to join in the effort to improve, to put pressure on the Mugabe regime and to take Zimbabwe forward.

I agree with the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk on money freezing, and if the figures are as low as he says, let us look into it. I undertake that I, or another Minister, will write to him on that and on his other suggestion—I know that the USA was considering taking action on Air Zimbabwe. All these actions should be considered, and we will do that.

I would say to the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) that I have an office of enormously brave staff in Zimbabwe who are making sure that the food supplied by the UK is not tainted or touched by ZANU-PF thugs who might prevent it from being properly distributed. I want to pay tribute to my staff there, who are working in very difficult circumstances to that end. We are working with the World Food Programme and the UN to ensure that, in trying to face the coming crisis, there will be no political manipulation.

Let me say, however, that we cannot feed those who will be hungry unless the Mugabe regime permits the private sector to import food. As yet, it will not, and the situation looks appalling. There will be considerable food aid, but trucks will be needed to distribute it, and the trucks are all controlled by the regime. The commercial suppliers are not allowed to import, while the Zimbabwean currency has such a high exchange rate that the costs are prohibitive. The country is facing a drought that will cause a crisis that could easily be managed, but it is potentially a disaster because of the mis-government, the mismanagement of the economy and the grossly mismanaged land reform that has handed farms to fat cats, as the hon. Member for South Staffordshire stated.

If the regime in Zimbabwe cannot be persuaded to allow us to do our work to get food to the hungry, there will be famine conditions, and the population will stream out into the neighbouring countries. I am afraid that that is how the political crisis will be resolved: in an utter tragedy. I am sure that that will bring down the regime, but it will do so in a way that will cause even further suffering to the people of Zimbabwe. This is not a matter of dispute across the House; there is no difference between the Government and the Opposition on this analysis or on our sense of the forthcoming tragedy.

On top of all that, Zimbabwe has the highest HIV infection rate in Africa. The lives of the poor people of Zimbabwe have been wrecked by the Government who have brought untold harm to them. I give those people an undertaking that we will do all in our power to keep them fed through the coming crisis. We stand ready, when they can find a way of bringing round this regime, to support them in a democratic election and in rebuilding their economy and their country. That beautiful country, which is naturally very fertile, should be the bread basket of this region of Africa, instead of facing this crisis. It will rebuild again—

Mrs. Spelman: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Clare Short: Very quickly. There is only one minute left.

Mrs. Spelman: My hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir Patrick Cormack) asked the Foreign

Secretary whether, given the significance of the region, he would consider a visit to the region. May I extend that question to the Secretary of State?

Clare Short: I have been to the region repeatedly, and I shall go again. For obvious reasons, I am not planning to go to Zimbabwe, or to meet representatives of its Government.

The population of Zimbabwe is highly educated. They will rebuild; they will come to democracy again. We will be there to try to help people to survive the coming crisis, and to help them to rebuild the country. The way in which President Mugabe has wrecked this prosperous country is truly unforgivable. Zimbabwe should be an engine for development in Africa and should be supplying food to help the region through the drought that it now faces. But there are no magic wands. We cannot fix it just because we hate it. We have to work together to do everything in our power to mobilise international support for action that will bring the crisis to an end, but we have not been successful. No one has been successful as yet, and no one could have envisaged how far President Mugabe would go in wrecking his country. As he brings down his regime, he brings down the whole economy with it.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 138, Noes 361.

Division No. 283] **[10 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brazier, Julian
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prisk, Mark
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Simmonds, Mark
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Steen, Anthony
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trimble, Rt Hon David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas
(Macclesfield)
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Dr. Julian Lewis and
Mrs. Cheryl Gillan.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baird, Vera
Barrett, John
Barron, Rt Hon Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas
(Newcastle E & Wallsend)
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnett, John
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr Vincent
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
(NE Fife)
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clark, Dr Lynda
(Edinburgh Pentlands)
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles
(Norwich S)
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack
(Copeland)
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam

Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Ewing, Annabelle
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hume, John
Hurst, Alan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Keetch, Paul
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laws, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Price, Adam
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stunell, Andrew
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wishart, Pete
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Derek Twigg and
Joan Ryan.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

MR. SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House expresses its grave concern at the abuse of human rights and suppression of freedom of expression in Zimbabwe, the increase in poverty arising from the policies of the ruling party, and the impending humanitarian crisis in the country; reaffirms the view that the outcome of the recent Presidential election does not reflect the will of the Zimbabwean people; recognises the need for Land Reform but also recognises that this needs to be done responsibly; welcomes the actions taken on Zimbabwe by Her Majesty's Government in co-operation with the EU, the Commonwealth, the US and others; further welcomes the efforts of the Governments of South Africa and Nigeria to facilitate dialogue between ZANU (PF) and MDC, and deplores ZANU (PF)'s withdrawal from these talks; further welcomes the Government's commitment of £32 million to humanitarian relief in Zimbabwe outside official channels; and calls on the Government to encourage other donors to stand by the people of Zimbabwe at this difficult time.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr. Speaker: With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

COUNTRYSIDE

That the draft Vehicular Access Across Common and Other Land (England) Regulations 2002, which were laid before this House on 14th May, be approved.

INVESTIGATORY POWERS

That the draft Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Maintenance of Interception Capability) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 22nd May, be approved.

INTERNATIONAL IMMUNITIES AND PRIVILEGES

That the draft Specialized Agencies of the United Nations (Immunities and Privileges) (Amendment) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 12th June, be approved.

INTERNATIONAL IMMUNITIES AND PRIVILEGES

That the draft United Nations and International Court of Justice (Immunities and Privileges) (Amendment) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 12th June, be approved.

SOCIAL SECURITY

That the draft Social Security Amendment (Intercalating Students) Regulations 2002, which were laid before this House on 12th June, be approved.

INSIDER DEALING

That the draft Insider Dealing (Securities and Regulated Markets) (Amendment) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 12th June, be approved.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

That the draft Offshore Installations (Emergency Pollution Control) Regulations 2002, which were laid before this House on 12th June, be approved.—*[Mr. Jim Murphy.]*

Question agreed to.

SCOTTISH GRAND COMMITTEE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 100(1) (Scottish Grand Committee (sittings),

That the Scottish Grand Committee shall meet at Westminster on Wednesday 10th July at half-past Ten o'clock to consider a substantive Motion for the adjournment of the Committee.-*[Mr. Jim Murphy.]*

Question agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Ordered,

NATIONAL CARE STANDARDS COMMISSION

That the National Care Standards Commission (Children's Rights Director) Regulations 2002 (S.I., 2002, No. 1250) be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.—*[Mr. Jim Murphy.]*

Asthma

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Jim Murphy.]*

10.14 pm

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): I am grateful for the opportunity to talk about this important subject—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. There is an Adjournment debate taking place. Would hon. Members leave the Chamber quietly?

Mrs. Campbell: Everyone in the House probably knows someone who is badly affected by asthma. Yet in 1950 fewer than one in 50 of the world population had asthma, and before the 1960s, asthma was not regarded as a fatal illness. However, there has been a massive increase since then. The National Asthma Campaign estimates that about 5 million people in the United Kingdom currently receive treatment for asthma, and 8 million people have been diagnosed as having asthma at some point in their lives.

Over the past quarter of a century, the number of first or new asthma cases has increased considerably. Compared with 25 years ago, the incidence of asthma is three to four times higher in adults and six times higher in children, and it is particularly problematic in the UK. The international study of asthma and allergies in childhood found that the highest number of children reporting asthma symptoms were in the UK, Australia, New Zealand and the Republic of Ireland. Asthma has also become more serious: in the UK, about 1,500 deaths a year have asthma registered as the cause.

This epidemic imposes a huge cost on the national health service, employers and individuals. The estimated annual cost to our health care system of treating asthma is more than £850 million a year, and those costs account for just one third of the total cost to society. There is also an enormous cost to employers, with more than 18 million working days lost to asthma each year.

I am pleased to see that *The Independent on Sunday* is running a campaign to get us to take the disease more seriously and to spend more money on research. I applaud the paper's sentiments and fully support its campaign to reduce traffic and other forms of pollution. However, I shall argue that pollution is a trigger, not a primary cause of asthma. Increasing levels of pollution and ozone affect existing asthmatics but do not create new ones. The medical community still does not know what fundamentally causes the disease.

It is time we admitted that the current treatments appear to be making us worse, not better, and I want to take a look at the possible causes and treatment of asthma. I shall describe the work done by a Russian doctor, Konstantin Buteyko, in the 1960s; it attempted to explain why people get asthma, and offered a management regime for the disease.

Dr. Buteyko's methods were practised widely in Russia in the 1980s, and that may still be the case. They spread to Australia when an Australian doctor suffered an asthma attack while visiting Russia. He was admitted to hospital and was taught the Buteyko method for controlling his symptoms. He was so impressed that he took the method back to Australia, and it is now taught there and in New Zealand.

Buteyko blames hyperventilation for a number of civilisation-induced diseases. We all hyperventilate at times of stress. Indeed, the "fight or flight" response to stress is well documented. It was useful in building energy reserves when stress was likely to be caused by a wild animal or physical attack by an enemy. However, continuous over-breathing is certainly damaging and can cause disease. The importance of correct breathing is acknowledged by the National Asthma Campaign's website, which states:

> "The body needs a balance between carbon dioxide and oxygen. Oxygen is the vital fuel for the body that we get from breathing in the air; carbon dioxide is produced in the body and breathed out. Breathing very rapidly, usually due to being very anxious, can lead to breathing out too much carbon dioxide. This can cause symptoms such as tingling in the fingers and dizziness."

Buteyko's hypothesis is that it also causes asthma.

It is not only emotional stress that causes hyperventilation; anyone who is sensitive to environmental factors such as pollution, tobacco smoke, pollens—which are especially noticeable at this time of year—dog and cat hair or house mites, will experience them as stress and can start to hyperventilate as a result. Certain foods also act as a trigger for asthma, notably chocolate, red wine, cheese and even strawberries—in fact, most of the things that I like best.

Other stress factors are illness, such as chest infections, or exercise. They are all experienced as stress and cause us to breathe too quickly. The effect of that hyperventilation is to increase the amount of oxygen but also to deplete the amount of carbon dioxide, which falls below the level needed for our bodies to function efficiently.

If carbon dioxide is too low, death will ensue, so when the level falls below a certain limit, the body takes retaliatory action. The smooth muscle surrounding the airways goes into involuntary spasm and tightens, thus preventing people from breathing out and losing more carbon dioxide. At the same time, the airway inner linings become swollen or inflamed and excessive amounts of mucus are produced. That is what many of us who are asthmatics experience as an asthma attack.

Usually we try to compensate by breathing more, even though that compounds the problem. An asthmatic may also resort to using reliever medication, which can be a life saver—but it works by relaxing the muscles around the airways, allowing the asthmatic to hyperventilate even more and making the problem worse. Buteyko concluded that asthma is actually a defence mechanism, to guard against the fatal loss of carbon dioxide by over-breathing.

Patients who need reliever medication frequently are usually prescribed steroid preventer medication, which helps to reduce the swelling of the inner airway tube. That works well, but unfortunately, it also depresses the immune system, thus making the patient more vulnerable to coughs, colds and chest infections.

Buteyko's conclusion was that rather than giving people more drugs, which usually make the condition worse, it would be better to teach them how to breathe correctly. However, it is important to stress that Buteyko practitioners always instruct people to continue using their medication unless it is reduced under the supervision of a GP.

Asthmatics whose stress response is constantly stimulated by asthma triggers will over-breathe continuously, and in the long term that can be both crippling and life threatening. There is a respiratory centre in the brain that controls our breathing rate, but hidden hyperventilation depletes the body of carbon dioxide and the respiratory centre adjusts to accept those levels as normal.

The respiratory centre has to maintain what it considers the correct levels of carbon dioxide, so it increases the breathing rate whenever the low level is exceeded. Once bad breathing habits have become established, therefore, the respiratory centre's acceptance of low levels of carbon dioxide perpetuates the problem. The good news is that respiratory centres can be retrained to accept higher levels of carbon dioxide. The aim of the Buteyko technique is gradually to reduce the asthmatic's breathing rate to normal, thus increasing the level of carbon dioxide.

The technique is simple and can be taught in periods of one and a half hours once a day over four or five days. Some follow-up work is sometimes needed, but the results can be dramatic. There are specially designed exercises for children and their parents; the technique has as much success in children aged over four as it does in adults.

There are some well documented cases of people who have been helped by the technique. I understand that Jonathan Aitken, when he was Chief Secretary to the Treasury, received treatment from a Buteyko practitioner in London. His asthma was moderately severe, but over a course of consultations and home visits he made a dramatic recovery. A newspaper article quoted him as saying:

> "I have tried plenty of treatments, but this is the only one that has really worked. I think it is a remarkable one that could help many people."

Con Barrell, a member of the New Zealand All Black team, said after his treatment:

> "I sleep better, my pulse rate has dropped 10–12 beats on a regular basis and I feel well. This has been a big help to me as a professional and personally. I recommend asthmatics try it—things can only get better."

As someone who has suffered from asthma for 40 years and whose condition would have been previously described as moderate, I have given the Buteyko technique a try myself. I started with a home education pack, as described on the website, www.buteyko.co.nz. Even self-teaching is effective, as by day five I had reduced the number of times I took my reliever medication from four or five times a day to very occasional use. Later I went on a course run by a qualified Buteyko practitioner. As I continued, I discovered to my delight that the asthma symptoms were rapidly reduced. I sleep better and have more energy than I can ever remember.

What I really regret is that no one told me about the method before. This year I have not suffered from any hay fever, except for a very occasional sneeze, and I wish that someone had told me about the technique some time ago. Alone, I could have saved the national health service hundreds of pounds' worth of medication and myself a lot of needless discomfort. However, the Minister, whom I am happy to welcome to the Front Bench, will be less impressed by anecdote than by medical trials. Unfortunately, there is little evidence to quote so far.

In referring to the effectiveness of the Buteyko method, the National Asthma Campaign remarks on its website:

> "Lack of published research makes it difficult to reach a conclusion on its effectiveness."

Buteyko himself conducted a trial in Russia, but the results were considered to be too good, and were not believed for many years.

In December 1998 a paper by Bowler, Green and Mitchell was published in *Alternative Medicine*, in Australia. The paper was called "Buteyko breathing techniques in asthma: a blinded randomised trial." The trial compared the effect of the Buteyko breathing technique with a control group in 39 subjects with asthma. The control group was given instruction in general asthma education, relaxation techniques and abdominal breathing exercises. The experimenters looked at medication use, peak flow and quality of life, among other factors.

After three months, the subjects assigned to the Buteyko group had reduced their reliever medication by 904 micrograms, whereas the control group had a reduction of 57 micrograms—a highly significant result at the 0.2 per cent. level of significance. There was also a reduction in inhaled steroid use by the Buteyko subjects, although the sample sizes were too small for that to be statistically significant.

Similarly and more importantly, perhaps from my point of view, there was a trend towards greater improvement in the mean quality of life scores of the Buteyko group. I certainly think that if someone can have uninterrupted sleep, feel better and have more energy, it is worth a great deal to that individual.

I should like to mention Jill McGowan, who was awarded the carer of the year award at the Pride of Britain awards 2002. She knows a lot about asthma because she has the condition herself, and is also a nurse who has worked for many years helping other asthmatics. Like many others who have followed the course, she stopped needing her inhaler within 24 hours.

Jill is also a university lecturer with the skills to look into the theory behind Buteyko. When she decided that the method had merit, she was amazed to find that it was not more widely researched. She applied to universities for grants to allow her to fund a pilot study. When they turned her down, she sold her house and used the £55,000 proceeds to pay for the study herself.

The pilot study has shown excellent results—a more than 90 per cent. reduction in reliever medication in the first few weeks. Because of those results, a two-year clinical study of 600 asthma sufferers is under way. Jill is also helping to pay for that work by donating three quarters of her salary. That is real dedication. She hopes that the clinical study will prove the benefits of the Buteyko technique, so that one day it can become available to all on the NHS.

I very much hope that as a result of this Adjournment debate, my hon. Friend will ask the chief medical officer to examine the available evidence. In particular, I would ask him to consider the preliminary evidence from the Scottish trial, and to have further trials conducted to ascertain the method's efficacy in the UK.

Let me stress that the technique that I have described does not constitute alternative medicine—a term normally used to describe techniques that sometimes succeed, although no one can quite work out why. The Buteyko

[Mrs. Campbell]

technique was derived from research carried out by Konstantin Buteyko, who devised a programme from his theory. The fact that it has worked for me, as well as for many others, must suggest that at the very least it is worth investigating further. I hope that the Minister will respond positively to that suggestion.

10.30 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. David Lammy): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) on securing a debate on such an important subject, and for managing to bring with her my hon. Friends the Members for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson), for Eccles (Ian Stewart), for Ipswich (Mr. Mole) and for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell). That, I think, conveys the seriousness and importance of the topic.

I must declare an interest. I am a hay fever sufferer, and as a child I suffered from eczema as well. I know that my hon. Friend recognises that the two complaints are related. The subject is dear to her heart, but it is also dear to mine, and I am pleased to have an opportunity to state the Government's policy clearly.

I know how distressing and debilitating this condition can be for people, their carers and their families. There is currently no cure for asthma, and the cause is not fully understood. Treatment is based on relieving the symptoms, and while that remains the case sufferers are bound to experience some frustration.

Asthma is the commonest chronic disease in the United Kingdom. It affects about 3.4 million people, and it affects all age groups. It causes breathing difficulties because of inflammation and swelling in the airways, which can be reversed spontaneously or by treatment.

People may become asthmatic at any time. There are two major types of asthma. There is the allergic version, caused by a bad reaction to allergens such as pollen or dust. It often results in wheezing, and makes life particularly difficult for sufferers at this time of year, especially young people. And there is the non-allergic form, which usually affects people in their 20s and 30s and older people.

We would welcome a drug-free treatment that was found to improve asthma symptoms as effectively as existing medicines. I think, however, that it would be helpful if I outlined the drug regimes currently used to relieve symptoms before turning to the drug-free methods described by my hon. Friend.

There are two kinds of asthma medicines, relievers and preventers, which work in very different ways. Relievers help to relieve asthma symptoms when they happen; preventers help to control swelling and inflammation in the airways, and reduce the chance of asthma symptoms. Relievers are safe and effective medicines that patients can take immediately to relieve their symptoms. They quickly relax the muscles surrounding the narrowed airways and allow the airways to open wider, making breathing easier. However, they do not reduce inflammation and swelling in the airways. Preventers control the inflammation and swelling, and stop the airways from being so sensitive. They need to be used daily, and it may be up to two weeks before they are fully effective.

Although asthma has become more common in recent years, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge suggested, treatments have improved. It is important to stress that the number of deaths from this very debilitating disease, which can be fatal for many people, has fallen. Since 1988, in England and Wales, the number of asthma deaths has fallen by about 25 per cent., and in 2000, the latest year for which figures are available, 1,272 died from the condition. In 2000, there were 14 deaths in young people aged 19 and under.

The management of asthma mainly takes place in the primary care arena. The chronic disease management programme, introduced in July 1993, provides arrangements for health promotion under the GP contract. Participating GPs—around 93 per cent. of the total—receive a fixed annual payment for running organised programmes of care for patients with the complaint.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge spoke about the Buteyko method, which is claimed to be the most effective drug-free approach to the management of asthma and other breathing-related health problems. I commend my hon. Friend on the way in which she illustrated the effects of the approach, and of her personal account of how she has benefited over the past year or so.

The Buteyko method teaches people under stress to control their symptoms through calm, controlled breathing. My hon. Friend will be pleased to know that I spent much of this evening reading through the relevant website, and that I have the pages with me. I may well take up some of the practices to help my hay fever, as the website suggests that they may be of assistance.

If the Buteyko method proved to be as effective as is claimed, it would indeed be a breakthrough in the treatment of asthma. I should like to see robust scientific evidence to support the proposition that treatments such as the Buteyko method are effective in the treatment of asthma and provide long-term benefits for patients. I would expect that any such treatment would have to be as effective as existing drug therapies.

I know that a pilot study, involving a small number of children, was completed by the university of Aberdeen last year. My hon. Friend mentioned the work in Glasgow, and it is interesting that much of the work on this matter is going on north of the border. I hope that we can make links.

The children in Aberdeen were placed in a Buteyko group and a control group, respectively, and the aim of the study was to pilot incorporation of Buteyko breathing technique into conventional asthma nurse training and delivery of care. This would be used to decide whether it was worth doing a randomised controlled trial on a larger scale. I understand that the pilot indicated a number of positive trends, and that the Buteyko group showed a halving of sleep disturbance due to wheezing, as well as a reduction in the average daily dose of inhaled steroids. The university has subsequently made an application for major funding from the Scottish Office to enable it to carry out an additional study.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge mentioned that Australia and New Zealand have support groups for the Buteyko method, and she noted the work of Jill McGowan. I am interested in Dr. Buteyko's methods and I will ask policy officials to find out more about the Glasgow study. I will make available to the chief medical officer a copy of the record of this debate, and I will suggest that he looks further at the matter.

The Government are involved in a broad spectrum of research and development work into the disease. It is important to put that in context. The principal body providing Government funding in this area is, of course, the Medical Research Council. The MRC receives its grant-in-aid from the Department of Trade and Industry and it spent almost £4 million in 1999–2000 on asthma research.

It may be that the Buteyko method is worthy of further research. The MRC always welcomes high quality applications for research, and clinicians with a special interest in Buteyko are able to submit applications for research funding if they wish. I am sure that my hon. Friend is aware, however, that it is a long-standing and important principle of successive Governments that they do not prescribe to the individual research councils the detail of how they should distribute resources between competing priorities. That is something that researchers and research users best decide. The MRC will take all these factors into account when it makes its decision on whether it wishes to fund particular research—alongside some that we know is going on and much that my hon. Friend has talked about—into the Buteyko method.

I should add that a major joint initiative is currently being funded by the Department of Health and the Medical Research Council into air pollution and respiratory disease generally. I listened carefully to what my hon. Friend said about pollution at least adding to the symptoms of the condition. The Department of Health's policy research programme is another source of funding in this area, and it is currently funding three projects investigating the effects of external factors on asthma.

People with chronic illnesses such as asthma have a number of common requirements including needing to deal with acute attacks, making effective use of medicines and treatment, managing pain, fatigue and depression, and having to cope with other people's responses. Both adults and children with asthma will benefit from the emerging expert patients programme that will—via the NHS—provide training in self-management skills for people with long-term chronic conditions. The first pilot phase has recently begun in selected primary care trusts, with activity to take place on a generic and a disease-specific basis.

One of those pilots, in the Medway primary care trust in Kent, is proposing to focus self-management activity on people with asthma. The Medway PCT in Kent has a disproportionately high accident and emergency admission rate for asthma in childhood, and considers that many of those admissions might be avoided by improved self-management. The PCT's proposals will include involvement of a project manager for integrated services, health visitors, midwives and asthma management guidelines derived from those produced by the British Thoracic Society. We hope that expert patients can reduce the severity of symptoms, decrease pain and increase quality of life. I am sure that hon. Members will agree that those are important benefits.

The Department of Health also welcomes the National Institute for Clinical Excellence guidance on inhalers, which it produced earlier this year for children aged between 5 and 15, and in September 2000 for children under the age of 5. We hope that that has relieved the situation for many. We strongly support the guidance that emphasises the importance of ensuring that the device suits the individual needs of the child. I also plan to ask officials to discuss with NICE the feasibility of including the Buteyko method in their technology appraisals programme once we have a little more information about the evidence base.

In conclusion, I am interested in finding out more about the Buteyko method. I will ask policy officials and our research branch to look at the evidence that we currently have about its effectiveness and, once we know a little more, to discuss whether NICE could look at the feasibility of including it in a future technology appraisal programme. My hon. Friend may also want to consider approaching the Medical Research Council for advice about funding further research.

I reassure my hon. Friend that the Government are serious about improving the prevention and treatment of asthma. Our support for research projects and initiatives, such as the national service frameworks and the expert patients programme, and our willingness to look critically at new treatments, such as the Buteyko method, demonstrate that.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at fifteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 26 June 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

MERSEY TUNNELS BILL (*BY ORDER*)

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Tuesday 9 July at Seven o'clock.

Oral Answers to Questions

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Famine (Southern Africa)

1. **Huw Irranca-Davies** (Ogmore): If she will make a statement on international efforts to tackle famine in southern Africa. [62468]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): The causes of food shortages in southern Africa this year are drought and misgovernment. In Zimbabwe, which accounts for over half of the region's total food requirements, economic mismanagement and grossly mis-organised land reform have seriously exacerbated the effects of the drought.

The World Food Programme will next week launch a regional appeal for food for Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique, Lesotho and Swaziland. The WFP estimates that 4 million tonnes of cereal imports will be needed. Of that, 2.8 million tonnes will need to be provided by the private sector and government imports, and 1.2 million tonnes through food aid, which will be distributed free. Hardly any preparations have been made in Zimbabwe, and I am fearful that we are facing a serious catastrophe.

Huw Irranca-Davies: I thank my right hon. Friend for that full response. It is undoubtedly true that current levels of bilateral aid to Africa, with the pledges, will be treble what they were under the last Tory Government. However, in central Mozambique, there are one in five people with AIDS-related HIV, which is exacerbating the problem. In Zambia, there is the worst drought for 20 years. In Zimbabwe and Angola, Governments interfere in food aid. In Malawi and Zambia, people are scouring the bare maize fields for weeds to eat. There are corruption, political problems, HIV and famine.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Please be seated. Perhaps the Minister will try to reply to that question.

Clare Short: Yes, Africa is the poorest continent. Nearly half its people are abjectly poor. On current trends, the continent will become poorer. However, we have progress in a number of countries—for example, Uganda, Mozambique, Ghana and Botswana, and Ethiopia is turning round. We must take the plight of Africa seriously and we must ensure that there is a move forward to peace and development.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): We recognise that some of the problems are self-inflicted, as in Zimbabwe. However, will the Secretary of State tell us how Malawi was guided by the World Bank to release about £750,000 worth of wheat stock, which would now have been helpful to it?

Clare Short: That is an untrue excuse that has been given by the Government of Malawi. The country had large food stocks, but they must always be rotated to keep them fresh. Malawi borrowed money at great expense to have its food stocks. The IMF suggested that it could slim them down and rotate them. Malawi sold the lot. It is not clear where the money or the food went. That has exacerbated the crisis. That is the responsibility of the Government of Malawi. They are co-operating with the international community, and I hope that we can help the people of Malawi through. The situation in Zimbabwe, where nearly half of the people are in trouble, is much more worrying.

Barbara Follett (Stevenage): Have the South African Government been involved in providing food aid in the region?

Clare Short: I am not aware whether the South African Government have provided food aid. Much of the food has to come through South Africa and South African transport routes. We are talking not only about quantities but about getting the food in to the places where it is needed. It is a major logistical task and South Africa has been very involved. I think that we will also need to bring in food also through the ports on the coast of Mozambique if we are to get in enough food.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): While the famine in southern Africa has been developing and numerous aid agencies have been warning of an impending crisis, there have been 13 world summits. I will not read out the list, Mr. Speaker, because it would make you cross. What does the Secretary of State estimate to be the cost of all this talking? With far less than a dollar a day, how many people could have been saved with the money expended?

Clare Short: I agree with the hon. Lady's underlying point. There are too many conferences on international development. There are too many grand declarations and too little implementation. We have been trying to get a grip on not having endless repeat UN conferences where we renegotiate the text that was agreed last time, and instead report on progress against what was agreed last time. The recent run of summits from the millennium assembly tying the world to the millennium development goals, to Doha, to the commitment to a development round, to Monterrey to a reformed agenda and more money, and I hope, to Johannesburg, to get a commitment to sustainable development and poverty reduction, constitutes a good round. We should then implement and have fewer conferences.

Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): At a recent conference in madrid attended by African and European parliamentarians and organised by the Association of European Parliamentarians for Africa, there was concern among the African parliamentarians that the emphasis on the New Partnership for Africa's Development initiative needed to have more links with the emphasis on relieving poverty and debt in southern Africa, and therefore relieving famine. Will my hon. Friend comment on how famine and poverty relief will be worked into the NEPAD initiative that is being discussed at the G8 summit?

Clare Short: The whole point of NEPAD and all its targets is to move Africa forward to meet the millennium development goals. It is all about reducing poverty sustainably. That is the purpose of NEPAD. My hon. Friend's comments reflect the fact that there has been too little work across Africa to let the people of Africa know what NEPAD is about. We, through the Global Coalition for Africa, will engage in such an exercise.

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): In our debate on Zimbabwe last night, the Secretary of State said that

> "we cannot feed those who will be hungry unless the Mugabe regime permits the private sector to import food."—[*Official Report*, 25 June 2002; Vol. 387, c. 844.]

What additional pressure is being brought to bear on Robert Mugabe to enable food imports to stave off famine?

Clare Short: As the hon. Lady knows, it is very difficult to bring sensible pressure to bear on President Mugabe. He does not take advice, it seems, from anyone. The Government of Zimbabwe are not yet making credible plans to deal with the impending disaster. In order for the private sector to operate, price controls need to be removed, the exchange rate needs to be adjusted, and the state grain monopoly must be abolished. Otherwise, the private sector will not be able to operate. There will be lots of people with money and there will be no food to buy. We must get food aid through to the people with no money. Kofi Annan and the leader of the World Food Programme are trying to exert pressure, but the situation remains extremely worrying.

Mr. Derek Wyatt (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): With regard to Malawi, is my right hon. Friend saying that the President of Malawi sold the food to Kenya and that the money is missing? In that case, what electronic information can the International Monetary Fund give us about where the money has gone?

Clare Short: No, I am not saying that the food has been sold to Kenya. We do not know where the food is. There is about to be a crisis, and people sometimes hoard and speculate with food when countries are facing famine, as my hon. Friend probably knows. We do not know where the money is or where the food is, and we know that there is an impending crisis in Malawi but the Government are co-operating. There is an inquiry into these matters, but we must get people fed while we make inquiries about what happened.

Mrs. Spelman: Last night the Secretary of State also said that the only way she could see the Mugabe regime being brought down was as an inexorable consequence of the famine. How does that square with the Prime Minister's rhetoric about healing the scars of Africa and declaring no tolerance of the activities of Mr. Mugabe? Were those just empty words?

Clare Short: The hon. Lady and her party were banging on about that last night in a most foolish way, and I am sorry that she has returned to the matter today. The presumption is that the UK Government can fix catastrophes in the world, when Governments are determined, against all international advice, to wreck their country. No UK Government can do that. The present UK Government have done everything in their power to try to dissuade the Zimbabwe regime from the course that it is taking. Even in the face of impending famine conditions, the regime goes on making errors that will make matters worse.

Third World Debt

2. **Andrew Selous** (South-West Bedfordshire): If she will make a statement on the repayment of third world debt. [62469]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): Twenty-six of the 37 eligible heavily indebted poor countries have now qualified for debt relief of $62 billion. That has been provided through the poverty reduction strategy process, which has led to improvements in economic management and improved spending of local revenues and aid money.

Of the remaining 11 countries, many are mired in conflict and misgovernment. We are working to try to achieve progress on peace. We estimate that because of the fall in commodity prices, we will need an extra $1 billion by 2003 to get the countries that qualify to debt sustainability levels.

Andrew Selous: Do the Government agree with the Jubilee debt campaign that the number of countries that benefit from the HIPC initiative should be extended to include further countries that have unsustainable levels of overseas debt?

Clare Short: No, I do not agree with the Jubilee debt campaign. For example, it is proposed that Nigeria should benefit. Nigeria is massively oil-rich, and oil prices have gone up. It is terribly misgoverned and its resources are not used for the benefit of its people. To write off debt unconditionally would not bring any benefits to poor people. We are using the leverage of debt relief to write off unpayable debt and get good economic policy and better social spending. That is the right way. Countries such as Sudan, Burma, Somalia and Liberia could qualify if we could get them to peace. It is no good giving them debt relief while they are still buying arms and fighting, so I disagree. We must drive those countries forward, achieve peace and reform, and reward that with debt relief so that the countries get better economic management and the life of the people improves.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): Further to the previous question, there are nevertheless several dozen countries that lie just outside the HIPC—heavily indebted poor country—criteria. Can the Secretary of State tell us what our Government are doing to help those countries to move forward to a sustainable debt framework not unlike the HIPC one?

Clare Short: The other thing that hon. Members must understand is that, because there has been such a wonderful campaign on debt, people sometimes talk as if it were the only problem. Many very poor countries do not have a debt problem, but need continuing support. For example, in Uganda, which has qualified for debt relief, 50 per cent. of the Government's revenues are supported by aid, and the country has made enormous progress in reducing poverty and getting all its children to school. We are helping country after country in the appropriate way and not pretending that the only problem is debt. Some countries are poor but do not have debt, and they need help as well.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien (Eddisbury): The Secretary of State will be aware that the debt of many heavily indebted countries is not only sovereign-to-sovereign debt, but involves private finance in the banking system. She will also be aware that back in the 1970s and 1980s, when most of the debt was extended, many of the banks knew that they were very unlikely ever to be repaid and are quite happy to continue to exercise their leverage. Given that they have now written off the amounts in their own balance sheets, should it not be possible to persuade them, in exchange for having direct access through NGOs rather than Governments, that that debt should now be relieved?

Clare Short: My understanding is that those countries have limited commercial debt and that as they are such poor countries, they did not get much commercial lending. However, some commercial debt that should be part of the HIPC process is not properly being written off, and we need to attend to that issue. In general, commercial debt is written down through the London Club. If the hon. Gentleman would like to explain his points more fully, perhaps in a letter, I shall look into the matter and respond to him.

Angola

3. **Vernon Coaker** (Gedling): What assessment she has made of the humanitarian situation in Angola. [62470]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): The humanitarian situation in Angola remains very serious. More than 80,000 former fighters, 160,000 family members and 4 million displaced Angolans are all facing a humanitarian crisis. The United Nations has launched an appeal for $141 million to provide support until the end of 2002. We are contributing directly and trying to improve the effectiveness of the international response to the crisis, but Angola is at peace for the first time since the 1960s and this is a fantastically important opportunity to help it to move forward.

Vernon Coaker: My right hon. Friend deserves a lot of praise for the way in which she has highlighted the plight of the poor in Africa. Is it not also the case, however, that some countries in Africa do not get as much publicity as others? On a visit to Angola with UNICEF a few months ago, it was clear that Angola was almost a forgotten country. According to UNICEF figures, Angola is the worst place in the world in which to be born. Will she do all that she can to ensure that Angola is mentioned in all the international discussions that take place and features in any anti-poverty drive?

Clare Short: Yes, I will give that undertaking. As my hon. Friend knows, the biggest chance that Africa has is that Angola, the Congo and Sudan are all ripe for peace. If we can capture peace in those three massive resource-rich countries, the prospects of the continent will be lifted. Angola has enormous and rich resources, but they are not well used for the benefit of the people. If we can get peace and development there, they will act as an engine for development in Africa.

Tony Baldry (Banbury): It is incredibly good news that Angola is at last at peace. It is also good news that Africa as a whole wants to take forward partnership through the NEPAD agreement. Great hope was held out at the G8 meeting, but there is a danger that the initiative may be distracted by other issues. Does the Secretary of State feel that, if it is distracted, it may be sensible to try to hold a summit that is devoted to African issues? I suspect that if the G8 does not make the progress on Africa for which many people hope, there will be considerable disappointment.

Clare Short: The priority that is being given to Africa at the summit is remarkable, and it is down to the efforts of our Prime Minister. A third of the summit's time has been allocated to Africa, which is unprecedented; the G8 countries do not usually discuss development, let alone the poorest continent. The hon. Gentleman is right: Africa cannot be fixed in one summit. NEPAD is a long-term development relationship that we all have to commit to and drive forward through all the channels of the international system. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will try through his Select Committee to ensure that that is done as well as possible.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge and Chryston): The overwhelming recollection of many of us who went to Angola during those terrible years when the war was taking place is the dreadful devastation arising from land mines. Will my right hon. Friend assure us, as I believe that she would want to, that the Government will do as much as they can to remove the legacy of those land mines?

Clare Short: Yes. Four million people are displaced in Angola as a result of the war. Getting them home, getting them farming and getting their lives moving again is crucial, and land mines have to be removed to allow that to take place. When I was recently in Luanda, members of UNITA, the rebels who were defeated in the war, said that there are fewer land mines than has been suggested to the international community. So there is a problem, but it is probably resolvable. I agree with my hon. Friend that it is an important priority to get people back on to their land.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): Although, as the Secretary of State said, the peace in Angola is very welcome, I am sure that she agrees that Angola has suffered greatly from drought and starvation, as well as from wars and bad governance. Aid to the people of Angola is being delayed as a result of protracted negotiations between the United Nations and the Angolan Government, who failed to provide the security guarantees that the UN required. What steps do the Secretary of State and Her Majesty's Government propose to try to end that stalemate and to ensure that the aid reaches the people who desperately need it?

Clare Short: The first point that I would make to the hon. Gentleman is that natural disasters rarely become catastrophes without misgovernment. Countries can cope when they have a decent Government, but the combination of natural disasters and misgovernment leads to catastrophe and famine. Unfortunately, Angola has suffered from war and misgovernment, but it now has a great opportunity.

As regards the UN, the problems are completely resolved. We have been attending to that. The UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs is about to make its appeal. We are getting food through to families and to fighters—otherwise there is a danger that they will roam about with weapons, and the country will be full of disorder. We are following the situation closely. I believe that all the problems with the UN system have been resolved, but, given what the hon. Gentleman says, I shall look at the matter again to make sure that that is correct.

Afghanistan

4. **Andrew George** (St. Ives): What recent assessment she has made of the international effort to provide humanitarian relief to Afghanistan. [62471]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Ms Sally Keeble): About half the Afghan population—about 9 million people—rely on food aid, but a complete humanitarian catastrophe has been avoided through the efforts of the international community, which has provided more than £1 billion in humanitarian aid to the country since October last year. We now need to refocus our efforts so that we not only provide people with food, but ensure, in conjunction with the transitional Administration, that livelihoods and public services are restored and that the security sector is reformed.

Andrew George: I am grateful to the Minister for that reply. The leadership of her Department in this regard is widely acknowledged, but does she not share my concern that last month the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees had to cut by two thirds food aid to returning refugees? There are worries that food rations might need to be stopped altogether in certain areas. What action will her Department take in the international sphere to ensure that assistance is increased and peace is effectively secured?

Ms Keeble: We are pressing others to provide the aid that was promised to the country. We are also considering other factors, including what happens in the regions and security sector reforms, to ensure that food aid can get out—not only into Kabul, but throughout the countryside.

Linda Gilroy (Plymouth, Sutton): Will my hon. Friend give the Department's assessment of the capacity of women to help to deliver that humanitarian aid effectively?

Ms Keeble: It is extremely important to ensure that women can play a proper role in the reconstruction of the country. The transitional Administration have made the education of women a priority, and women have acted independently in the Loya Jirga. We will monitor the situation closely to ensure that the commitment to appoint a women's Minister is carried out.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): What assessment has the Minister made of the ability to get all land back into productive use for agriculture next season, if not this season? What effect will that have on the need for humanitarian food aid?

Ms Keeble: The ability to get land back into productive use is important because approximately 85 per cent. of the population live in rural areas and rely on it for their food. There are perhaps two key factors: the administrative reforms that I mentioned, and ensuring that we encourage farmers to produce different crops instead of cultivating poppies. My Department is taking a lead on that.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Can it possibly be true that specific Afghan cultivators have easily acquired land mines to protect their poppy crops?

Ms Keeble: I was not aware of that. The Government have provided some £3 million of support for removing land mines. I shall make inquiries and keep my hon. Friend informed.

Interdepartmental Discussions

5. **Norman Baker** (Lewes): What mechanisms exist for discussions with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Ministry of Defence and Department of Trade and Industry collectively to resolve questions of common interest. [62472]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): We have close dealings with other Departments at official and ministerial level on debt, International Monetary Fund and World Bank policy, conflict, trade policy, international environment agreements, agricultural and fisheries policy, money laundering, corruption and many other subjects.

Norman Baker: The mechanism for arms sales and the clearance of arms exports—the F680 procedure—is not working properly. I understand that the Department was not consulted or even informed about BAE's application for the Tanzanian air traffic control system. Should not the Department be involved much earlier? It is unsatisfactory if the Ministry of Defence gives clearance at an initial stage and that is the end of the matter.

Clare Short: I agree that it is worrying that there is a procedure for saying that it is a good idea to go ahead with a project when other Departments have not been informed. That does not commit us to the licence, but it is a strange procedure. We are reviewing the application of the sustainable development criterion. The question needs examining.

Ms Julia Drown (South Swindon): My right hon. Friend is aware of the impact of conflict on developing countries. The availability of small and large weapons plays a part in fuelling that conflict. The UK is one of the largest producers of weapons and therefore has a responsibility. What mechanisms exist whereby my right hon. Friend can engage in conversations with other Departments to ascertain what can be done to diversify away from that dangerous trade into more productive trades? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I appeal to the House to come to order. The noise is unfair to hon. Members who are interested in this matter.

Clare Short: My hon. Friend is right. However, there are responsible arms sales. For example, South Africa has equipped itself to help resolve conflicts in Africa, and that is desirable. Arms can therefore be sold responsibly, but they can also clearly be sold irresponsibly. When he was Foreign Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House negotiated with other EU member states a tightening of standards for licensing applications. That process is beginning to flow through, including a new control on arms sales that might damage sustainable development. The application of that rule is currently being reviewed. We are making progress, and there is room for more.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): Given the generally effective way in which the Department has come to work over the years with the Ministry of Defence, to the great advantage of delivering aid to those who most need it, will the right hon. Lady consider developing with her colleagues in the EU a system of best practice whereby Ministries of Defence in other European countries adopt the same method of operating?

Clare Short: We work well together when the Army is in developing countries and can help to stabilise matters, get schools working and re-establish other aspects. It is also important to work together to reform the security sector in badly governed countries so that people have peace, order and stability, which contribute to the development of the economy. We have worked closely with the Ministry of Defence on that. A good example is Sierra Leone. I have held discussions with the NATO leadership about the way in which we might spread such good practice throughout NATO. I shall keep the hon. Gentleman informed of progress.

AIDS (Africa)

6. **Mr. Ian Davidson** (Glasgow, Pollok): What steps the Government are taking to help curb AIDS in southern and western Africa. [62473]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Ms Sally Keeble): The Government are strongly committed to working to combat HIV/AIDS, and provided more than £150 million for programmes in southern and western Africa last year. We continue to work with the Governments of developing countries, and other bodies, to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS and to help those affected by it. We need to replicate the progress that has been made in Uganda, where the prevalence of the disease has been more than halved in the last decade.

Mr. Davidson: Does the Minister accept that the scale of the problem is enormous, and that the resources required are substantial? If Britain and other countries are to be expected to play their part in fighting this evil, we must also ensure that governance in these areas of Africa is improved. Will the Minister tell us what steps are being taken to ensure that money given to fight AIDS is not being siphoned off or stolen?

Ms Keeble: My hon. Friend is right about the scale of the disease, and about the related problems. Each year, 2.3 million people die of AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa. While it is extremely important that we ensure that there is good governance, so that all the money that goes into fighting AIDS is spent properly, we do not at present have any evidence of the kind of problems that my hon. Friend mentioned. If he would like to provide me with any such evidence, I will certainly make sure that it is looked into, because we want to ensure that all the money goes into AIDS prevention and into treating the people who suffer from the disease.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [62498] **Mr. Gwyn Prosser** (Dover): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 26 June.

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): Mr. Speaker, I have been asked to reply. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear!"] If I may continue—my right hon. Friend the Prime

Minister is currently attending the G8 summit in Canada. Today, the summit will discuss world terrorism and proliferation

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): Where's Prescott?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not want the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) shouting. He often shouts, and he must not.

Mr. Cook: If I may continue, Mr. Speaker. Today, the summit will discuss world terrorism and proliferation. Tomorrow it will discuss how it can help to promote development and prevent conflict in Africa.

Mr. Prosser: On the day that marks international drug abuse and trafficking day, will my right hon. Friend pay tribute to the hard-working people in Dover and elsewhere who police our borders and who have contributed to the year-on-year increase in the number of seizures of illicit drugs?

Last week marked the second anniversary of the tragic discovery of 58 Chinese people found dead in a container in Dover. What progress have the Government made on cracking down on the evil people-smugglers and on improving border security on the other side of the channel?

Mr. Cook: There can be no greater menace than those who make large profits out of trading on the misery and desperation of others. That is why we hope shortly to introduce proposals that will increase sentences for those who trade in human beings. We made good progress at the Seville summit on getting agreement on joint action—*[Interruption.]* Indeed, we did—to ensure that we take forward our joint policing into those areas of entry. The measures that we have taken in Bosnia, for example, have been dramatically successful, and have contributed to a 90 per cent. reduction in the number of people being trafficked by organised gangs.

On my hon. Friend's point about the United Nations drugs day, we fully support the initiative by the UN, and the strategy of taking action on both supply and demand. My hon. Friend has already given the House figures on our success in cutting supply, and the whole House will want to congratulate the police and customs on their progress in seizing an extra £140 million worth of drugs in the past year. On the action against demand, we have doubled the amount of money available for treatment of those who abuse drugs, and we are on target to get the majority of drug abusers into treatment by next year. That is a solid achievement—*[Interruption.]* I would hope that the whole House, including Opposition Members, will recognise that drug addiction is not only tragic for the individual but a menace to the community, and that we must give it a high priority.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst) *rose*—

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Forth: When the Chancellor hit pensions with his £5 billion a year tax, he said that it was justified because of the buoyancy of the stock market. Last week the Prime Minister said that the stock market was

"massively up on where it was five years ago."—*[Official Report, 19 June 2002; Vol. 387, c. 272.]*

Is he right?

Mr. Cook: My right hon. Friend was absolutely right in the statement that he made. I am surprised that the right hon. Gentleman requires a lecture on this from me. The nature of the financial markets is that they go down as well as up. Stock markets around the world have been going down in the past 48 hours. There is no way in which any Government can insulate their stock market from that effect.

What is the right hon. Gentleman asking us to do—bring in price controls on stock exchange movements? I am surprised that the stock market going down should come as a revelation to him. Surely he must remember that during the Conservative years the stock market collapsed several times, and the change over the past few days is still only a quarter of what occurred in the worst week in the Conservatives' 18 years.

Mr. Forth: When I question the Leader of the House at business questions, he is normally remarkably honest and straightforward with the House. In fact, on occasions he has even apologised to the House when he has been mistaken. What is it about appearing at the Dispatch Box at this time of the week that renders him unable to give a straight question? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Forth: This is my first, and probably only, Prime Minister's questions. I was about to say that the Leader of the House may be representing the Prime Minister but he does not have to impersonate him. The fact is that the stock market today is almost 5 per cent. below where it was when the Chancellor first hit pensions. I shall give the Leader of the House another chance. When the Prime Minister said that the stock market was "massively up", was he right or was he wrong?

Mr. Cook: My right hon. Friend was absolutely right. *[Interruption.]* I am not clear what other answer Conservative Members were expecting. My right hon. Friend was right with reference to the period from the general election to the time when that question was asked last Wednesday. As I said, stock markets went down even more spectacularly under the Conservatives. The difference is that, at the present time, we have a sound economy with the lowest inflation for 40 years, the lowest interest rates for 50 years, and 1.5 million more people in work. On all those points it is better now than on any single day during 18 years of Conservative Government. If the right hon. Gentleman does not find that good enough, what heights of new rhetoric can he scale to describe the appalling record that his party had in Government?

Mr. Forth: Well, the Leader of the House really does have a touch of the Prime Minister today. The truth is that the Prime Minister was wrong, we know he was wrong, and what is more important, pensioners know he was wrong. The sad truth is that shares in pension funds have lost a fifth of their value as a result of the Government's pensions tax, and that is more than four times the fall in the stock market. May I ask the Leader finally whether he will apologise to pensioners for what the Chancellor has done to their pensions?

Mr. Cook: I am astonished at the right hon. Gentleman's brass neck. I most certainly will not apologise for the Government's record on pensions. Next April, the average pensioner household will be £22 a week better off than under the Conservative party. We have increased pensions by double the level of earnings, whereas the Conservatives cut them behind earnings. We have provided a pensioner tax credit that increases the incentive for those who want to save, and will reward pensioners who have a little bit extra income from savings, whereas the Conservative Government continually penalised them by introducing a means test. I will most certainly not apologise to pensioners for our record.

When the right hon. Gentleman next comes to the House, he may, because of his own special brand of compassionate conservatism, like to tell us how he will fill in the form from the Leader of the Opposition inviting him to spend a week with vulnerable people in his constituency. I should appreciate it immensely if he could tell us which week it will be and whether I can come, so that I can hear him explain to the vulnerable in his constituency how the last Conservative Government doubled unemployment, doubled homelessness and trebled the number of children in poverty. One week will not wipe out the memory of 18 years.

Mr. John Hume (Foyle): In the light of recent serious public information about the murder of Belfast solicitor Pat Finucane, will the Prime Minister and the Government respond positively to the Finucane family's request for a special inquiry into that terrible murder?

Mr. Cook: I know that this is of serious concern to the hon. Gentleman's constituents and his community. He will be aware that two investigations are in progress. Sir John Stevens has been appointed by the United Kingdom Government to conduct one of them, and we have also agreed with the Irish Government on a joint inquiry led by Mr. Justice Cory of Canada. Should Mr. Cory recommend a public inquiry, we will of course implement that recommendation.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): A couple of weeks ago, the Leader of the House told me here:

> "I believe that the best, most secure and most transparent way to fund political parties that is least open to misconstruction is from the public purse."—[*Official Report*, 13 June 2002; Vol. 386, c. 1005.]

This morning, responding to a debate on state funding in Westminster Hall, the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, the hon. Member for Doncaster, Central (Ms Winterton), said that there was nothing wrong with the way in which political donations are sought and made. Which is Government policy?

Mr. Cook: I must confess that I had other things besides visiting Westminster Hall on my mind this morning, but as always I will study *Hansard* with great care tomorrow.

I made it plain to the House during business questions that I spoke as an individual, not on the Government's behalf; but I say now that the Government have absolutely nothing to apologise for in regard to their record on donations. We have indeed been open and transparent, and we still look forward to the Conservative party's response to my repeated challenges to publish the names of those from whom it received donations during its years in government.

Mr. Tyler: Should not the Government have a policy on this issue? Is this not a matter of trust, given current concerns about the influence bought by, among others, Andersen, the owner of the *Daily Express* and the RMT? Do the Government not think it about time they settled the issue? Does the Leader of the House not recognise that the public think that when auditors, owners of major newspapers and major unions believe they are buying influence, it is time the Government had a policy so that trust could be maintained?

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman has raised the precise point on which I have expressed concern—that although we have been impeccable in declaring and screening our donations, they are open to misconstruction. That is why I personally believe that putting the matter in the hands of the British electorate through public funding is the best answer.

The matter belongs to the British people, because it reaches fundamentally into the way in which their democracy is conducted. That is why it is right for the British people to decide, and why there should be a public debate.

I am slightly surprised that the hon. Gentleman should suggest that the RMT is buying any influence. Spectacularly, I myself have refused to accept the money on the basis of an oath of loyalty. So have a dozen RMT Members of Parliament, and so should any honourable Member of this free and sovereign Parliament.

Mr. Roger Berry (Kingswood): Yesterday I received a distressing e-mail from my constituent Sue Brown, who is again under curfew in Bethlehem. Is she not right in saying that repeated Israeli invasions of the West Bank

> "cause untold misery, suffering and death to the hapless and largely innocent civilians of the West Bank"?

Is she not right when she asks how on earth such action can be justified under international law, and in the light of successive United Nations resolutions?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to a serious issue that is, I am sure, of concern to all Members. We warmly support President Bush's call in his speech the other day for a viable Palestinian state. The way to achieve that is through movement on both sides—an end to the occupation and the settlements on one side, and an end to terrorism on the other. Without both, we shall not see a successful return to the negotiating table. The future of both the people of Israel and the Palestinian territories depends on that return, because it is the only way in which we will achieve a secure and just peace.

Q2. [62499] **Mr. Peter Lilley** (Hitchin and Harpenden): Returning to the subject of the £5 billion a year stealth tax on pension funds, can the right hon. Gentleman name anyone who believes that siphoning off millions of pounds from pension funds does not undermine their ability to pay pensions? Can he name anyone, that is, apart from the Prime Minister and, of course, the late Robert Maxwell?

Mr. Cook: If I remember correctly, the right hon. Gentleman had some responsibility for pensions during the previous Conservative Government. The electorate have already given their verdict on how he managed his stewardship of their pensions during his time in office and I am happy to put our records side by side. On the question of the withdrawal of advance corporation tax, the right hon. Gentleman is intelligent and well informed enough to know that that was done in order to ensure that we did not distort the tax system to encourage dividends rather than investment. He is a fair-minded man, so I am sure that he will be delighted to hear that that decision has succeeded and that investment in British industry is now £20 billion a year higher than it was under the Government of whom he was a member.

Mr. Martin Salter (Reading, West): Will my right hon. Friend join me in offering condolences to the 2,500 UK workers of WorldCom in my constituency, whose jobs are now at risk as their company teeters on the edge of bankruptcy—a bankruptcy compounded by corporate greed and dishonesty and a $3.8 billion dollar fraud covered up by crooked accountants? Does he agree that it is high time we heard less bleating and whingeing from the corporate world about the burden of regulation and saw more effective supervision of international accountancy practices?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend is right to express the concern of his constituents about a matter that will be of grave concern for the economy of his constituency. On the issue of auditing standards and the quality of auditing, he will be aware that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has already set up an inquiry to consider ways in which we can improve the quality of auditing standards and whether we can learn any lessons from what has happened on the other side of the Atlantic. I am sure that that inquiry will wish to consider the latest collapse as well as the Enron collapse. We expect the report in the summer and we will look closely at any action necessary and try to take it as quickly as possible.

Q3. [62500] **Mr. Laurence Robertson** (Tewkesbury): Is the Leader of the House aware of the escalating problem of TB in cattle? In Gloucestershire, 1,500 whole-herd tests are yet to be carried out—a backlog caused by the shortage of technicians and vets. That situation has been brought about by the 10 per cent. cut in the budget for tackling that problem. Will he do all that he can to persuade the Government to provide sufficient finance to tackle the escalating problem of TB in cattle and, more importantly, will he speed up the Government's investigation into the real cause of the spread of that disease?

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman raises a matter that is of great concern to the farming community and which the Government take very seriously. I am slightly surprised that he should allege that the problem is exacerbated by a cut in funding. This Government have substantially increased the funding necessary to ensure that we police our economy and society and have safeguards in place. The hon. Gentleman belongs to a party that is committed to cutting public spending and whose leader has said that he would like to cut it to 35 per cent. of gross domestic product. That would be the equivalent of cutting the entire education and health budget and the salaries of all police officers. The hon. Gentleman cannot continue to support a party that demands cuts while at the same time demanding increased expenditure.

Q4. [62501] **Mr. David Stewart** (Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber): Does my right hon. Friend share my view that the greatest challenge facing the international community is fighting global poverty, when 1 billion people exist on less than $1 a day? Is not the war on poverty the acid test of the G8 summit? Does The right hon. Gentleman also agree that in the future the culmination of success must be enhanced debt relief and fair aid and trade? What we need is a new Marshall plan for Africa.

Mr. Cook: I fully agree with my hon. Friend about the importance of the issue. That is why the G8 summit will examine tomorrow how the world's wealthier nations can combat poverty, child mortality and illiteracy throughout Africa. The UK Government go to the summit with the strength of having increased by half, since the last general election, the amount of aid that we give. We have also just made a commitment that we will increase by another billion our aid to Africa. That reverses the cuts experienced under the previous Conservative Government.

It is right that the G8 summit should address the issue of world terrorism, but it is also important to bear in mind the fact that tackling world poverty can make an important contribution to that, as world poverty provides the breeding ground for terrorism and the recruiting ground for the fundamentalists.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Does the Leader of the House agree with the Lord Chancellor's Department that the payment of fines in this country has become voluntary?

Mr. Cook: I always find it prudent to agree with the Lord Chancellor's Department in all particulars.

Mr. Forth: That was a remarkably complacent answer. We have discovered the sad truth from the National Audit Office, and the Lord Chancellor's Department has admitted it, and it is that fewer than two thirds of fines are collected now, and that half of all uncollected fines are written off.

That would be bad enough, but it is not just fines that are failing. Will the Leader of the House say how many criminals failed to complete their sentences to community service last year?

Mr. Cook: On the question of fines, we will study with care the forthcoming report from the Public Accounts Committee. I assure the House that there will be plenty of legislation, on the criminal justice and courts systems, in the next Session. That will enable us to address some of these issues.

I cannot answer the question that the right hon. Gentleman asked. However, given that he asked it, I suspect that we are about to hear the answer.

Mr. Forth: How well the Leader of the House knows me. The answer—and it will not give the right hon. Gentleman any pleasure to hear it—is that 40,000 criminals failed to carry out their full sentence last year.

The Lord Chancellor has said that sentences

"send important messages to the British people. They show what should not, and cannot, be tolerated."

Is it any wonder that crime is soaring, when the message being sent to criminals by the failure of the Lord Chancellor's Department is that, in the unlikely event that they get caught and convicted, they will get off scot free?

Mr. Cook: I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on his courage in choosing to go on crime. He will be aware that the British crime survey shows that the amount of crime has fallen by a fifth under this Government. The number of police officers is going up, and I remind the right hon. Gentleman that that is in stark contrast with what happened under the Conservative Government, who doubled the amount of crime, more than doubled the amount of violent crime, and saw police numbers fall in five successive years. When I get back to my office and look up the figures on those who have completed community service, I suspect that I shall find that they were even worse under the Conservatives.

Liz Blackman (Erewash): My local police have had reasonable success in targeting drug traffickers. Today, 1.5 tonnes of cannabis was confiscated, and five people were arrested. A little while ago, a large heroin organisation was busted, but the victims of addiction remain. Pursuant to the answer that he gave my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Prosser)—that the amount in the drug budget devoted to support for victims has doubled—will my right hon. Friend undertake to keep the adequacy of the resources under review? Will he also monitor closely the pace at which new and more effective drugs are getting through to drug addicts?

Mr. Cook: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for raising, in her question, a very serious matter in a very serious and proper fashion. Of course, I give an undertaking that the Government will continue to make sure that we put in adequate resources to tackle the supply of drugs and to promote the cut in demand for drugs. We are confident that at present we are on course to achieve our target of getting 55 per cent. of drug users into treatment by 2004, two years from now. Obviously, we will keep the target under review. When we hit the target, we will want to go further, and I assure my hon. Friend that the matter will remain a high priority for the Government.

Q5. [62502] **Mr. Peter Luff** (Mid-Worcestershire): Last week at his press conference. the Prime Minister attacked my constituents when, in response to their concerns about the proposed asylum centre at Throckmorton, he claimed that they wanted asylum seekers

"anywhere else but where I am".

Yesterday, the Bishop of Worcester said that that was

"an unwarranted slur on the serious intentions of people from the churches of our diocese."

Can the Leader of the House identify any Church, charity, trade union or non-governmental organisation that supports the Home Secretary's plans to put asylum seekers and refugees in large, remote, rural camps? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Cook: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary appears to be having his own private exchange with Conservative Front Benchers on this matter. However, as he has quite properly pointed out, Conservative policy for a long time was to make sure that all asylum seekers would be detained.

Of course I understand local pressures and the difficulties in local constituencies, but it must be right to ensure that we provide centres that can offer all the services required by asylum seekers, such as proper education facilities for children, proper health facilities and an ability to be integrated, through language, with the local community. I appreciate the local pressures that these factors give rise to, but this is a national issue. It is important to ensure that we provide a basis on which to hold and handle those who seek asylum. It is a vast improvement on the attitude of the Conservative Government, which was to pretend that the policy was not there and let asylum seekers disperse across the whole of the United Kingdom.

Q6. [62503] **Mr. Huw Edwards** (Monmouth): Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating all those students who will be graduating from universities in the next few weeks? Does he agree that our universities play a massive role in achieving the knowledge-based economy and enjoy a fine reputation throughout the world? While I welcome the Government's commitment to 50 per cent. access for all young people, does he agree that such expansion will require adequate funding for research and teaching and a fair pay settlement for academic staff, as well as looking at the problem of student poverty, so that those who can benefit most from higher education are not deterred by unreasonable debts?

Mr. Cook: I fully agree with my hon. Friend. We have increased funding in higher education by a sixth. However, more important to the future of Britain as an economy and a country that can make its way in a highly competitive global economy is the fact that we now have one of the highest participation rates in higher education of any of the OECD countries, something of which we can all be proud.

Q7. [62504] **Mr. Henry Bellingham** (North-West Norfolk): Is the Leader of the House aware that I was recently contacted by a constituent, Mr. Robert Blunden, whose wife sadly died of cancer last year? Her cancer specialist recently wrote to a national newspaper deploring the fact that he was prevented from using two new cancer drugs as the result of the National Institute for Clinical Excellence not permitting their use on the national health service. My question is simple: given the

Government's welcome emphasis on cancer treatment in the NHS cancer plan, why are there no cancer specialists on that committee?

Mr. Cook: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's support for our commitment to treating cancer. Indeed, we have increased the number of cancer specialists throughout Britain and are reducing the waiting time for treatment by them.

On the case to which the hon. Gentleman refers, I am absolutely confident that the Government were quite right to make sure that we put the decision on whether a drug should be prescribed on the NHS in the hands of NICE, which represents medical opinion. It is much better that such decisions are taken by medical experts than that they are taken by politicians. I shall, of course, consider the hon. Gentleman's point and make sure that the Secretary of State for Health writes regarding the membership of NICE; but on the fundamental principle, I think that it is much better for doctors to decide such matters rather than the hon. Gentleman and I doing so across the Floor of the House of Commons.

Q8. [62505] **Mr. John MacDougall** (Central Fife): Will my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming the continued trend in the fall of unemployment, particularly since 1997? In Fife, especially in my constituency of Central Fife, unemployment fell by 14 per cent during that period, despite the dramatic loss of jobs in traditional industries. Will he join me in welcoming the many efforts made by unsung heroes who have contributed to this success, including Fife council, Scottish Enterprise Fife, and voluntary organisations such as the Leven development trust?

Mr. Cook: I am happy to join my hon. Friend in congratulating all those who worked in the partnerships in Fife on making their contribution to cutting local unemployment. We should always remember that much of the progress in providing jobs and securing the local economy is made in the local community by members of that local community. It has also, of course, been helped by the measures that we have taken nationally, such as the new deal, opposed vigorously by the Conservative party, which has created 3,000 new jobs and placed people in such jobs in Fife—2,000 of them for young, long-term unemployed people. One of the great achievements of the Government is that we have almost removed long-term unemployment among our young people, who will be the work force of the future, and that is a great investment in the future of Britain.

Mrs. Marion Roe (Broxbourne): In response to the outrageous slur made by the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, who said that she would not touch some comprehensive schools with a bargepole, and in fairness to the pupils, parents, teachers and governors of good comprehensive schools, will the Leader of the House name names and tell the House to which comprehensive schools the Secretary of State was referring?

Mr. Cook: What my right hon. Friend said in her speech was that she had taught for 18 years at a comprehensive, and would not have taught at any other type of school. I will not take criticism of my right hon. Friend from a Conservative party whose leader will not touch any state school with a bargepole when it comes to sending his children to school, and who has sent his children to Eton. Of course—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Cook: Of course not all comprehensive schools are as good as we would wish; that is why we have introduced a new deal for schools which has resulted in our being able to take out of special measures the majority of the failing schools that we inherited from the Conservative party. If I remember rightly, the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) was the Education Minister from whom we inherited them.

Meeting with French Interior Minister

3.32 pm

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset) (*by private notice*): To ask the Home Secretary if he will make a statement on his recent meeting with the French Interior Minister.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): First, I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on being elevated to membership of the Privy Council today. [Hon. Members: "Hear, Hear."] I am sure that it will make all the difference in the world.

Yesterday I held a meeting with the Minister of the Interior in the new French Government, Nicolas Sarkozy. The meeting was the first to be held between us and the new French Government on tackling illegal immigration across the channel. This is not something that needs to divide the United Kingdom and France; it is not an adversarial contest, but a matter of finding a joint solution to shared problems. Migration has global causes and global consequences. No single country can solve its problems alone.

Yesterday was a satisfactory start to the process, especially bearing in mind the fact that the National Assembly elections were held only 10 days ago. We have made concrete progress in a number of key areas. First, we agreed to install at the port of Calais British detection technology, including acoustic heartbeat detectors and millimetric wave imaging. A start will be made within weeks. We shall also provide the latest forgery detection technology in order to tackle the use of false identity documents.

In addition, a package of measures to increase security at the Frethun freight depot was agreed. The success of the security investment at Coquelles has put increased pressure on the Frethun yards. Services have been disrupted and a great deal of cost has been incurred. It is therefore crucial that we close that loophole for illegal immigration as quickly as possible. We agreed to use our best endeavours to complete the double fencing at Frethun by 31 July, substantially speeding up the earlier timetable. The French Government will accelerate deployment of additional gendarmes and security personnel in the depots. A financial contribution will be made by the Strategic Rail Authority. That will allow the reintroduction of a full and reliable service no later than the end of September.

We also agreed to enable our intelligence and operational officers to work together in joint teams. We are determined to work in partnership to detect, arrest and prosecute the criminal gangs who profit from the barbaric trade of people trafficking. To monitor progress, we shall establish a joint reporting system to track illegal immigration on both sides of the channel, and publish the statistics every six months.

I also outlined yesterday the comprehensive measures that we are taking to reduce the pull factor to the United Kingdom, in particular by clamping down on illegal working and by spelling out the new measures in the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill. That was welcomed by the French Government, who committed themselves to the closure of Sangatte, which is now a joint objective of both Governments.

As I said yesterday, this is a marathon, not a sprint. I did not expect to secure full agreement on every issue yesterday. I specifically indicated that I did not expect an immediate resolution of a timetable for closing Sangatte. However, we made significant progress and a number of issues are now on the table for the next meeting, which will be held in Paris on 12 July. I know that the House will welcome this long overdue progress in resolving those difficult issues.

Mr. Letwin: I am grateful to the Home Secretary for his statement, and for his congratulations. We of course welcome the promises that he has received on security and joint monitoring from the French—without welcoming nearly so much the fact that Britain will be contributing millions of pounds to paying for that security. How is it that the French managed to persuade the Home Secretary that it was our responsibility to pay for security on their side of the channel? On how many occasions in the past years have promises been made to increase security on the French side of the channel, and what assurances does the Home Secretary have that on this occasion they will actually be fulfilled?

How real was the offer to construct, in due course, a timetable for delivering the possibility, in due course, of closing the Sangatte camp? How did the Home Secretary manage to persuade the French Interior Minister that his accommodation centres—which, at the present rate, it can be calculated may cure the backlog of asylum applications in the UK over a period of 40 years and 11 months—would be sufficient, in his words, substantially to reduce the pull factor?

I now turn to what is overwhelmingly the most important question, which the Home Secretary specifically avoided mentioning in his response: the bilateral agreement that used to be in place between Britain and France, which at one time provided that those coming from France to the United Kingdom would be returned to France within 24 hours, to have their asylum applications processed there. The Home Secretary has described me and my party as the "militant tendency" in pressing for a resurrected bilateral agreement, and I have therefore three specific questions to ask him.

First, if it was always impossible to negotiate such an agreement with the French, how was my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), the former Home Secretary, able to do so in 1995? To which miraculous powers does the Home Secretary ascribe that achievement? Secondly, if it is impossible to negotiate such an agreement with the French, is it not also impossible to negotiate it with other Governments—and if it is impossible to negotiate such an agreement with any Government, why did the Home Secretary take the trouble to legislate in the House and in the other place to provide for such bilateral agreements to be compatible with UK law?

Thirdly, if it is impossible to negotiate such an agreement, why did the Home Secretary write an open letter to me on 23 May, in which he said:

> "I am committed to negotiating a new bilateral agreement with the French government. But I intend to negotiate something that will work".

Is it not time for the Home Secretary to make an application to his right hon. Friend the former Home Secretary—the current Foreign Secretary—who is the agent who brought chaos to an asylum system that was once in order—*[Interruption]*. That person is now responsible for our diplomatic efforts; might he not be

[Mr. Letwin]

expected, notwithstanding the Home Secretary's brilliant assault on all the policies that he pursued when he was Home Secretary, to assist the current Home Secretary in negotiating with the French to achieve successfully what this country desperately needs—a new bilateral agreement?

Mr. Blunkett: The right hon. Gentleman's first question was: why are we prepared to negotiate a commitment to the technology and security at the French border? The answer is very simple: this is a unique position—we are trying to persuade a country to prevent people not from getting into its territory, but from getting out of its territory. We are trying to persuade the French to stop people leaving France and entering Britain.

We are prepared to use British technology—advanced as it is—to assist in the process precisely because if we can use the technology that we have at Dover in Calais, to prevent people from crossing the channel, they will not be able to claim asylum, so we will not incur the substantial costs of processing their applications for the first decision or the adjudication decision, or for the judicial review, the appeals tribunal or the further review, or the cost of removal. If we stop just a few dozen people wrongly claiming asylum—those who cannot show that they are at risk of death or persecution—we will save the amount invested in the millimetric and heartbeat technology several times over.

The second question related to Sangatte. It was fairly obvious from the negotiations and from studying the French papers that it is necessary to persuade the French that actions taken concerning the closure of Sangatte will resolve the pull factor and the signals that are sent to individuals and traffickers, so that they do not end up with hundreds of thousands of people on the streets of Calais and surrounding areas. That is necessary not because this is not a French problem—it is—but because it becomes our problem if those people continue to try to get through the tunnel or across on ferries.

In resolving and helping to sort out the French problem, we substantially resolve our problem. That is what an intelligent approach seeks to offer, and it is why I was prepared to spell out what we were doing in our own legislation and in non-legislative matters, which the French believed required legislation, to reduce the pull factor to this country. That is why, of course, I spelled out aspects of the new Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill, as the House would have expected me to, and those proposals were welcomed and understood.

The reports in this morning's French papers, which I have looked at, were accurate and the quotes from myself and Nicolas Sarkozy were in line with what we actually said yesterday, as opposed to what someone made up along the way.

The substantive question related to returning people to France. In 1995—two years before the Dublin convention, to which the then Conservative Government signed up—there was an interim gentleman's agreement to see the situation through to what was presumably believed to be a very welcome Dublin convention. I presume that the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), who is sitting along the Bench from the shadow Home Secretary, will recall that very well. He will recall that, as he believed that the Dublin convention would solve the problems, he was right to agree in 1995 that the gentleman's agreement would cease once the Dublin convention was introduced. When it was implemented, of course, the gentleman's agreement ceased. I must say that the gentleman's agreement was not all that it was cracked up to be—last year we returned to France 6,000 people who had not claimed immigration status, whereas in the last year of the gentleman's agreement, just over 500 people were returned to France—*[Interruption.]*

The right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) is right to say, sotto voce, that many more people tried to get in last year than in 1996. That is true, and that is precisely why we have a much more substantial problem than we had when we inherited the Dublin agreement, which we had not signed up to. It is precisely for those reasons that I am taking steps now to reach agreement with France. I want an agreement on returners to original countries when the first decision has been turned down, and, as I said in my letter of 23 May to the right hon. Member for West Dorset, I want an agreement that will be workable and acceptable.

I describe the right hon. Gentleman's words as coming from the militant tendency because in the 1980s and 1990s, the Labour party went through a process in which impossible demands and unsurmountable barriers were placed in our way—everyone knew that the demands would be unachievable—so that a handful of people could claim failure before we had even started on the policy concerned.

That is what the right hon. Member for West Dorset did when he announced on the "Today" programme yesterday morning that I should simply turn people who arrived in Britain round and send them back to France. Any Member who seriously believes that every person arriving in this country who we believe might have passed through France can simply be turned round and sent back without negotiating terms of reference, and without an understanding that we have considered the case—as we are doing with the non-suspensive appeals and clearly unfounded cases—does not deserve to be in government.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): Is not one of the problems the continuing policy in France of allowing what I think the French call tolerated illegal presence? Despite their so-called robust preventive measures such as identity cards and so on, they continue to allow people from third countries who intend to claim asylum to avoid doing that while they are in France. In his very welcome discussions with France, has the Home Secretary been able to make any progress in persuading the French authorities to consider remedying that practice?

Mr. Blunkett: On a lighter note, I did point out that, given the wine, the food and the sunshine—and the women—I was amazed that anyone would want to leave France to claim asylum anywhere else. My hon. Friend is entirely right to say that the tolerated illegal presence of so many people in France is a major problem. It means that those people are not encouraged to claim asylum, to seek another form of legal status or to leave the country legitimately. That is why the problem has accumulated in northern France. The problem also exists partly because the measures that have been taken make it very much more difficult for those people to leave northern France to reach

Britain, and partly because of the pull factor that I have described and acknowledged this afternoon. In consideration of discussions not just with the Interior Minister but with the Justice Minister, with whom I am also seeking a meeting in July, I intend to press the point vigorously that those who are not there, and who, I presume, have not got French identity cards, should be dealt with rigorously so that we can get a grip on this problem.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): May I join the Home Secretary in congratulating the shadow Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin), on his elevation to the Privy Council? I also join the Home Secretary in accepting the idea that when we can have good relations with our neighbours—including, obviously, France—we should seek to do so.

Will the Home Secretary tell us whether the French Government are insisting on any preconditions or action from the British Government before the French Government implement any of their terms of the agreement? Has any estimate been made of the cost to the French Government of the measures that they are taking?

Does the Home Secretary accept that closing Sangatte, building fences or having more gendarmes will not stop people moving around Europe? The only real substitute for the nonsense of a policy that Europe has to deal with asylum seekers would be a common way of processing all asylum seekers, wherever they appear in the European Union. We need a common set of conditions and entitlements to which they will thereafter be entitled, and a common basis for deciding who is a refugee and therefore entitled to that status. The logic of that is that we should have a common agency to act on behalf of all member states, so that there is a common standard throughout Europe.

If we close the existing way of entry, how will Britain honour its obligation to allow people to come to this country to seek asylum legally? Given that we are not the nearest country to any of the land-mass countries in eastern Europe, how will we take our fair share commensurate with burden sharing if we close off all legal routes into the country for asylum seekers?

Mr. Blunkett: The hon. Gentleman's first and last questions were the same: how do we facilitate a legal and legitimate route for those who face persecution or death? In the White Paper on 7 February, I spelled out the fact that we would commence negotiations with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on a legitimate route for, first, a few hundred, and then for an expanded number of nominated and verified cases who could be allowed directly into the country, having sought refugee status outside Britain. That is the only way in which we will be able to make progress. We should discuss it with the United Nations and use the good offices of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to see how we can facilitate such work in our embassies and high commissions in an acceptable way.

The process is taking time, but I hope that we can make substantial progress, not least with the UNHCR, and on minors under 18, who form part of a worrying trend and are now fodder for traffickers. There are 2,000 youngsters with Kent social services alone.

Simon Hughes: Six thousand in the country.

Mr. Blunkett: Six thousand in the country as a whole.

It is true that simply putting higher fences round Frethun and closing Sangatte will not solve the overall problem. I agree that substantial measures must be taken EU-wide both in sharing the challenge and in finding administrative ways of dealing with it. However, I am not sure about a unified central agency. All of us, including those working for it, know how difficult the role of the immigration and nationality directorate is in this country. God knows what it would be like if it were run from Brussels. However, I accept that a common issue needs to be shared, with a common solution.

Mr. Gwyn Prosser (Dover): I welcome the new joint arrangements—and I say that as someone who has been highly critical of the slowness with which the French have moved to secure their sites. I welcome the new approach.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that if the French authorities can build a system that approaches anything like the level of security that we have in place in the port of Dover—my right hon. Friend and I looked at the measures for detection, forgery surveillance and other matters only last week—we shall be near to closing the last of the gaps in the security system, and to bringing order back to it? That will give confidence to my constituents and others that we have the system under a measure of control.

Mr. Blunkett: I again congratulate my hon. Friend on the way in which he has handled a very difficult situation. Without any spin and advance preparation, last Monday he and I saw the operation of the new technology that detected the presence of people in a vehicle coming from France. Five people had been picked up from the same vehicle on the French side of the channel, but because the French did not have the equipment to look deep into the freight being carried, they had missed half the human cargo. That is why it is crucial to do that job, not merely for border protection purposes, but in a humanitarian sense, too. We all remember the desperate incident in which 58 Chinese people died because people were prepared to make money out of sacrificing their lives.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): The Leader of the House earlier today and the right hon. Gentleman rightly referred to the evils of people trafficking and the need for legislation. When does he anticipate that draft legislation will be available for scrutiny?

Mr. Blunkett: We have a partial measure in the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill. I promised when we published the Bill and on Second Reading that the sentencing and criminal justice legislation, which we are committed to introduce in the next Session, will include measures necessary to increase the penalty to 14 years and to tackle trafficking, including trafficking for sexual exploitation purposes. The legislation will be available for scrutiny as soon as it is drafted.

Mr. Tom Levitt (High Peak): I find it a little astonishing that the Conservative party, having tabled the private notice question, cannot find one Back Bencher to contribute.

Does my right hon. Friend believe, as I do, that one reason why so much attention has focused on Sangatte and the tunnel in recent months is our success in reducing

[Mr. Tom Levitt]

illegal entry into this country by air, lorry and boat? Does he accept, as I am sure he did in his opening remarks, that the present situation is doing grave damage to the rail freight industry, its reputation and its prospects? He talked about resolving that problem by September, and I hope that he will do whatever he can to restore the status quo on rail freight for British exports.

Mr. Blunkett: I agree entirely about the freight industry. Freight operators have had to contend with horrific circumstances that are deeply undesirable from their point of view and for the commercial well-being of our country. The installation of double fencing by the end of July and the substantial increase in security personnel, which the French have promised, will facilitate the provision of the electronic surveillance necessary to back up the fencing. I hope that by the August deadline the fencing will have made an enormous difference to the difficulties currently experienced and to the rapid return of a full service.

Norman Baker (Lewes): What conditions did the French Interior Minister require the British Government to meet before he would agree to the closure of Sangatte? Will the right hon. Gentleman comment on, and rebut if necessary, a statement in one of today's nationals that he has allegedly pledged to introduce new measures to curb illegal working, including a national identity card scheme, as part of the agreement? Is that true?

Mr. Blunkett: No, there are measures in the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill that relate to our position on illegal working. We made our view clear when we clamped down on that problem by developing ways to improve on section 8 of the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996. I said that we will shortly undertake a consultation on entitlement cards. I made that clear to the House in an answer on 5 February and reiterated it in a statement to the House on 7 February. The consultation measures that I mentioned to the French were only what I reported to the House several months ago.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Were he so minded, the Home Secretary could legitimately answer my question by saying, "Easier said than done." Although I do not doubt that the detection equipment for forgeries is now formidable, what about the forgers themselves? Are not some people making a mint of money out of forgery? What effort is being made with Governments in the far east or elsewhere to get at the root of those who are doing the forging, who are making enormous and odious profits?

Mr. Blunkett: Easier said than done, indeed, but I will give my hon. Friend a more comprehensive answer than that. The commitment to joint intelligence working is a step in the right direction to get people to acknowledge that there is a worldwide problem and that people will go to whatever expertise is available anywhere in the world to obtain fraudulent documents. Therefore, it is a common problem.

The European Union in the form of the Justice and Home Affairs Commissioner, and his equivalent in the United States, are committed to working with individual Governments on finding a way around the problem. We will need to adopt more secure methods, in addition to the passport control measures, to establish that we are part of the strengthened system, which in future will include biometric techniques. Otherwise, it is almost certain that the United States will reintroduce visas.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): You will recall, Mr. Speaker, that on Monday I asked my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister whether he would ensure that security measures at Sangatte freight depot are speeded up. Naturally, I am delighted that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is back so quickly—it makes me feel that I have more power on the Government Back Benches than I ever had on the Government Front Bench.

Unlike my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Levitt), I had assumed from my right hon. Friend's statement that EWS and other freight operators would be able to run normal services after 31 July, when the security measures will be in force. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that that is his expectation? When he meets his counterpart in July, will he ensure that all the work is on schedule, because in the past there has been some slippage?

Mr. Blunkett: I will do my utmost, here and elsewhere, not to claim deadlines, timetables or success where they do not exist. I indicated that double fencing and security personnel measures will be in place by the end of July. That will substantially improve the ability of EWS to run its services, but the electronic and surveillance measures inside the terminal will not fully complement the external security until September; only then will we be able to guarantee the substantial turnround that has been achieved at Coquelles.

I agree entirely with my right hon. Friend's second point. I am extremely pleased that his intervention earlier this week was so successful.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Following the suggestion of the Father of the House about focusing on the forgers, does the Home Secretary think that there is potential for the security and intelligence services to try to infiltrate the lines of illegal immigration, so that people inside the system can, as it were, expose it from the inside? I appreciate that at present terrorism is their top priority, but surely that would be one way of exposing what is going on and discovering who is organising it.

Mr. Blunkett: Yes, I do. I was deeply impressed when I went to see Operation Reflex yesterday. Every agency, including the security agencies combined, were working in unison and with their equivalents in Europe and elsewhere, precisely to try to bring that sort of expertise to bear. Given that the traffickers are organised in a $12 billion business, and given that the misery it causes is so great, we are justified in allocating even greater resources to our endeavour.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): In addressing the pull factors, does my right hon. Friend agree that it is important that we should have a reliable and compatible system that identifies who is in the country and ensures that those who apply for employment, education or other benefits are truly entitled to do so?

Mr. Blunkett: This very interesting question will be addressed next month in the consultation document on entitlement cards. I have given an undertaking, both publicly and in Government, that that will deal with the pros and cons of such a card. I am absolutely certain that the issue of proper and acceptable identification for employment purposes will form one of the pros, rather than one of the cons.

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): I apologise to you, Mr. Speaker, and to the House for the fact that preparation for a Select Committee hearing prevented me from hearing the question from my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin), to whom I add my congratulations, and the Home Secretary's answer, but modern technology enabled me to hear all the exchanges in my own office.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member must be in the Chamber to hear statements. I therefore cannot call him. I thank him for listening to the exchanges, but I must put it on the record that hon. Members must be in the Chamber to hear the statement, not listening on a monitor.

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): My right hon. Friend is aware that the geography of France is very different from that of the UK. France has borders with a large number of countries. Did my right hon. Friend have an opportunity to discuss what the French Government are doing to secure their borders with their other neighbours, and what might happen in future as desperate or gullible people still try to come to this country? Are the French Government prepared to start thinking about their eastern and southern borders?

Mr. Blunkett: My hon. Friend is right to say that the eastern and southern borders of France are extremely important. That is why discussions both at the Justice and Home Affairs Council and in Seville concentrated on that wider issue, including questions around accession countries. There is a much broader issue of collaboration on border control and surveillance, and on the unified handling of those who clandestinely enter the European Union. The French Government are interested, but I will not speak for them; they can speak for themselves about acquiring the technology that I described this afternoon. I hope that British companies will be able to benefit from that.

Points of Order

4.7 pm

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. As the question of the immunity of British, American and other forces operating abroad on peacekeeping duties has become a bone of contention between the United Kingdom and the United States in the United Nations, threatening the continuation of the UN peacekeeping mandate in Bosnia, I raised the issue on Thursday last week and asked the Secretary of State for Defence about it. He said:

> "On the ICC"—

the International Criminal Court—

> "the Government negotiated an effective immunity for British forces . . . Obviously, that degree of immunity is available to any country that chooses to sign the treaty."—[*Official Report*, 20 June 2002; Vol. 387, c. 413.]

Today, when giving evidence to the Select Committee on Defence, the Secretary of State corrected that statement. He said:

> "Immunity is not quite the right word."

He went on to explain that the only protection from malicious accusation will be "appropriate procedures" in the International Criminal Court. In the circumstances, would it not be appropriate for the Secretary of State to correct the record and explain why the Government's policy is in such a mess?

Mr. Speaker: That is a matter for the Secretary of State; it has nothing to do with the occupant of the Chair.

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. On Monday, during his statement following the Seville summit, the Prime Minister indicated in response to a question from me that the Sangatte protocol, which is directly relevant to the statement that we heard earlier, was overtaken by the introduction of the Dublin convention. My understanding is that the Sangatte protocol was signed following the Dublin convention and in the light of the effects of the Dublin convention, and therefore takes precedence over it. That being so, and the Prime Minister being aware of that, have you had a request from the Prime Minister to correct his statement?

Mr. Speaker: Those are matters that the hon. Gentleman will have to put to the Prime Minister. I chair the proceedings of the House of Commons; I do not answer questions on various protocols.

Indirect Taxes (Disclosure)

4.9 pm

Mr. Mark Hoban (Fareham): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require retailers to include on receipts the amount of VAT and excise duties paid on goods and services purchased.

I am not sure whether anyone knows how much tax they pay. Those in work will know how much national insurance and pay-as-you-earn they pay from their payslips and P60s, and those who are subject to self-assessment will get a summary of their income and the tax that they have paid on it, but direct taxes are only part of the picture. With very few exceptions, almost every one of us will pay indirect taxes in the form of excise duties, fuel duties and VAT on the goods and services that we buy. Occasionally, we will get a VAT receipt or bill that sets out the net amount, the VAT charged and the gross amount; hotel bills, telephone bills and invoices from tradesmen usually fall into that category. However, we are rarely told how much VAT we have paid, and even more rarely will we know how much we have paid in excise duties.

If the revenue raised were trivial, it would not matter too much how much we paid. It would be of no consequence to us, as a few pence here and there would not make much difference. However, the amount that we pay through such taxes is not trivial. This year's Red Book shows that the outturn for indirect taxes for 2001–02 is as follows: VAT, £61.1 billion; fuel duties, £21.9 billion; tobacco, £7.8 billion; spirits, £1.9 billion; wine, £2 billion; and beer and cider, £3 billion—a total of £97.8 billion. In comparison, the yield for income tax in the same year was £110.2 billion, so VAT and other indirect taxes raise almost as much as income tax. As I said, everyone knows how much income tax they pay, but how many people realise that they are paying almost as much through VAT and other indirect taxes?

The cost of VAT and other taxes soon mounts up. Let me give a few examples. An England fan watching the match last Friday and wearing a £30 England top would have paid £4.46 in VAT for the top. The tax on the four cans of beer that he might have drunk during the match—costing, say, £4—would be £1.20. If he decided, having heard the result, to drown his sorrows in a bottle of whisky costing £14, he would have to pay £8.50 in tax.

As another example, *The Grocer*, a retail trade magazine, has a standard shopping basket called "The Grocer 33". In the 15 June edition of the magazine, the cheapest shopping basket containing the 33 items featured was £38.67, of which £5.83 went to the Chancellor in a combination of VAT and excise duties. More than 15 per cent. of the amount paid at the till went straight to the Exchequer.

How many people know that a litre of petrol costing 74.6p includes duty of 46p and VAT of 11p? Refuelling a family car with a 40-litre tank will benefit the Chancellor to the tune of £22.80. At the time of the petrol tax protests a couple of years ago, people knew how much they were paying, but memories have faded. The Bill would ensure that every time people filled up they would know just how much they were paying the Chancellor in taxes.

As those examples show, VAT and other duties mount up quickly, but such taxes have another aspect that we need to consider. I believe that indirect taxes are a form of stealth tax, because no one knows how much tax they are paying to the Treasury every time they make a payment. When a tax is taken by stealth, people cannot assess the true cost to them of the services that the Government provide. Of course, that is in the Government's interests—it is far better to raise taxes by stealth than take tough decisions on spending priorities. It is far better to extract the money in taxes from the purse or the wallet, where it is mixed up with the price of a bottle of wine or a litre of petrol, than to take it from the pay packet, where the tax paid is all too visible. It is far better to add the tax to the price of goods, so that retailers take the blame for price increases. We need to remove that opportunity for the Government to disguise the amount of tax that they raise from our spending.

If people do not know how much tax they pay, how can they judge whether they are getting value for money for the services that they receive? If their perception of the amount of tax that they pay is based solely on the amount that is taken from their pay packet, what reaction will they have when they realise that they are paying almost as much again through indirect taxes? Making sure that taxpayers know how much indirect tax they are paying in total would change the dynamic of the relationship between taxpayers and the Government. A greater awareness of the cost of services would lead to people giving much more thought to value for money. More people, whether their taxes are taken through their pay packets or through their spending, would question decisions on how money had been spent—the true cost of Government would become known. How much more dissatisfied would people become with failing public services when they realised that those services were costing them twice as much as they thought?

Another group of people—those who pay no income tax at all—would realise the extent of their contribution to the state. They would know how much tax they were paying towards Government services. Those on benefits would see how much of their income they have, in effect, paid for themselves through indirect taxes extracted through their weekly shopping and other spending. To use a biblical allusion, even the widow would see how much of her mite the Chancellor was taking.

In an ideal world, we would receive a statement setting out the taxes that we have paid—both direct and indirect—so that we could see at a glance the tax burden that each of us suffers personally. I readily accept that that is impractical, but we can progress towards the goal of increasing the transparency of our personal tax burdens by requiring those who supply us with goods and services to give us receipts telling us how much tax we have paid on our shopping, whether it is for food, drink, electrical goods or petrol. Every time we bought something, we would know straight away how much of what we had paid the retailer or the publican would go to the Government. It would be a powerful jolt to each of us if we knew that most of the price of a bottle of wine was going to the Chancellor; perhaps we would stop and think about whether we were getting value for money. That is what they do in the United States. Every receipt shows the amount of sales tax that one has paid. Perhaps that is one reason why people in the US are much more conscious of the taxes that they pay and why taxes may be lower. People who know how much tax they have paid are more likely to hold the Government to account, so the pressure to restrain spending growth and to ensure that each pound of tax is spent wisely is great. We should perhaps learn that lesson from the United States.

This is a simple measure that I hope and believe would change the political climate. Politicians would find it less tempting to increase indirect taxes rather than income tax because people would be able to see the increase every time they paid for their shopping. Realising the full extent of their tax bill, voters would challenge the Government on value for money. Everyone would be able to understand the price that they pay for the Government services that they receive and to decide whether they are getting value for money.

It is time to lift the lid on taxes so that we can have a proper debate about how much we pay and the value that we get. Ensuring that we know how much VAT and other indirect taxes we pay on goods would be the start of that process.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Mark Hoban, Dr. Andrew Murrison, Mr. Hugo Swire, Mr. Mark Field, Mr. John Baron, Mr. Mark Francois, Mr. Mark Simmonds, Mr. David Cameron, Chris Grayling, Mr. George Osborne, Mr. Paul Goodman and Mr. Peter Duncan.

INDIRECT TAXES (DISCLOSURE) BILL

Mr. Mark Hoban accordingly presented a Bill to require retailers to include on receipts the amount of VAT and excise duties paid on goods and services purchased: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 19 July, and to be printed [Bill 155].

Tax Credits Bill (Programme) (No. 2)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Order [28 June 2002],

That the following provisions shall apply to the Tax Credits Bill for the purpose of supplementing the Order of 10th December 2001:

Consideration of Lords Amendments

1. Proceedings on Consideration of Lords Amendments shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at Ten o'clock on the day on which those proceedings are commenced or, if that day is a Thursday, at Seven o'clock on that day.

Subsequent stages

2. Proceedings on any further Message from the Lords shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.—*[Jim Fitzpatrick.]*

Question agreed to.

Orders of the Day

Tax Credits Bill

Lords amendments considered.

4.20 pm

Mr. Speaker: I draw the House's attention to the fact that privilege is involved in Lords amendments Nos. 2 to 6, 11, 15 to 17, 19, 22 to 27, 32, 35 to 37, 39, 52, 53, 66, 71, 75, 76, 78, 80, 81, 85 and 102, which are to be considered today. If the House agrees to the Lords amendments, I shall ensure that an appropriate entry is made in the Journal.

New Clause

Lords amendment: No. 1, after clause 2, to insert the following new clause—*Annual report to Parliament*—

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): I beg to move, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Speaker: With this we may take the Government amendment in lieu, a new clause—*Annual reports.*

Dawn Primarolo: Noble Lords introduced the new clause in a desire to ensure that Parliament was furnished with sufficient information about the operation of tax credits properly to scrutinise that operation. That is undoubtedly a wholly desirable intention and the Government wish to ensure that there is maximum transparency in providing information on the operation of tax credits and in enabling proper scrutiny.

As Baroness Hollis explained in another place, the sort of information sought by the proposed report will be available through existing channels, primarily the board of the Inland Revenue's annual report, which is laid before the House each year. Nevertheless, we are sympathetic to the Lords' view that it would be useful for the relevant information to be contained in a single document, and I am therefore pleased to move a Government new clause in lieu of the Lords amendment.

The Government new clause covers much the same ground as the amendment made in another place. There are some changes in the drafting, and it would be helpful if I explained them in more detail.

First, it is properly up to the board of the Inland Revenue, rather than my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, to produce such a report and present it to the Treasury. As hon. Members know, the Inland Revenue reports to Treasury Ministers. That is why subsection (3) of the new clause imposes on Treasury the requirement to lay the report before both Houses.

Secondly, the Lords amendment intended that the report should include the amount of tax credits paid out each year as reported in the Inland Revenue's departmental accounts. That was not clear in the Lords amendment and subsection (2)(a) of the Government new clause sets it out in detail.

Let me consider the other items that we propose to cover in the annual report. Subsection (2)(b) makes it clear that the report will set out the number of awards of each tax credit in the year. The Inland Revenue currently publishes detailed statistical reports on the number of awards of

[Dawn Primarolo]

working families tax credit and disabled person's tax credit on a quarterly basis. However, the Government understand the value of including information about awards in an annual report on tax credits. That matter is therefore now covered.

Subsections (2)(c), (d) and (e) cover information relating to compliance inquiries, penalties and prosecutions. Of course, there must be the utmost transparency in reporting the Inland Revenue's compliance activity. This was a matter of considerable concern to hon. Members during our debates on the Floor of the House and in Committee. Much of this information is already provided in relation to the working families tax credit and the disabled person's tax credit, as part of the Inland Revenue's annual report, but the Government acknowledge the convenience of bringing all the information together in a single report.

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): On a point of clarification, I am following the Paymaster General's references to subsection 2(b), 2(c), 2(d), and so on, in the Government's amendment in lieu. However, these provisions are numbered 1(b), 1(c), 1(d), and so on, on the Order Paper, and I wonder whether I have a different version to the one that the right hon. Lady is looking at. It is on page 2341 of the Order Paper. I just want to be sure that we are looking at the same amendment.

Dawn Primarolo: I most certainly hope that we are looking at the same amendment, otherwise I would be moving something that was not before the House, which would be even more difficult. I know that the House fully appreciates that I always try to be as helpful as I possibly can, but anticipating the views of the House on a matter that is not yet before it would be beyond even my ability to ensure that Members are properly advised. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will allow me to finish making these points, because I want to make it clear that the amendment before the House today is the Government's amendment to replace the Lords amendment. It provides for the same information, but in a form that is readily translatable into our legislation. I will return as quickly as I can to the hon. Gentleman's question about whether we should be referring to subsection 1(c), (d), (e) and (f); certainly, in terms of how the amendment is drafted, it should read "1(a), 1(b), 1(c), 1(d)". I can only say that perhaps when I was putting my notes together, I transposed numbers that I should not have done.

Subsections (c), (d) and (e)—I shall stick to calling them that—cover compliance inquiries, penalties and prosecutions. As I was saying, there was much discussion in the House and in Committee about this. Much of this information is already provided in relation to the working families tax credit and the disabled person's tax credit, as part of the Inland Revenue's annual report, but hon. Members and noble Lords made the point that they would prefer it to be brought together in one publication. To be perfectly honest, I do not think that the House would expect us to disagree on this point about duplication, in such an important piece of legislation, for the sake of an argument about whether the information has already been published in one report, or whether it should be published in another.

Finally, the House will no doubt be aware that the new clause does not include reference to the cost to employers of operating tax credits. The Government continue to take the view that it would not be appropriate to provide an estimate of employers' costs in an annual report. That matter is properly and comprehensively addressed by the regulatory impact assessment of the Bill. That assessment is being revised in the light of announcements made in the Budget, and the revised assessment will be made available to Members of both Houses.

Regulatory impact assessments are the right place to deal with the impact of tax credits on employers. That is the process that the House now uses to assess all its legislation, in terms of its likely impact on employers. The Board of Inland Revenue cannot be responsible for accounting formally for costs other than its own. More important, the assessment of employers' costs does not need to be taken on an annual basis. The assessment of the impact on employers is based on the provisions of the Bill. Such an assessment will not fluctuate significantly year on year, because there is a constant set of legal obligations. As the obligations of employers do not change, the assessment of the impact on employers is not likely to change.

4.30 pm

I remind the House that the Government produce comprehensive impact assessments whenever legislation that contains a significant regulatory impact is introduced or amended. The Government take the regulatory impact of legislation seriously. We introduced the concept of a regulatory impact assessment, and we intend to be nothing less than transparent on this issue.

I do not want to revisit the debates that we had in Committee about the changes in the Bill, such as the lessening of the requirement on employers and the £1 million a year saving that is expected as a result of these changes, which has been widely welcomed by employer groups. I hope from what I have said about the importance of regulatory impact assessments that the House will appreciate that we keep a close eye on these matters.

The Government have listened sympathetically to the arguments put in the other place, as we did on many issues when the Bill was considered in Committee in this House. We have considered the arguments put in the other place for an annual report, and we want to be helpful to their lordships and to hon. Members in this House. I urge the House to accept the Government's amendment in lieu of their lordships' amendment. The only issue that the Government's amendment does not deal with is the annual assessment of the impact on employers. To all other intents and purposes, the Government amendment is the same and is correctly drafted to fit into our legislation.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) for correcting my references to subsection 2: I should have said subsection 1. I am sure that the record will ensure that that correction is made.

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): The Bill seems to have been dogged by incorrect definitions and references. As the Paymaster General said, the Government are seeking to substitute their own prescription for an annual report in lieu of a rather broader if less specifically defined annual report prescription passed on an Opposition amendment in the other place.

The purpose of the annual report as introduced by Conservative Peers is to ensure the submission of data giving an account of the care and management of tax credits. In particular, the report would contain estimates of the total take-up of each tax credit, the statistical and other assumptions on which such estimates were made, and the actual take-up of each tax credit. The Opposition amendment prescribed that the board's reports should be published by the Treasury. As the Paymaster General said, it is correct that the report should be made by the Board of Inland Revenue to the Treasury.

The key point is that Parliament should know when the take-up of any tax credit is less than the forecast level, and the report would set out the estimate of the amount of moneys not spent by reason of the deficiency of take-up to which that estimate related. It would also include the Government's proposals for increasing take-up to the forecast level. It would deal with fraud, and with other issues on the Government's list.

The report is considered necessary because of the vastness and complexity of the Bill and the fact that the new arrangements are untested. We still fear that there could be major administrative difficulties in their implementation. Unless the legislation is monitored, what is actually happening will be inscrutable for some time.

Lady Hollis described collecting the information from existing sources as a simple cut-and-paste task. Perhaps I am a little slow-witted, but I do not think collating such information is at all easy, and I think it is right to require it to be presented in a digestible form. Conservative Members are pleased that the Government have accepted the case for a single, clearly understandable—I will not say "easily understandable"—report.

The Government's alternative raises certain issues. The Paymaster General has commented on the differences between the two proposals, but I should like to extract a little more information before agreeing to the Government's version. Take-up is a key issue on which the Paymaster General did not comment. If the measure is about what it is supposed to be about—helping the needy—a crucial aspect will not have been covered if we do not know whether it is being effective, what the targets are, and so forth.

The reference to numbers in what I think is subsection (1)(c), not subsection (2)(c), could be interpreted to cover the process of reporting on the estimated and actual take-up and the reason for the difference, if any, and on what the Government are doing to improve take-up. I should be grateful if the Minister could elucidate a little further.

The Government seem to think it fairly impractical to report on costs to business. There is an argument to that effect, but if the Bill encounters administrative problems, it will be to employers that the Revenue will be forced to go to find information it may be seeking in order to check that awards have not been made that are materially in excess of entitlements. The Government, MPs and indeed businesses should want to know whether costs to businesses are turning out to be significantly greater than was estimated. I ask the Paymaster General to consider, at least, avoiding a meaningless exercise and requiring the report to include any comment on whether there is evidence on administrative costs to business are proving larger, or indeed smaller, than expected.

Take-up is crucial to whether this complex machinery helps those who are most in need. In Committee and on Third Reading, I observed that it was somewhat ironic that when in 1974 the outgoing Conservative Government proposed similar arrangements for tax credits, then called negative income, it was the leaders of the Labour party who produced a minority report warning that such mechanisms might be rather blunt and unsuccessful in helping those most in need. Despite all the wonders of modern computers—which invariably go wrong or break down—the basic issue remains of whether the tax credits will do their first duty of helping those who are in real need. We believe that an analysis of, and report on, take-up is important and we hope that the Government will confirm that their reference to numbers will cover that point.

The second area of concern, to which the Paymaster General has already referred, is the investigations into fraud and what I call fiddling, because most of the problems will not be of sufficient magnitude to deserve the label of fraud. It is important that we know what is happening, including how many prosecutions and convictions have occurred. My hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) will talk in more detail on that issue later, but new subsection (1)(c), (d) and (e) appear to cover that territory and we are happy with that.

On the issue of cost to business, the history of the Bill shows a little obfuscation. If the Government expected costs to decline or be less than forecast, they might have been keen to boast about that. If they are unwilling to say anything, we infer that they think that the news could be bad. In the other place, the Government responded that their initial estimate was that the new working tax credit and child tax credit arrangements would cost business £11 million per annum less than the WFTC. We are pleased to hear that, but it was only after being pressed that the Government came clean that the cost to business had been £100 million a year. Therefore, it will still be £89 million a year. *[Interruption.]* The Paymaster General will find that Baroness Hollis gave that figure in the debate in the Lords.

Dawn Primarolo: There is no secret about that figure. The regulatory impact assessment clearly details the figure and I have given it repeatedly in the Chamber. Baroness Hollis was not imparting any new information, because I even gave that information on Second Reading.

Mr. Flight: I am delighted to be corrected, because that means that the Government will have no problem keeping tabs on the future cost to business. If there is any significant increase, they will be able to tell us about it.

Problems could arise because the Inland Revenue will have a demanding task when it comes to check awards paid against entitlements at the end of the year. One key area will be whether people have met the requirements for number of hours worked. Presumably, except for the self-employed, that check can be done—if the Revenue wishes to go further than what people report to them—only by making inquiries of employers of the number of hours worked. If the administrative difficulties that I fear arise, employers could have to deal with large numbers of inquiries from the Revenue to check information, and that could add considerably to costs.

The overall background to the need for a report is that the complex new arrangements must be monitored to determine whether those in need are getting the help that they need. I confess that our concern is that the general drift of policy, and especially the contents of the Bill,

[Mr. Flight]

is that the Government should be seen to be giving money to large numbers of people. Some 6.5 million families—38 per cent. of the total—will be eligible for the means-tested benefits. The Government seem more concerned with that than with focused efforts to help those in need.

4.45 pm

There are widespread concerns about fraud and fiddling, and the House will be familiar with the much quoted fears of the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), who is worried that

> "the whole of the family tax credit venture is fraught with great dangers. It offers huge bonuses for dishonesty. It strengthens the employers' hold over working people—'these are the conditions: cheat and both of us will be better off'. It thereby pulls employers into a spider's web of dishonesty and corruption. It rewards employers paying low wages. It takes the pressure off improving productivity and thereby the scope for increasing real wages."

It is crucial for the House, the Government and the community to know, when the system is up and running, whether those fears prove justified. We are pleased to note that the Government have covered that.

Dawn Primarolo: The hon. Gentleman has alluded to some points made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field). I refer especially to the point about depressing wages. Will the hon. Gentleman explain why the previous Conservative Government would not support the introduction of the minimum wage? If he is so concerned about depressing wages, why did the previous Government allow that to happen in the absence of a minimum wage?

Mr. Flight: I do not think that we are really discussing minimum wages today, but their very existence is a tacit admission by the Government of the need for legal protection in a situation where too many factors are driving wages down. As I have noted before, I have to my regret encountered in my dealings with businesses a feeling among many of them that the provision is to be greatly welcomed, as it can be considered to be a big subsidisation of wages.

Dawn Primarolo: Okay, let us try this another way, as I do not think that the hon. Gentleman has answered the point. The former Select Committee on Social Security conducted an investigation specifically into the use of tax credits in the United States, to see whether their existence depressed wages. Tax credits have been in use for much longer in the US, but the Select Committee found no evidence that they depressed wages there. Is the hon. Gentleman disagreeing with that assessment? The Conservative party supported neither tax credits nor the minimum wage, yet there is no evidence that they depress wages.

Mr. Flight: First, I cannot resist noting, in connection with the US experience with similar arrangements, that evidence did emerge that there had been some $4.7 billion in unjustified claims. Also, the Select Committee duly noted the serious concerns raised about increased potential fraud in working families tax credit, as compared with family tax credit.

These are new arrangements. Let us hope that the right hon. Lady and the Committee are correct that the measure will not depress remuneration. However, rather cynically, one reason for businesses welcoming many aspects of the Bill is because it is seen in the business community—as similar measures have been seen in our history—as a jolly good way of subsidising employment, enabling companies to pay less because their staff will get more from the Government. However, it is the business of the House to know whether the concerns of many are justified and how the legislation will work out in practice.

I repeat that we are glad that the Government have essentially accepted our argument. We think that extracting the evidence will not be easy. On cost, it was not clear until the Bill was in Committee that the tax credits would cost some £15 billion overall, as I recollect pointing out. The Government have now agreed that the figure will be £16 billion, which is not easily identifiable in their statistics. It was not clear until the Bill went to the other House that 90 per cent. of tax credits will be accounted for as Government expenditure paid as benefits and not treated as bogus deductions against tax revenues. We think it thoroughly healthy for the proper accounting principles of the Government that the objections of the Office for National Statistics should eventually have won the day.

The Budget Red Book estimate for 2002 shows that tax credits will cost some £4.6 billion next year. That figure is based on a take-up assumption of 85 per cent. If the take-up were 100 per cent, tax credits would cost some £5.43 billion. It will be necessary to know, for reasons of cost as well as meeting the target of helping the needy, what take-up is expected and how much more or less than budgeted the measures will cost as a result of the actual take-up figures.

It is important to know the total public expenditure on social security, including the 10 per cent. that will not be treated as expenditure. The figure for 2001–02 seems to be £110 billion—about 30 per cent. of total expenditure. That figure has increased in the past five years by more than spending on health or education and despite a massive and welcome fall in unemployment, and is expected to grow to £126.7 billion next year—an increase of £34.58 billion or 37 per cent. over the past seven years. That contrasts with increases of only £22 billion for education and £28 billion for health.

Rob Marris (Wolverhampton, South-West): Only £22 billion?

Mr. Flight: I remind the House of the Government's commitment in 1997 that the additional spending on education and health would come from rationalisation and reforms of social security expenditure. It is important to note that in reality the reverse occurred: at a time of prosperity, spending in that sector has increased by more than spending on health or education.

The crucial point is whether the money is reaching those in greatest need. The latest estimates on income-related benefits for 1999–2000 showed disappointing take-up figures, mainly for pensioners where the figure was between 74 and 78 per cent. by case load; 1.2 million pensioners had not received council tax benefits, while 580,000 had not received their income support and 150,000 had not received housing benefit. About £3 billion in benefits were unclaimed.

The arrangements for the new tax credits are rather more complicated than the long-standing arrangements in the areas to which I have just referred. I beg to differ strongly with anyone who does not think that take-up data are important in a humanitarian sense.

Our main concern is that the tax credits should address their key objectives—helping those in need. The report is about that and about not wasting money. In essence, the Government's version fine tunes the Opposition's proposals, but before I agree to it I should like the Paymaster General to confirm two points: first, that the reference to numbers will cover everything that I mentioned in respect of take-up; and, secondly, that, although it is sensible not to have annual estimates or guesses as to the cost to business, the Government will encourage the Revenue to indicate any evidence that costs to business are rising substantially as a result of administrative problems with the tax credits.

Mr. Webb: I congratulate the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) on the breadth of his contribution, although I was slightly disappointed that he did not ride into battle on behalf of his noble Friends, instead seeming meekly to accept the Government's half-offering in the form of the amendment in lieu.

We are being asked to consider two versions of an annual report to Parliament on tax credits. It is instructive to reflect on the fact that when the proposition was first put to the Government in another place, they felt that no annual report was necessary. The Government advised their lordships that Parliament was able to scrutinise such matters through parliamentary questions—we all know what an effective and lucid means they provide for obtaining information—or that perhaps the appearance, once a year, of the chairman of the Board of Inland Revenue before the Treasury Committee would enable us to acquire all those hard data. It strikes me, however, that the Treasury Committee might want to raise other issues with the chairman.

I welcome the fact that, after their defeat in another place, the Government have conceded the principle of an annual report.

Dawn Primarolo: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman did not mean inadvertently to mislead the House. The annual report of the Inland Revenue is placed in written form before the House. It is not dependent on the attendance of the chairman of the Board of Inland Revenue before the Public Accounts Committee—the Committee to which he reports, as accounting officer. The report is already produced in written form and presented annually to the House. If the House decides that it wants to receive the report in another form and that it wants more bureaucracy—something that it normally does not want—the Government will provide it.

Mr. Webb: The right hon. Lady is right; there is an annual written report. However, in another place, Lady Hollis referred to the written report and said:

> "the chairman of the Inland Revenue appears annually before the Public Accounts Committee so that the committee can more closely scrutinise the details of the annual report."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 12 June 2002; Vol. 636, c. 289.]

If we want scrutiny of detailed aspects of tax credits, an annual response to a report that covers the whole range of the Inland Revenue's activities may not provide the necessary degree of detail.

5 pm

Dawn Primarolo: I remind the hon. Gentleman that we have a very effective Select Committee system in the House, and the Treasury Committee calls me, as the responsible Minister, before it. I have just appeared before the Treasury Sub-Committee as part of its examination of that very annual report. There are checks on the accounting officer and on the Minister, and there is a printed form in the annual report, so there are three ways to check the information. Our amendment merely provides a fourth way for exactly the same information to come before the House. Quite rightly, Baroness Hollis pointed out that the House already had this information; but if hon. Members insist that they want more bureaucracy and a fourth way of expressing the same information, we are happy to provide for it in the amendment.

Mr. Webb: I think I am right in saying that the amendment in lieu before us is a Government proposal to produce an annual report containing the information. Therefore it is the Government who are today offering to produce it. If the Government consider that that would be a waste of time and a duplication and would add nothing else, they should have stood against—*[Interruption.]* No, they should be standing against the Lords amendment today. They have decided not to, and essentially accept the principle of an annual report.

Dawn Primarolo: Let me get this right. The hon. Gentleman is saying that, when something is pressed on the Government that they do not believe to be necessary, but which Members of the House and the other place continue to insist they would like in a particular form, the Government should turn their face against those propositions and continue not to provide it. He is saying that, consequently, when a Minister comes to the House saying, "Even though we do not believe that this is necessary, we will do it anyway because that is what the Members of the House want," that Minister should be criticised. That is a bit crazy.

Mr. Webb: The right hon. Lady told us that the information that her proposal would make available was unnecessary because it would be available in three other ways, but she proposes to ask the House to support its publication.

We have before us two alternative proposals for different variants of the annual report, which the Minister considers to be unnecessary. There are two differences between the Lords and Commons versions of these annual reports and, as the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs said, one relates to take-up and one relates to the burdens on business.

If we accept the Government's version, we have sold the pass on take-up, because the Lords version refers in paragraph (d) to

> "an estimate of the take-up of the working tax credit"

and in paragraph (c) to

> "an estimate of the take-up of the child tax credit".

The word "take-up" can be used by different people to mean different things. Let me make it clear what we are talking about here.

If the information published is an estimate, it must be an estimate of the proportion of those who are entitled to the credit who take it up. It cannot be statistics on the

[Mr. Webb]

numbers who get it, because the Government know the precise number, so if it is an estimate, it must be information about rates of take-up—the proportion of the eligible population who claim the credit—which is very valuable information indeed. The Government have taken that out of the Commons version of the report. The Government's amendment in lieu simply refers to "the number of awards".

I absolutely agree with the Minister on that point. The number of awards will be available trivially, all over the place. The value added of the Lords report would be an estimate of take-up rates, which are, as the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs said, absolutely central to any means-tested or tax credit-based approach. It is a central issue: what proportion of the money available is claimed by those who need it, as compared with other routes. I am sure that the Minister's amendment in lieu takes out the requirement to give an annual report on tax credit take-up as part of the overall report, and that is a very important thing to keep in, because not enough work is done on giving the House up-to-date information on take-up.

The hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs quoted take-up figures for 1999–2000—three years ago. The House should have much more up-to-date information on take-up, and if the Lords amendment requires that that information be provided annually, systematically and together with all the other information on tax credits, that amendment is preferable to the amendment that the Government have asked us to accept today.

The second thing that is different about the two versions of the annual report concerns burdens on business. When I first read the ministerial response, I thought, "That's fair enough." An initial assessment on business would be undertaken, and then things would be left to run, so why would anyone want to keep picking away at the burdens on business each year? However, one reason why things might change would not be picked up by the initial regulatory impact assessment.

The legislation on tax credits might not change, but the environment in which they are applied will change. For example, the balance between small and large firms changes over time, as does the minimum wage. Because of those changes, the effects of the tax credit regime on business will change over time. So it is no good saying, "We did an impact assessment when we passed the legislation a year or two ago and things will always be more or less the same until we change the primary legislation."

The world in which the legislation operates is changing all the time. For example, one can imagine that a Government who substantially increased the minimum wage and floated large numbers of people off tax credits would substantially reduce the burden on business because far fewer people would claim the credits. However, if the minimum wage were allowed to drift below the wages of the low paid over a period, people would be drawn into tax credits and the burden on business would increase, but none of that would be captured in the initial regulatory impact assessment.

Obviously, if nothing else changed, there would be no point in carrying out a reassessment every year for the sake of it—but the world is changing all the time. The measure's impact on business will change because unemployment and employment rates, working patterns and business patterns are all changing.

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): The hon. Gentleman is right to be concerned about the costs to business of operating the working tax credit scheme, but does he think that it might be possible to assess the benefits to business of that scheme? What does he think those benefits might be?

Mr. Webb: The hon. Gentleman may not recall this, but we voted for this legislation. We do not dispute the attractions of supporting the low paid. There is no difference between us on that. However, in all these things, there is a balance to be struck between the advantages to individuals and the burdens on business. In my view, delivering the tax credits through the pay packet creates a burden on business, with no advantage to the citizen, so updating information on the burden on business each year will help us to make the case that such things should be done differently. It would help us to keep an eye on the problem inherent in the scheme that has been adopted.

I shall not detain the House any longer. There are two differences between the Lords version of the report and the Commons version. The Lords version is superior because take-up and other information would be provided every year and because it would provide an up-to-date picture of the burden on business, which will change over time. For those reasons, we are disinclined to disagree with the Lords in the said amendment, and we hope to find out in due course whether the House agrees with us.

Hywel Williams (Caernarfon): I, too, am glad that the Government have given ground on the annual report issue, despite the arguments against taking the step proposed on their behalf in the other place by Baroness Hollis. Hon. Members will perhaps have noted that Baroness Hollis argued that the various statistics were available from a variety of sources and all that the curious needed to do was track them down. That may be so, but that does not detract from the value of publishing all the statistics annually and in a form that is easily accessible not only to hon. Members but to the public, in the fine tradition of open government.

Baroness Hollis also said that she was against what would be a cut-and-paste exercise, so I am glad that, despite her persuasions, we will now have an annual report. I am sure that the Government are poised, even now, with the scissors and glue. I congratulate the Government on changing their mind, and look forward to the result.

However, unlike the Lords amendment, under the Government amendment in lieu, the report would note only the number of child tax credit and working tax credit awards and the number of inquiries, penalties, prosecutions and convictions. It will not contain an estimate of the take-up rates. The Lords amendment would require

"(b) an estimate of the take-up of the working tax credit;

"(c) an estimate of the take-up of the child tax credit".

I am sure that the Government are always pleased to report positive figures to the House, such as the number of awards made. They are always pleased to report how often they have hit a particular barn door. In itself, that is interesting; it might lead to favourable headlines of the variety that say, "Barn door targeting—another Government success!" However, I am sure that that consideration could not be further from the Government's mind. Of equal interest is not only how often the Government have hit the barn door, but how often they have missed it. Indeed, such a comparison is essential for any serious assessment of the success or otherwise of the tax credit system.

The statistics are available on take-up, or they can be worked out. The noble Baroness noted that

> "in the first year, take-up of WFTC . . . was 76 per cent—which is close to the 81 per cent for family credit".—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 12 June 2002; Vol. 636, c. 291–2.]

I do not regard a difference of 5 per cent. as close, although, in terms of barn doors, I suppose that it might be.

The Government are, of course, reticent in talking about take-up rates, for good, if not laudable, reasons. Those who have a right to means-tested benefits but who do not claim them are a continuing demonstration of the inefficiency of means-tested benefits as a way of relieving poverty. Given the higher proportion of people in Scotland and Wales who are dependent on those means-tested benefits, drawing attention away from the deficiencies of the system is not a politically neutral step. Apart from our interest in promoting open government, that was one more reason why Plaid Cymru and the Scottish National party were very much in favour of the Lords amendment and why we are disappointed with this Government revision.

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): With the leave of the House, I shall intervene briefly—as my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) suggested I would—on the subject of fraud, which has been of some interest to me and other Members during the passage of the Bill.

I congratulate the Paymaster General on the eloquence of her opening remarks, and the elegance with which she executed a strategic retreat from the position of the noble Baroness Hollis, who told the House of Lords that the amendment was wholly unnecessary, and that it amounted to a scissors-and-paste job. If I may say so, the right hon. Lady has carried out a scissors-and-paste job today with our hardly noticing. After my initial admiration for her elegance, however, I began to feel a sense of unease about the way in which she responded to the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs and other hon. Members on eligibility as part of the information required to assess take-up, and on the question of burdens on business.

If one looks at the difference between the Lords amendment and the Government amendment, whether subsection (1) or subsection (2), it strikes one immediately that the Government have changed the wording from "estimate" to "number" and that the question of business costs is left out altogether. I feel a slight sense of concern about what the Paymaster General said about a figure for business costs being available later and being revised. First, in the regulatory impact assessment, the Government conceded that the impact of some of the proposed legislation could only be estimated once the system is up and running, and that there may be an additional cost to businesses as a result of the need to respond to in-year changes in recipients' circumstances.

Secondly, if the right hon. Lady is right in her statement that it is inappropriate to include business costs in the annual report, and she is right that the cost will be fixed, what are the Government afraid of? Why are they shy about including that as part of the annual report? They will be able to say, "Look here, we were right. There was only this fixed cost for business. It isn't changing each year. The amount isn't increasing." Whether the arguments of the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) are right or wrong, the Government will be able to say that there is not an increased cost to business every year. What would be the harm of including that in the annual report? Many businesses, especially small businesses, will feel some small sense of unease that that has been left out of the annual report.

On fraud, an important question arises from the Lords amendment. The right hon. Lady will recollect that concern has been expressed in many quarters. My hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs was absolutely right to talk about fraud and misdirection of public money in tax credits. He quoted the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), who is in a good position to judge given his previous experience in the Department of Social Security, and whose contribution on Second Reading we all recollect. He said that

> "some people in Whitehall are less keen on countering fraud than hon. Members."—[*Official Report*, 10 December 2001; Vol. 376, c. 617.]

I know that Members on both sides of the House are concerned about fraud and Conservative Members are certainly keen to bear down on it. We recognise that fraud is a misuse of public funds and we recognise the affront that it causes to hard-working taxpayers and claimants alike.

5.15 pm

The vast majority of those in receipt of tax credits are, of course, decent and honest people who properly claim what they are entitled to and, when we talk about fraud, we are not talking about those who simply make a mistake and thereby receive more than their entitlement. The Paymaster General will recall that, throughout our proceedings, we have been at pains to draw a distinction between those who commit fraud and those who make a mistake. We have tried to argue that the Government should not bundle the two groups together. However, members of the public want those who set out to cheat the system and who sometimes obtain substantial sums of money to be brought to justice.

Under the amendment in lieu, the annual report will give details of the number of prosecutions and convictions for offences connected with tax credits. Members of the other place were right to press for that information to be made available in the annual report because, thus far, the record of prosecutions for tax credit fraud has been feeble. In the first two years of the working families tax credit, there were 22 prosecutions for false working families tax credit applications. That is for the whole two-year period up to September 2001, the first two years of the working families tax credit.

It is true that a little more vigour has been shown since then. In the six-month period since September 2001, 26 prosecutions were instigated for fraud, according to a written parliamentary answer that I received on 1 May this year. However, even if there has been that slight

[Mr. James Clappison]

increase in the past six months, on any view of the potential scale of fraud in tax credit, it remains a low number of prosecutions. We note that there have been no prosecutions at all for fraud in the child care element of the tax credit, but stories abound of what members of the public regard as irregular practices in that area.

In a written answer, I was told:

> "As at 31 December 2001, there were a total of 542 Inland Revenue staff involved in investigating possible false applications for tax credits. The figure comprises 27 Investigators and 226 support staff employed centrally at the Tax Credit Office. There are a further 247 Inland Revenue Network staff who also deal with tax credit investigations, and a specialist team of 42 staff dealing with the most serious cases including those resulting in prosecution."—[*Official Report*, 19 December 2001; Vol. 377, c. 326W.]

All those staff for the annualised equivalent, on the latest figures, of 52 prosecutions a year! According to my simple maths, that means we employ 542 staff for 52 prosecutions, so there are 10 man-years for each prosecution that is brought by the Inland Revenue.

Dawn Primarolo: The hon. Gentleman said that stories and allegations of fraud abound. Is he suggesting that the Inland Revenue does not investigate those allegations or that the investigations do not come to fruition in terms of prosecutions?

Mr. Clappison: I remind the right hon. Lady of what I said. I pointed out the number of staff

> "involved in investigating possible false applications for tax credits."

I hope that she is not suggesting that the record of prosecutions is anything other than feeble. She has also conceded in written parliamentary answers that there have been no prosecutions whatever in cases involving child care. Even if one takes into account the number of investigations and the number of penalties—they run into a few hundreds—the performance is less than spectacular.

Prosecutions and the threat of imprisonment have the greatest deterrent effect, or so the Government would have us believe with their television advertising campaign. The right hon. Lady looks quizzical, but their campaign shows a benefit cheat languishing in a prison cell. When it comes to the facts, the truth is rather different.

Dawn Primarolo *rose—*

Mr. Clappison: I will give way to right hon. Lady, but she may want to comment on the fact that in the first two years of tax credits only seven people have been sent to prison for fraud.

Dawn Primarolo: Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that allegations should not be investigated and proven before a prosecution on fraud takes place? I am a little confused. The hon. Gentleman talks about allegations and the number of investigating staff. Has it crossed his mind that sometimes allegations are made but not proven?

Mr. Clappison: The right hon. Lady is a little confused about the role of the prosecution in the criminal justice system. It is not the role of the prosecutor to prove the offence—

Dawn Primarolo: The role is to get the evidence.

Mr. Clappison: It is the role of the prosecution to get the evidence—*[Interruption.]* Of course they carry out an investigation. They then make a decision based on whether there is sufficient evidence to prosecute, to which they apply the public interest tests, before taking the case to court. Is the right hon. Lady trying to persuade us that the 26 prosecutions in six months or the 22 prosecutions in the previous two years are representative of the scale of fraud in tax credits? I will give way to her if she is prepared to defend that.

Dawn Primarolo: Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that the Inland Revenue should take cases to court without evidence to support the allegation that fraud has been committed? Is that the centre of his argument?

Mr. Clappison: No, the centre of my argument is that the Inland Revenue's record of prosecuting fraud under this Government's policies is feeble to have brought such a small number of cases to court. That amount of fraud beggars belief.

The right hon. Lady will be familiar with the estimates by the Department for Work and Pensions on the extent of fraud within the rest of the benefits system. It estimates that total fraud varies from £2 billion to £7 billion. Some 12,000 prosecutions are brought each year, but when the Labour party was in opposition it said that that was inadequate. The right hon. Lady's Government have brought only 26 prosecutions in the past six months and 22 prosecutions in the previous two years. That hardly bears out the gist of the Government's advertising campaign.

Mr. Mark Hendrick (Preston): How many cases were investigated and what percentage were found to be fraudulent?

Mr. Clappison: We have obtained a massive amount of statistics on that which the hon. Gentleman can find in the responses to written parliamentary questions. The fact of the matter is—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman will find those if he looks at the written answers for the relevant periods. I do not have the figures in front of me, but I can tell him that the number of prosecutions in relation to the extent of possible fraud is very low. I do not know whether the right hon. Lady is defending that, but however one looks at it, the number is very low.

Dawn Primarolo: I hate to spoil the hon. Gentleman's speech, which he obviously prepared before he read the Government's amendment, but has he noticed that our amendment goes further on fraud than the Lords amendment by making it necessary to provide more information on such matters? If he is arguing against the Government's amendment in favour of the Lords amendment, he should realise that the other place asked for less information to be provided than we will give to the House on penalties, prosecutions and other matters.

Mr. Clappison: If the right hon. Lady will exercise a little patience, I will come to that. In the spirit of being open about information and given her remarks about the extent of fraud, perhaps she will tell us something else so that we can make a judgment on the information requested in the amendments. The extent of take-up can only be judged when we compare the number of people who take up the benefit with the number who are eligible. The right hon. Lady is defending the number of prosecutions, and her hon. Friends joined her in that. Perhaps she will be as bold as her words in defence of the Government's policy by telling us one thing: how much fraud is there? So far, the right hon. Lady has refused to tell us. She will remember that she wrote to me in April 2001, telling me that the Inland Revenue was conducting a benchmarking exercise to establish the level of fraud in tax credit claims, and that that would run from September 2000 for 12 months. At the end of that 12 months—we shall see whether the right hon. Lady's openness will be forthcoming again—I asked the question again. That was in December. She told me that the results would be known "early next year".

That was earlier this year, and we had the opportunity to ask the right hon. Lady about these matters when we were considering the Bill in Committee. When I asked her again about the extent of the fraud and the outcome of the benchmarking exercise—*[Interruption.]* This is of interest to the hon. Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick), because this is the answer to his question. The right hon. Lady told me:

> "I cannot give him a guarantee that I will be able to publish that information because it deals with specifics of possible frauds that it would be unwise to put in the public domain. However, I will consider how to ensure that he is properly informed so that he can discharge his parliamentary duties."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 24 January 2002; c. 239.]

That was me.

I did not hold my breath when I received that reply from the right hon. Lady. It says something about the Government's mentality that they presume that they are the judge of what information can be given to the Opposition and to other hon. Members. I suspect that I was right not to hold my breath because when I raised the question again after a reasonable interval in April 2002, I was referred back to an earlier answer in February 2002, which told me:

> "The Inland Revenue are currently analysing the data from their compliance benchmarking exercise. We shall be considering the results, and questions of publications, within the next few months."—[*Official Report*, 5 February 2002; Vol. 379, c. 851W.]

We are talking about a report that Ministers have had since September 2001. We have asked repeatedly for information, and months have elapsed. In response to our questions, we have had one blocking answer after another. We have been referred back to previous answers. The right hon. Lady had much to say earlier when I was asking about numbers of prosecutions, and suggesting that there were not very many. Perhaps she will now be as brave as her words and tell us whether the Government will publish their own report—Ministers have had it in their hands since September 2001, at least—and state how much fraud there is within the working families tax credit mechanism. Will the Government publish the results of their own benchmarking exercise?

We simply want to obtain this information. We will be able to judge both sets of amendments when we know how much fraud there is. We shall then know whether the numbers of prosecutions and convictions are an adequate reflection of the level of fraud. Once again, I am waiting with bated breath. I hope that I will not again have to use the procedure of parliamentary questions, because we know how effective that is when the Government are determined to withhold something. My sad experience is that that has been the case so far in this instance. Will the Government tell us how much fraud there is in the working families tax credit mechanism. I ask for a straightforward answer to a straightforward question.

5.30 pm

Roger Casale: I wish to speak in support of the Government amendment in lieu and in support of the motion to disagree with the Lords amendment.

There is much common ground between what the Government are proposing and the Lord's amendment. I welcome the Government's decision to publish an annual report. I am sure that there will be a great deal of interest in the report from both sides of the House—given the level of support for the tax credits system—and in the way in which it operates in practice.

We have heard that there is common ground on the issue of tackling fraud. The Government's amendment goes much further than the amendment from another place in terms of a commitment to report on the steps that they are taking to tackle fraud. That is despite the huff and puff that we have heard from the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison).

There is also common ground on reporting on the take-up of tax credits. Again, the commitment that the Government make to that in their amendment is much stronger than that in the Lord's amendment.

Mr. Flight: The hon. Gentleman has just said something that may be important or may not be quite right. I await the Minister's response. All we know is that the Government will publish a report on numbers. We do not know what the commitment is under the Government's measures to report on take-up. If the hon. Gentleman can tell us, we would be delighted to hear.

Roger Casale: I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to the text of the Government amendment, which refers to the number of awards, the number of inquiries conducted and the number of penalties imposed by the scheme. The Government have got the balance right in terms of the focus of the annual report. They are right to reject the suggestion that there should be an annual assessment, in addition to the regulatory impact assessment that will have been made, of the cost of the scheme to business.

It is interesting that in the other place it was Lord Saatchi who drew attention to the cost to business of the working of the tax credit schemes. During the debate in the other place, he explained why he was asking for an assessment of that cost as part of the report. He said:

> "Why do we ask for this? Because we believe that such a responsibility being placed on the Treasury will have the healthy effect of focusing the Treasury's attention"—

and, presumably, everyone else's—

> "on the cost of the Bill to small business."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 16 May 2002; Vol. 635, c. CWH 31.]

It is rather ironic that in moving the amendment in the name of cutting red tape on business, Lord Saatchi seems to want to do so by imposing a greater burden of red tape on the Inland Revenue—it would be onerous to run regulatory impact assessments every year. I am not saying that we should not be aware of the impact on business and seek to ameliorate that, but we must set the costs that there may be to business against the real benefits to business of increasing the number of people who are in work and participating in the labour market through the operation of the scheme.

Of course, it was Lord Saatchi who, 20 years ago, drew everyone's attention to the costs of "Labour's not working," as he put it then. It seems ironic that he is now

[Roger Casale]

drawing everyone's attention to the costs when Labour is working. We have more than 1 million more people in work as a result of labour market interventions such as the tax credit scheme.

It is all very well for the official Opposition and the Liberal Democrats to say that they support the tax credits, but if the tax credit schemes are to have their full beneficial effect in practice, it is important that they have the full support of the business community in their implementation. By drawing attention the whole time to the cost to business of operating the tax credit scheme, rather than taking a more balanced approach which emphasises the great benefits to business, especially if there is a high take-up of the scheme, the Opposition get the balance wrong.

In responding to the wishes of hon. Members in all parts of the House for the tax credit scheme to be effective, for a way of benchmarking that from year to year, and so for an annual report, the Government have got the balance right in their amendment. If the Opposition intend to support the scheme, they should stop carping about the form of the annual report and support the Government's amendment.

Dawn Primarolo: With the leave of the House, I shall respond to the three major points that have been made in the debate this afternoon, although I get the feeling that it does not matter what I say in my concluding remarks; the Opposition have already made up their mind that they will vote against the Government regardless.

The three points refer, first, to the cost to employers; secondly, to take-up; and thirdly, to fraud and the enforcement of the compliance system to reduce the level of fraud. I shall deal briefly with each point, starting with the cost to employers. As I said earlier, it is not for the Government to assess and account for employers' costs. However, it is for the Government—and it is we who introduced the process—to monitor and evaluate the introduction of measures that may impact on employers' costs, as the regulatory impact assessment does in relation to the regulations required under the Bill.

Two further issues were raised. First, the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) accepted my argument that, if the regulations were set, they would not change. He also said, however, that the Government would do other things that might impact on employers and that the situation had to be seen in the round. The Lords amendment did not ask us to deal with such matters—it asked only for an annual report on the Bill—so even if he votes against the Government and in favour of the amendment, he will not get the assessment for which he has called on the Floor of the House. As the Government are committed to regulatory impact assessments, an evaluation is conducted of every measure's impact on employers and presented to the House.

I would also go further—the hon. Member for Northavon is aware that the same issue has arisen in previous debates on the working families tax credit, the disabled person's tax credit and the new tax credits—and say that the Government have worked very closely with business on the design and development of the systems. The consultative group has given an enormous amount of time, for which the Government are grateful, to ensuring that we properly take forward the work. That group will continue to have the ability to monitor and consider the situation should any changes occur that might impact on business. It will then be for the Government to bring the matter to the House. We take the view that the suggestion that we must conduct an annual report on regulations that will not change, costs that will not vary and an impact on business that is not yet accounted for is a waste of time, as such a report would produce information that would take the House no further forward.

The hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) demonstrated that he still did not quite grasp what employers are being asked to do. In particular, he said that employers would be asked to supply a lot of information about hours. Precisely because of the way in which the new tax credits are structured, however, people will claim on the basis of information that the Revenue already has. Furthermore, the end-of-year checks will not routinely involve employers, so even his suggestion that the checking system will cause extra work is incorrect. The idea that we should conduct an annual report on something that is not happening is somewhat bizarre.

I turn now to the question of fraud and tax credits. The irony is that the Government, having listened closely to debates in this House as well as the other place, tabled an amendment that goes further than their lordships requested in their amendment. The Inland Revenue system does not operate only on the basis of prosecutions; the position is fundamentally different in relation to the Department for Work and Pensions. We also impose penalties, as we have a process that graduates through the system. The original Lords amendment asked for details on the number of investigations, prosecutions and convictions. The Government amendment requires the inclusion of both sets of information in the annual report. In addition, it requires that the report set out details of the number of penalties imposed under the Bill. That is an area on which hon. Members concentrated when we discussed the matter on the Floor of the House and in Committee.

On the first two points, hon. Members are asking for information as regards employers for which the Lords amendment does not provide, yet claim that that amendment is better. On the second amendment, about fraud and compliance with the system, the Government listened not only to their lordships but to this House, and tabled an amendment that goes further. We have also dealt with the issue of take-up.

Mr. Clappison: I am afraid that the Paymaster General is doing it again—she is bracketing fraud and non-compliance together. Does she appreciate that it is fraud that really angers members of the public, and will she now tell us how much fraud was involved in the working families tax credit?

Dawn Primarolo: I was hoping to save the House the explanation of the difference between how the Inland Revenue operates what it calls its non-compliance regime and how the Department for Work and Pensions conducts its regime for prosecutions. I fear that I will now have to give that explanation, because although the hon. Gentleman has repeatedly had the matter explained to him, he has not grasped it.

It is true—I think that the hon. Member for Northavon would entirely support this proposition—that the Government want to ensure that all those who are entitled to the new tax credits claim them. Of course, there is no reason not to tackle fraud where it arises, but the development of the regime must not have a negative impact in frightening or discouraging people from applying for their rights.

The Inland Revenue has a long history of dealing with non-compliance. Since 1999, that has been extended to dealing with tax credit claimants in order to ensure that tax credit claims are subject to a suitable compliance strategy. That experience, together with that obtained by the Department for Work and Pensions in operating the benefits system, has led to the development of a robust new compliance regime for the tax credit systems. That will make full use of automated systems and data sources used by the Inland Revenue to counter non-compliance. If we can prevent people from committing the fraud in the first place, we will not need to prosecute them because it has been picked up at an early stage.

The Inland Revenue can use penalties as forms of prosecution. We should consider the improvements that have been made. The Bill, like the previous tax credits provisions, contains structural improvements that should help further to reduce fraud. First, there is a move away from payment by the order book to payment directly into the bank account. Misuse of the order book is a well known and extensive area of fraud. Secondly, one of the biggest areas of fraud is understated earnings, which the Inland Revenue has long experience in tackling. Moreover, the measure of income for the tax credits will be aligned much more closely with those that are used for tax. Along with links between different Inland Revenue systems, that will make it much harder for claimants to hide sources of income.

The Bill goes further. It provides new powers to tackle fraud effectively, including powers to charge penalties and to provide the Revenue with the necessary power to obtain information, to check claims and to carry out inquiries where fraud is suspected. It allows for a co-ordinated approach of investigating tax and tax credit non-compliance. It includes new powers to investigate criminal fraud when necessary. It creates a new criminal offence of tax credit fraud and provides for powers that will allow the Revenue to recover overpayments. That contrasts with the system in the Department for Work and Pensions, which the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) keeps mentioning.

Compliance activity in the Department for Work and Pensions traditionally depends more on prosecutions, and contrasts with the Inland Revenue's approach of a compliance regime that reinforces at every point that the application is correct. The Inland Revenue's approach to tax credit fraud is consistent with its approach to other sorts of fraud. So the points made by hon. Member for Hertsmere are simply not valid.

5.45 pm

Mr. Clappison: The Paymaster General has been generous in giving way, but I want to press her on the matter. Whatever one's view about dealing with the matter as fraud or non-compliance, surely she agrees that it is important to know the amount of fraud. She wrote me a letter, which stated:

> "The Inland Revenue are carrying out a benchmarking exercise to establish the level of fraud in tax credit claims."

Will she tell us the amount of fraud and publish the report?

Dawn Primarolo: That is precisely what the Government new clause will do annually. Where has the hon. Gentleman been? It will provide annual information to the House on penalties, prosecutions and convictions.

Let me consider take-up. It is argued that the Government should somehow put in place estimates of take-up. I am surprised at the hon. Member for Northavon, who is well versed in the various surveys that are conducted and on which the Government draw. He also well knows that there is a gap between the studies being conducted and publication of the evidence. He knows that the studies do not always cover points that may now be relevant and need to be asked in the context of tax credits.

Estimating take-up rates is not as straightforward as hon. Members suggest. The purpose of an annual report is to provide the House with meaningful and structured information so that it can assess the impact of the tax credits. The matter is not straightforward because the take-up rate is calculated by dividing the number of awards by an eligible population. Survey data are used to estimate the number of eligible non-recipients. There is a time lag between conducting the survey and publishing the data. For example, the family resource survey for 2000–01 was published earlier this year. Eligibility tests, not only on household income but on hours worked, makes estimating the eligible population, especially those without children, far more complex.

Take-up was discussed when I appeared before the Treasury Sub-Committee. I explained the difficulty with the surveys on which we depend. I also explained that the Inland Revenue was in discussion with the bodies responsible for conducting the surveys to ensure that they included relevant questions for gleaning the information that would provide a more accurate measure of eligibility. We do not currently have that information. Producing an annual report now, when the information is unavailable and unreliable, would be a waste of Parliament's time and would not give us a true picture.

We have tried to be helpful; we have listened to the debate here and in another place, and we have tabled a better new clause. Despite the force of the argument, some people prefer to vote against the Government for the sake of doing so.

Question put, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment:—

The House divided: Ayes 296, Noes 188.

Division No. 284] **[5.50 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald
  (Swansea E)
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Rt Hon Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith, *(Withington)*

Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Cairns, David
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Irranca–Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Ian Pearson and
Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe.

NOES

Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin

Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chidgey, David
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Doughty, Sue
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, Rt Hon William
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Moore, Michael
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Simmonds, Mark
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thurso, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wishart, Pete
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Charles Hendry and Mr. David Wilshire.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment disagreed to.

Government amendment in lieu of Lords amendment No. 1 agreed to.

Clause 3

CLAIMS

Lords amendment: No. 2.

Dawn Primarolo: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): With this we may discuss Lords amendments Nos. 3 to 6, 12, 18 to 23, 33, 34, 37 to 40, 42, 45, 47, 49, 50, 52 to 64, 66, 72, 73, 75 to 78, 80, 81, 85, 86, 88, 91, 93, 99, 106, 108 to 113, 115, 118, 121 and 124.

Dawn Primarolo: The debates that we will have as we proceed through the remainder of our considerations today will be on technical and drafting amendments that the Government believe will improve the Bill by clarifying and rationalising its provisions. I shall briefly introduce the purpose of each group, and many of the amendments are consequential.

This group of amendments deals with the interaction between awards and entitlement, and includes technical changes to the provisions on recovering overpayments and paying out underpayments when entitlement turns out to be different from the amount paid under an award during the year. In addition, it makes clear that awards are not revoked by a decision of the board, but are instead terminated by such a decision.

I shall briefly explain why these technical changes are necessary. The new tax credits introduced by the Bill are designed to target support according to the current circumstances of claimants within the context of a system that bases entitlement to tax credits on annual income and can respond by adjusting support if claimants experience a change in their level of income.

As the credits are designed to ensure support is delivered to claimants during the year, the Bill enables the Inland Revenue to make awards, and payments under those awards, during the year, and to adjust those awards and payments as claimants' circumstances change. That is precisely what we intended.

However, there were some technical problems—as there often are—with the relevant provisions in the Bill as it stood. The amendments do not change the basic operation of the Bill. Awards and payments under those awards are the vehicle for delivering support during the year. Entitlement is different. I am sorry that we need to be so precise, but legislation needs to be precise in these

[Dawn Primarolo]

circumstances. Entitlement depends on the underlying facts, some of which cannot be determined until after the end of the year. However, that distinction was not clearly drawn in the Bill as it stood, so we decided that a number of technical changes were necessary to clarify matters.

The key changes are the amendments to clauses 3 and 5. A considerable number of purely consequential amendments to later clauses were also necessary. That accounts for the bulk of the amendments in this group.

In addition, the Bill was unclear about the effect of income on awards and entitlement. As the new tax credits will respond to changes in income, entitlement cannot finally be determined until after the end of the year, when current year income is known. As the Bill stood, however, the lack of a clear distinction between awards and entitlement meant that claimants could face having their entitlement curtailed because of decisions taken by the board during the year based on expectations about income.

If the board decided not to make an award at all, in the expectation that a claimant's income would be too high for entitlement to any tax credits, that could cut across the claimant's entitlement. Awards will of course be finalised at the end of the year, once all the relevant details about income are known; but if no award was ever made there would be nothing to finalise. Someone might be entitled to receive money, albeit perhaps not very much, when his or her final income was determined according to the facts but the submission of expected income over the rest of the year had suggested no entitlement. To avoid that problem, amendments to clause 14 will allow the board to make awards at a nil rate.

The idea of someone receiving a notice telling them that their award is nil may strike some people as bizarre. However, the reason for that is that at the end of the year the assessment of entitlement against award allows for action if it is indicated that money is outstanding.

The group of amendments also contains minor drafting changes, the main change being replacement of references to the board's revoking awards with references to its terminating them. Once made, an award cannot simply disappear, which is what the reference to revoking awards might be taken to imply. If the award disappeared, it would not be possible to decide on the entitlement at the end of the year.

Provisions relating to both overpayments and underpayments are amended. That enables the board to recover overpayments before the end of the year when the person to whom the award was made never met the basic qualifying criteria for the tax credit, and also makes clear that the board is obliged to pay any extra tax credits to claimants when there have been underpayments. It was always clear in Committee that the Government intended to make such provision, but I was told that the technical definitions should be made clearer.

I am sorry that there are so many technical changes, but it was necessary to change every reference throughout the Bill to ensure that there could be no dispute about claimants' entitlements.

Mr. Flight: We support these technical amendments, which, along with others, correct drafting errors.

The many amendments tabled in the other place were, I think, largely tabled at the last minute. They seem to have been grouped into nine categories here, whereas there were five in the Lords. Essentially, however, they reflect a drafting muddle that occurred when the Bill went there—a muddle concerning both the definitions and the operation of awards and entitlements.

Lord Higgins, who contributed a great deal to sorting out the problem, was strongly vexed. He said it would be "far more appropriate" to describe the amendments as structuring amendments, because there were

> "fundamental inconsistencies . . . between the earlier and later parts of the Bill."

He said the Bill was "fundamentally flawed", and added

> "Rarely in almost 40 years in both Houses have I seen such a badly drafted Bill—in fact I probably never have."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 12 June 2002; Vol. 636, c. 266.]

6.15 pm

I must confess that it took me a long time and a lot of digging to establish the essence of the structural errors. I must also confess that in Committee I focused on the related territory rather than on specific drafting issues. The Revenue is being expected to make awards during the year, not necessarily based on adequate evidence, to check entitlement in terms of meeting all the qualifications and criteria at the end of the year, and then to recover overpayments.

I think that the mechanism remains questionable and potentially flawed. I remember making the crucial point that unless claimants completed the tax credit equivalent of a tax return at the end of the year, I could not see how the poor devils in the Revenue could easily obtain all the information they needed to confirm that the provisional awards they had made would be correct in terms of legal entitlement.

Let us consider the technical issues. The credits are designed to ensure that support is delivered to claimants during the year. The Bill enables the Revenue to make awards—and payments according to those awards—during the year, and to adjust the awards and payments as claimants' circumstances change and are confirmed. But because the credits will also respond to changes in income, entitlement cannot be finally determined until the end of the tax year when current-year income is known.

Awards, and any payments made according to them, are simply a vehicle for the delivery of support during the year. Entitlement, however, depends on the underlying facts, some of which—those relating to income—will not be determined until the end of the year. That distinction was not originally clear in the Bill, and gave rise to some technical problems.

In particular, there was a contradiction between clause 5 and the decision-making provisions in clauses 14 to 16. What were then subsections (3) and (5) of clause 5 were intended to make provision regarding claimants' entitlements. When people cease to meet the basic requirements necessary for qualification for one of the credits, it is sensible for their entitlement to stop. That was the aim of clause 5(5).

As couples will be jointly entitled to the new credits, it is axiomatic that the entitlement of a couple—as a couple—should stop if the partners break up. Similarly, the entitlement of a single person as an individual will stop if that person takes on a new partner. That was the aim of clause 5(3). The provisions in clause 5, however, were cast in terms of the effect on awards rather than entitlement. They implied that awards would or would not end in particular circumstances. Clauses 14 to 16 make it clear that the existence of awards depends on decisions made by the board. Thus there was a conflict. The Bill as it stood left unresolved the question of what would happen in a case in which an award ought to end under clause 5, but the board had made no decision to end it under clause 16—or vice versa.

These, then, are technical amendments intended to correct the misdrafting. Clause 5, in particular, now makes clear that awards run until the end of the tax year, and end during the year only if terminated by a decision of the board.

I could bang on about the technicalities, but I think I have put on record what the technical issue was. The amendments relating to awards, entitlements, overpayments and underpayments are the key ones, although I believe that four other groups relate to those matters as well.

Mr. Webb: It may reassure the House and you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to learn that I shall not try to catch your eye on any further group of amendments, unless goaded. The amendments relate to overpayments and underpayments and other technical issues, and one practical issue arises.

It would be helpful if the Minister would say how the system, which will come into operation in April 2003, will work in the following example of a typical person. We were told in Committee that the tax credits are modelled on the tax system and that they will bring benefits and taxes closer together. The tax liability for 2003–04 is based on income in 2003–04. My understanding is that eventually entitlement to tax credits for 2003–04 will be based on outturn income in 2003–04, which will obviously be known for sure only at the end of 2003–04.

What is the position of someone who makes a fresh claim in March 2003? I have a constituent who has had a letter from the Inland Revenue to tell her to hold on to her P60 for 2001–02. I have written to the Minister on this issue. My constituent is very concerned, because her income has fallen since 2001–02. She is worried that she might make a claim in March 2003, hand in her P60 for 2001–02, and be told by the Revenue that she had a high income and will not get much tax credit. The relevant adjustments would not be made until the end of 2003–04, when her income could be determined definitively. For someone who makes a claim in March 2003, the assessment of income should be based on a best guess for income for 2002–03, not on outturn income for 2001–02, which will be two years out of date by then.

Dawn Primarolo: When the system starts up in April 2003, we will not have P60s available for 2002–03. Therefore we will start, effectively, at P-1, so we will use the base year of 2001–02. In the circumstances the hon. Gentleman describes, when someone's income has fallen in 2002–03, we might move to current-year income. We would consider the actual income at that time. I am grateful that the hon. Gentleman has written to me, because I wish to consider his point, but that is my understanding of the situation. In the first year, we have to use P-1, which will be 2001–02 and that should suffice, except in the circumstances that the hon. Gentleman describes of someone experiencing a fall in income.

Mr. Webb: I am grateful to the Paymaster General for that constructive response, but unfortunately it raises several concerns. First, my constituent rang the WFTC helpline, but the staff did not have a clue about the system that will start in April. Many people will want to know how it will work, and I would be grateful for confirmation that the staff will start to give prospective advice on how the new system will work as soon as possible.

Secondly, when I have received the Paymaster General's reply, I will write to my constituent and advise her to point out to the Inland Revenue when she makes her claim that her income has fallen and that she wants to be judged not on the previous year's income but on the present year's. My constituent will know what to do, because she has talked to me, but many people will not. They will be asked for the previous year's P60, but if their income has dropped they will be underpaid for up to 18 months.

Thirdly, I do not understand why we will not always have that problem. In March 2004, we will not have P60s for 2003–04, so we will have to use P60s for 2002–03 for assessments for 2004–05, unless three months into every tax year, when the P60s are published, all assessments are revisited in one go.

Dawn Primarolo: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman's constituent on being ahead of the game in applying for something that the House has not yet decided will be available to be applied for. It is difficult for a helpline to advise on something that has not yet been agreed by the House. None the less, I apologise if his constituent has not received the advice that she should have received.

On the hon. Gentleman's second point, I agree that, once the House has agreed the new system, it is important that we start training programmes and put the helpline in place. I will certainly pay particular attention to that.

On the third point, the Bill allows for assessments to be made on a combination of previous year and current year. In Committee, we discussed the timing of the changeover of the rates so that it was in place with the issuing of the P60s. Although the claim is made from April, an increased payment might start a little later. That will even out the system. I realise that my intervention is too long, and I do not wish to try your patience, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so I will write to the hon. Gentleman on those points. If he agrees, I will send a copy to the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight), because I am sure that he is interested in the same points.

Mr. Webb: The system will be introduced in nine months. My constituent has taken or is considering taking—I forget the exact circumstances—another job that will mean a drop in income. She is looking ahead and wondering whether she can take the job. She has rung up for advice on a system that Ministers have said will be available next April, so it is a little harsh to criticise her. It is not unreasonable to ring a helpline for advice on a system that Ministers have repeatedly mentioned and that will be in place next April.

Given that P60s are provided to everyone a couple of months into the new financial year and that, presumably, most people will need some adjustment to their rates—

[Mr. Webb]

because of overtime or whatever—will we routinely see millions of adjustments to tax credit awards in, say, June every year? Some will be overpayments and some will be cuts, so what certainty will people have that the money they start getting in April—presumably a continuation of the previous year's money—will continue?

I also wonder about the culture of the changes. We have been told that tax credits are supposed to be like income tax, but everybody's rates might change in June, whereas income tax rates apply for the year from April—although I appreciate that allowances have been changed mid-year in the past.

Dawn Primarolo: I certainly did not criticise the hon. Gentleman's constituent. In fact, I congratulated her on her forward thinking. In April 2002, the Inland Revenue published a document entitled "The Child and Working Tax Credits: The Modernisation of Britain's Tax and Benefit System, Number 10". Paragraph 4.5 on page 19 deals with how we would adjust the credit and the calculation. As we ran on past the beginning of the tax year, we would have information about what people had already had. We would then be able to make the calculation for the next year accordingly. However, I will write to the hon. Gentleman about that.

6.30 pm

I agree with the hon. Gentleman that it is vital that the correct advice is in place for people who want to plan for their futures and to take advantage of what will be an excellent source of support for them and their families as they enter the labour market or change jobs.

Mr. Flight *rose—*

Mr. Webb: I thank the Minister, and give way to the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight).

Mr. Flight: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. I simply remind him of the extensive debate on these matters in Committee. The central problem in moving to a system based on the current year rather than the previous year is how the Revenue can obtain the relevant information. That is not about income alone; it also involves the numbers of children involved, housing benefit details, and all sorts of other things. There is also the difficult problem of the number of hours worked.

The administrative process is not up to speed at present, and the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) is right to point out that that problem will continue beyond start-up. The Revenue will have a nightmare working out entitlements at year-end against awards paid in the course of the year, and in its attempts to collect overpayments. That is one of the problems with the Bill.

Mr. Webb: Not all the items listed by the hon. Gentleman are especially complex. For example, the number of children involved should be fairly predictable, and housing benefit does not feed into this calculation—rather, it is the other way around. However, the practical problem with the number of hours worked may be the big one.

My point about the amendments is that we are faced with 137 of them this evening. I sat through the Standing Committee debates and did not spot the problems that the amendments resolve. Will the Minister say something about how the problems came to light? The hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs implied that Lord Higgins spotted them, and brought them to the attention of the House. I am worried that the House allowed the Bill to go through without spotting the problems. By what mechanism were they brought to light, and are there any lessons about how that mechanism could be brought to bear earlier in the process? I am as embarrassed as anyone that we are having to discuss 137 amendments to a Bill that I waved through.

We support the clarifications and technical corrections in the amendments that remain, but I hope that the Minister will comment on how we reached this point.

Dawn Primarolo: With the leave of the House, I shall respond to the points that have been raised.

The Government consulted widely on the Bill, which is far better as a result. We continued to undertake consultation, and then moved these amendments. Lord Higgins's complaint was that we tabled them.

Mr. Flight: The Government tabled them late.

Dawn Primarolo: No, we did not table them late. The lesson mentioned by the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) involves Governments who want to ensure that legislation going through the House is subject to constant scrutiny. This is a complex Bill, but it would have operated without the changes suggested in the amendments. The Government are very grateful for the continued contribution made by the experts involved. They have made the Bill better as a result, but we had to decide whether to table the amendments.

The other problem has to do with the point made by the hon. Member for Northavon—that the Bill has been eagerly anticipated by our constituents. Before the Government can put in place the apparatus for advice and support in connection with the Bill, and before we can publish the details about it, we need the House to agree it. I deeply regret that the amendments were tabled at such short notice in the other place. I should have preferred to avoid that, but they were purely technical in nature and everyone—including Lord Higgins and Lord Russell, who was extremely supportive and generous—agreed that the Bill would be improved by them. In the light of that, it would be a very poor House of Parliament—Commons or Lords—that stood on procedure and prevented the amendments from being agreed and improving the Bill.

I accept that inconvenience was caused to the House of Lords, but the situation is not unique. The previous Conservative Government often tabled, at the last minute, matters of substance in the other place. These amendments do not change the substance of the Bill, but, as a result of the partnership in the consultation, they do make it better.

Inland Revenue officials have worked tirelessly to ensure that all the information was available to Members of this House and the other place, and to those organisations outside the House that were actively helping us to design the Bill. I must even tell the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs that the speaking note that he read out and attributed to Lord Higgins was, in fact, prepared for Baroness Hollis. When we accepted that the amendments had been tabled late, the Government provided the House of Lords with all notes and ministerial speaking notes. We also provided all the technical details, and full explanations of them. We offered their Lordships meetings with officials, and I would even have honoured the meetings that were, rather baldly, set up with me. However, I am glad that that did not turn out to be necessary.

Amendments may improve a Bill, but it may be inconvenient for the House to deal with them. Ministers must decide the balance between those two factors. I decided that we should continue to improve the Bill as much as possible.

I apologise to both Houses for any inconvenience caused, but I remind hon. Members that most of the amendments are consequential. Lord Russell was very generous in his comments, and even Lord Higgins said that the Bill was improved by them. His objections therefore perplexed me.

Mr. Webb: My observation—it was not a criticism—was not that amendments were tabled late. If a problem is spotted, it should be corrected. However, why did not the mechanisms that allowed outside observers to spot the problems come into action earlier in the process? Legislation is under constant scrutiny after it has finished its passage through the House, but why did not the process of technical clarification happen earlier?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I appreciate that the Minister is responding to questions that have been raised, but we are not at present dealing with the amendments that are before the House. I hope that she will respond briefly to the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb), but then she really ought to turn to the amendments.

Dawn Primarolo: Indeed, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Gentleman answered his own question, which is that legislation is normally scrutinised in detail after it has been passed. The option is to take much longer and have draft legislation available for years in advance, to do it as the Government have attempted to do, or to do as people suggested and table amendments once the legislation is finalised. Points on most legislation are made afterwards, causing amendments to be tabled.

I think that I have dealt with the point of the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs about the amendment. If there were a criticism to be made of the Government—because it is the Government who found that changes needed to be made—it would be that they were trying to be too helpful. This may be a dangerous thing for a Minister to say, but long may the Government and their Ministers continue to be helpful in ensuring that legislation is improved.

I am grateful to the hon. Members for Arundel and South Downs and for Northavon for the positive way in which they have commented on the amendments. I look forward to their continued involvement as we roll out the tax credits up to April 2003; they have touched on important issues that can be dealt with only when the legislation is finalised.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 3 to 6 agreed to.

Clause 7

INCOME TEST

Lords amendment: No. 7.

Dawn Primarolo: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this we may take Lords amendments Nos. 8, 24 to 31, 84, 98 and 100.

Dawn Primarolo: I will be as brief as I can on these amendments, which make technical and drafting improvements to the provision in clause 17 about the processing of the final entitlement at the end of the year. Before I explain the main changes made by the amendments, I should perhaps explain why the group begins at clause 7. That is simply because, as a result of the changes that I am about to describe, the terms "current year income" and "previous year income", currently defined only for the purposes of clause 7, will in future have an application elsewhere in part 1. For this reason, amendments Nos. 7 and 8 make the purpose of the Bill clear.

Amendments Nos. 9 and 10 are short, technical amendments, intended to clarify the scope of the Treasury's regulation-making powers under subsections (6) and (7) of clause 7.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I think that the right hon. Lady has jumped ahead a little. Amendments Nos. 9 and 10 come in a later group.

Dawn Primarolo *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. There is no reason why we should not put the two groups together, if it makes life easier for the right hon. Lady and everybody else.

Dawn Primarolo: That is extremely generous of you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am not quite sure that it will make life easier, but I will start again.

We are discussing amendments Nos. 9, 10, 11 and 17—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Can I help the right hon. Lady? We are debating Lords amendment No. 7—that is the principal amendment. In the same group are Lords amendments Nos. 8, 24 to 31, 84, 98 and 100. There is a subsequent group, that we have not yet come to, which consists of Lords amendments Nos. 9, 10, 11 and 17.

6.45 pm

Dawn Primarolo: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I now discover that I was correct before I changed direction. I am not sure what made me change direction, but I apologise, and will return to the amendments before the House.

Let me resume by saying that this group of amendments deals specifically with finalising entitlement at the end of the year, dealt with under clause 17. However, the main changes made by this group of amendments start with clause 7. That is simply because, as a result of the changes, the terms "current year income" and "previous year income" which are defined only for the purposes of clause 1, will in future have an application elsewhere in

[Dawn Primarolo]

part 1 of the Bill. For that reasons, amendments Nos. 7 and 8 make it clear that those terms are defined for the purposes of part 1. At the same time, amendments Nos. 98 and 100 add those terms to the list of terms as defined in clause 44, the interpretation clause.

The most important changes are those to clause 17, which sets out the machinery for finalising the end-of-year awards. As discussed in previous deliberations, entitlement to tax credits will be based on annual income. This means that entitlement can finally be determined only after the end of the tax year, when all the relevant information is known. Clause 17 therefore requires that claimants be given an opportunity, after the end of the year, to provide details of their income and circumstances so that the Inland Revenue can finalise their entitlement.

None of the changes in this group of amendments is intended to change the process and the way in which the Bill works. However, as originally drafted, clause 17 required the board to ask claimants to confirm details of their relevant income. The clarification of relevant income is important. Requiring claimants to report details of their relevant income at the end of the year would mean that to arrive at the correct figure to report to the Inland Revenue, they would have to carry out a comparison of their previous year income with their current year income, applying the threshold for rises in income where relevant. In addition, most claimants would also need to report their actual current year income to the Revenue at the same time, so that their award could be renewed.

There is no need for the Bill to impose such a burden on claimants, nor was it intended to do so. The amendments clarify the correct explanation of relevant income and therefore the obligations that are placed to supply that information to the claimant are made clear in the Bill. Before the changes, the provisions could have been interpreted to mean that claimants were being asked to undertake all the calculations themselves, but that job is undertaken by the Revenue.

Thank you very much for your assistance, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I hope that that is now clear.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 8 agreed to.

Lords amendment: No. 9.

Dawn Primarolo: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this we may discuss Lords amendments Nos. 10, 11 and 17.

Dawn Primarolo: This group of drafting amendments clarifies the scope of the powers to make regulations about income and about the child care element of the working tax credit. Clause 7 provides that entitlement to tax credits will depend on the income of the claimant or claimants. In particular, entitlement will be based on the income for a tax year. The amendments to clause 7 in this group are concerned with subsections (6), (7) and (8) and relate to the computation of income, the period in which income is taken into account, what counts as income, and when the Inland Revenue can treat a person as having income or not.

Amendments Nos. 9 and 10 are short, technical amendments that are intended to clarify the scope of the Treasury's regulation-making powers under subsections (6) and (7) of clause 7. Those subsections allow regulations to be made about how income is to be allocated between particular tax years.

We discussed that matter in the Standing Committee. I point out to the hon. Members for Northavon (Mr. Webb) and for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) that, through these changes, we are trying to make as clear as possible the question of relevant income and to ensure that the application of the regulations delivers that.

All the amendments will improve the legislation and will clarify some of the meaning, but they do not change the operation of the Bill and I commend them to the House.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 10 to 12 agreed to.

Clause 8

ENTITLEMENT

Lords amendment: No. 13.

Dawn Primarolo: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this we may discuss Lords amendments Nos. 14 to 16 and 101.

Dawn Primarolo: These amendments are all aimed at ensuring that we have the flexibility to ensure that, if appropriate, any family responsible for caring for a child or young person could have access to the appropriate level of support.

I shall explain the Government's reasoning for introducing these amendments, as the matter did not detain us during the Committee stage, nor is it directly relevant at present, but given what might happen in the future, it is important to include in primary legislation the ability to respond to change. I shall thus set out in a little more detail why we believed it was appropriate to introduce the amendments.

Clauses 8 and 9 provide the framework for entitlement to the child tax credit. The draft Child Tax Credit Regulations, which were made available on 9 May, provide the detailed provisions that will sit within that framework. Together, those measures create a system that ensures that the family with main responsibility for a child will be provided with a suitable level of support, depending on their needs. That is similar to many current systems of support for children, and we believe that—currently—it provides the most suitable means to ensure that we can focus support on raising children out of poverty.

Our present aim is to enable one family to claim support for any particular child at any one time. That is the principle on which the Bill, the draft regulations and the business systems being developed are based. There are several sound reasons for that approach. Usually, the person or couple who have the main responsibility for care of a child bear more of the everyday responsibilities for the child, and meet the everyday expenditure for him or her. It is vital, especially for families on lower incomes, that enough support is directed to that family to lift the child from poverty, or to keep him or her out of poverty.

However, we recognise that patterns of care may be changing. That is the reason for the amendments. Many more families share responsibility for children than was previously the case, especially where a family has split up—resulting in both parents sharing responsibility for the children from the former relationship. The increase in shared responsibilities between families raises the question of whether, in future, directing support to one family will continue to be the right approach. We are determined to keep the provision of Government support in such cases under review, in order to ensure that we meet the needs of the children involved.

We have no intention, however, of making any hasty or ill-considered changes to our present approach. The question of shared responsibility for children goes wider than tax credits and affects other systems of support that recognise the needs of families with children such as housing benefit. Even if, in the light of the changing climate on this issue, we became persuaded that a change in approach was warranted, such a change could not be made overnight.

The consultation exercise on the tax credits and our continuing contact with lobby groups have shown that payment of support to the family with the main responsibility for the child is seen as the most appropriate way to deal with the vast majority of families with children. If there were to be a change, it would have to be carefully thought about; there would need to be careful preparation of the ground with claimants and advisers. Any change would also entail extensive—and expensive—IT and business systems changes, which would require detailed analysis and take time to establish.

We will continue to stand by our intention to direct payment to the family containing the person with the main responsibility for the child, and entitlement will not be divided in cases where more than one household is involved in care of a child.

Against that background, we see the need to make some protective changes to the Bill to equip us to change the way we deal with shared care cases—if it became apparent that a different approach was more appropriate. To provide us with that flexibility, Lords amendment No. 14 would allow us to vary the amount of the individual element in the child tax credit to reflect any relevant factors, such as shared responsibility for a child. That mirrors a similar power already present in the family element.

Lords amendment No. 15 would enable us, where more than one claim is received for a particular child or children, to pay each family a reduced amount of any element payable in respect of any particular child—to reflect the level of care that the family provides. If we decided, in the future, to recognise a claim for a child by more than one household at any one time, we would not want those households to be in a better position in terms of tax credits than a family who had stayed together throughout and were solely responsible for a child.

Lords amendments Nos. 13, 16 and 101 allow us to define the phrase

"being responsible for a child"

separately for the purposes of the child tax credit and the working tax credit. However, the key factor in making the amendments is to make clear in the Bill that, if, in future, tax credits have to reflect shared care responsibility, entitlement can be divided and not duplicated.

The new tax credits will provide an important source of financial support, especially for families on the lowest incomes. We recognise that it is important to be able to process claims as quickly as possible and get awards into payment. However, as with all forms of support, we have to reflect the complexities of real life; the rules may be complex. That is why we do not think it appropriate to rush into making changes.

7 pm

We are already aware that in many cases where a dispute arises over who is responsible for a child, its resolution can be time consuming and difficult. Those difficulties are unlikely to reduce if, in future, we recognise more than one claim. It will be necessary to undertake a great deal of detailed discussion and consultation about the practicalities of how we could deliver such a change. For example, we might wish to confine access to child credit to those who care for a child for at least three or four days a week, or, looking at the matter more broadly, for about 40 per cent. of the time on a regular basis. The powers that we have taken would enable such matters to be covered in secondary legislation, which can be fine tuned more readily if necessary, following detailed considerations and consultation.

I hope that I have made it clear that the Government's intention is as was stated on Second Reading, in Committee and in the debates in another place, and that that is purely to provide for a secondary legislation route if at any time we need to take account of shared care.

I have been careful to give a fuller explanation to the House on this issue because it had not been covered previously in debate in Committee or on the Floor. I hope that hon. Members recognise that it is necessary to have the power, although it does not mean that we will use it, because there is a long way to go in changing the system before such a power could be contemplated.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 14 to 31 agreed to [some with Special Entry].

Clause 17

FINAL DECISIONS

Lords amendment: No. 32.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.—*[Dawn Primarolo.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to deal with Lords amendments Nos. 35, 36, 41, 43, 44, 46, 48, 65, 67 to 71, 74, 79, 82, 83, 87, 89, 90, 92 and 94.

Mr. Webb: I apologise if, by my earlier remark, I indicated that I would not speak on this group of amendments. Something that arose in debate prompted me to make a brief comment. Lords amendment No. 36 would insert a new clause, subsection (5) of which refers to the

[Mr. Webb]

revision of decisions. It arises from our earlier discussion about the revision of decisions where a person is being made an award on the basis of an out-of-date P60 and then, within a year, they get a revised decision. I have one question for the Minister, which I hope to put briefly and simply.

The new system is starting in eight or nine months' time and everyone will be starting afresh on it. Let us assume that, very roughly speaking, the income of three quarters of the population goes up from one year to the next, as a result of inflation and so on, and the income of the remaining quarter goes down—in reality, most people's income goes up. In terms of revising decisions, is it correct that the three quarters of people who, for the sake of argument, will be assessed in March 2003 on the basis of their 2001–02 P60, will be overpaid and then, a few months into the financial year, will have to have that award revised downwards in light of their 2002–03 P60?

Will it be the case that, three months into the system, three quarters of all tax credit claimants will have their awards revised downwards? What effect will that have on public perceptions of the system? Will everyone face revisions, will most of them be downwards and will that undermine the system?

Dawn Primarolo: The hon. Gentleman is asking a question on quite a technical point. My understanding is that the answers to his questions are basically no, no and no, but I shall read what he said in the *Official Report*. This comes back to the way that calculations of what has already been received are taken into account when deciding future entitlement. The ability to revise is exactly that—for instance, where an application may be moving from previous year to in-year—so it does not imply what the hon. Gentleman said; quite the contrary.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 33 to 137 agreed to [some with Special Entry].

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

IMMIGRATION

That the draft Immigration (Entry Otherwise than by Sea or Air) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 17th June, be approved.—*[Derek Twigg.]*

Question agreed to.

Brightlingsea Shipyard

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Derek Twigg.]*

7.7 pm

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): I am privileged, and indeed extremely grateful, to have been granted the opportunity to raise the subject of this Adjournment debate—the development of the James and Stone shipyard, Brightlingsea. I should explain that the shipyard is quite a large site on the waterfront of a small Essex fishing town on the Brightlingsea creek, which is part of the River Colne estuary in my constituency. The site has been derelict for a number of years: it certainly requires development, and no one would oppose the principle of development. What is wanted, however, is development that is sympathetic in character to the town and in scale with the existing buildings of the town; that is the nub of the case that I wish to present to the House and the Minister this evening.

I have set out all the salient matters in correspondence both with the Deputy Prime Minister, who now has responsibility for planning matters, and with his predecessor, the then Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, the right hon. Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers). I very much hope that having read those and other representations the Minister will see fit to call for a full public inquiry into that planning application, which is in effect trapped in outdated thinking, and I shall set out the reasons why. The result would involve plonking a very large and inappropriate development into that very sensitive site in an historic fishing town, which would be to the detriment of the community.

Before I set out the key points, I should add that the situation has had a long gestation. For many years, I have been seeking to engage the developers in more constructive conversation and the local authority in putting more severe pressure on the developers to produce more practical and sensible proposals and to engage the townspeople more actively in the process. In the end, I got the false impression that the scheme would be accepted. It was only when I finally launched a campaign to hold a public inquiry that I was absolutely overwhelmed by the strength of representation against the development and in favour of a public inquiry.

I have circulated a questionnaire, and the response has been huge. There have been no more than a couple of dozen returns against. It is overwhelmingly in favour of a public inquiry. I hope shortly to submit a petition to the House that will carry a substantial number of signatures, certainly representing a substantial minority of those on the voting register in Brightlingsea, if not a majority of those who live in the town. I have the support of the town council in making these representations. So let there be no doubt that there is overwhelming public support for the position that I have adopted, and that the townspeople have moved from sullen acceptance of what they thought was inevitable to the hope that Ministers might be able to do something to rescue the situation.

I also wish to place on record the fact that I do not believe that the local authority is to blame for this situation, because planning policies have developed very dramatically in the past 10 years. We started with an out-of-date concept of what the development should be. Outline planning permission was given some 10 years ago for a very much larger development than modern planning guidance would suggest is reasonable. That is shown in a curious conflict: the current local plan, which is nearing its renewal date, suggests not more than 100 residential units for the site, but the outline planning permission already allows for 150 units. If one looks at the design brief, which is also much more recent than the outline planning permission, it becomes apparent how the difficulties have arisen.

The local authority has been trapped in a conundrum involving a succession of events, and it is pre-committed to proposals that would not be acceptable if they were begun from scratch now. Indeed, they are completely out of line with the much more enlightened planning policies on modern and sensitive design. Some of those policies were introduced by the previous Government, but I fully admit that others have been introduced by the present Government.

As I say, the planning authority is preparing to grant approval in principle based on conforming with the outdated design brief, which gives a range of 100 to 150 units, although the local plan gives only 100 units. The authority appears beholden to the numbers in the design brief, which is 14 years old, antiquated and quite inappropriate for today's standards. An impracticable and unsustainable development is proposed. The new design brief, based on modern thinking and reflecting Brightlingsea today, would specify a much more limited and sympathetic development.

The design brief is inherently flawed: it is impossible to see how 150 units could ever be delivered, given the other requirements of the brief, according to which the development should

"be sympathetic to its position within the Brightlingsea Conservation Area in terms of style, diversity and scale"

and

"maintain and enhance the sense of place at The Hard".

I should emphasise that the Hard is social centre of activity on Brightlingsea waterfront, where people sail small craft and a few yachts—all very much locally based waterfront entertainment.

Bob Russell (Colchester): There are lots of beach huts.

Mr. Jenkin: The hon. Gentleman may be a regular visitor to those beach huts, and I am grateful to him for his support today.

The design brief goes on to say that the buildings should be

"set back into the site"

and of

"domestic and vernacular scale . . . in sympathy with the neighbourhood".

There is absolutely no doubt that the proposed buildings are not set back or built in vernacular style, as a layman would understand it. I am not allowed to show the plans on the Floor of the House, so I have to describe them.

There is a problem with any waterside development in a place like Essex in that all the new housing has to be built above a certain datum that is significantly above the maximum high-water mark of the tide to prevent flooding. Moreover, the properties would be built out of piers that are thrust into the creek. Admittedly, many of those piers already exist, but they would have to be raised very substantially to meet the requirement to be beyond flooding level.

The development would not only be very much higher than the existing buildings on the surrounding land, but would thrust deep into the creek, blocking views, completely dominating the waterfront and completely changing the character of Brightlingsea. It would be detrimental to the amenity that the waterfront provides. Nowhere does the design brief make it obvious that the development would stick into the creek to such an extent and to such a height.

The current application, if granted, would result in a large, dominant high-density development, which would be out of character with the small scale of the coastal location. It would be a London Thames-side development in character, but it would be imposed on a small Essex creek.

The proposal exploits the brief to justify a major addition to the site, which would protrude well out from the foreshore. Some 80 units would be on the foreshore, where there are currently no permanent buildings. That would be to the detriment of the harbour, its users and visitors. The harbour is a vibrant summer sailing centre and small commercial port, with national and international regattas and regional events. Some 38,000 visitors are afloat each year, apart from local residents.

Much training and launching from the adjacent historic Hard and sailing club slipway are at risk because of the proposal's wind effects and the Hard is at risk of silting. It may well be that those technical matters can be addressed, but they underline how big the development's likely impact would be. Although the development would not intrude inside the harbour boundary, it would be right against the narrow fairway, where people launch and haul out their boats and where ships manoeuvre at high tide.

As I have already said, the views are unique to the town. They are the superb, unspoilt coastal Essex views across the Colne estuary to Mersea island and over to the Blackwater estuary. Those views are important in attracting 188,000 tourist and leisure visitors to the town each year, and the numbers are growing. The views will be largely blocked by the development on the foreshore. Some 90 local jobs are sustained by tourism and leisure.

I have written to the Deputy Prime Minister about the environmental concerns which have been raised by English Nature. The conundrum at the heart of the proposal is that it is intended that the environmental concerns should be addressed by closing the marina, which will be enclosed by the large piers, for a proportion of the year. Practically speaking, what is likely to happen is that once the marina is built, and people have their boats there, they will want to take them out at times different from the season. Of course, they will want to keep testing—reapplying for—the planning permission to open up the marina for different times of year. I guarantee that it is only a matter of time before the condition placed on the development is ignored or set aside, as it will come to be seen as completely unreasonable. Whether or not it is the right place for a major marina—there is certainly scope for mooring of boats and a small-scale marina—it is wrong that environmental concerns should be addressed in this temporary and unsatisfactory way.

[Mr. Jenkin]

As a final aside, there are serious traffic concerns about a major development at Brightlingsea. Only one access road into the town exists, the B1029, which is an accident-prone access road that ends at a tangle of narrow streets and blind bends by the site. The local plan notes that traffic and parking are key issues, and the town council is particularly concerned that those have not been sufficiently addressed. The highways authority avoided its responsibility, however, by making no comment whatever on the application. That reflects a general neglect of Brightlingsea,

Brightlingsea is a town right on the edge of Essex—people never go there unless they are going there. Not many people really know Brightlingsea. I know Brightlingsea. It is one of the favourite corners of my constituency, an historic Cinque port, which gives a sense of the history of the place. Part of the development of the site includes what is known as "The Old Wreck House". The people of Brightlingsea are a very stable population with a tremendous community spirit, and they feel that their wonderful town is very precious. The development represents a very serious threat.

A viable, sustainable, medium-density low-rise scheme is possible on the dry land without the considerable expense of constructing major new and much higher protrusions from the shore haul. That would meet all the environmental and statutory requirements and be to scale and in character with the location. Such an alternative concept—one has been drawn up by a local architect—could sustain perhaps 50 to 60 units with a variety of community uses, such as retail and so on.

The current application has very little to commend it. I am disappointed that the developers have made so little effort to engage constructively with me to come up with a more viable proposal. Against the background of an outdated design brief, only a full public inquiry can unblock all the issues that have been raised, take a seriously objective view, set aside the history and decide in favour of what the vast majority of the people of Brightlingsea seem to want—a recommendation for a much smaller and more sympathetic development.

7.23 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Tony McNulty): I begin by congratulating the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) on securing this debate. As it happens, I know Brightlingsea. The parents of very good friends of mine had a hostelry down in Brightlingsea. Although I confess that I have never been to the beach huts there, Brightlingsea was at that time blessed with several hostelries that were all rather close to each other. That made for inviting tours, popping in and out of each one. I did that many years ago, so I am familiar with the location and the description given by the hon. Gentleman.

The hon. Gentleman's interest in the proposed redevelopment of the James and Stone shipyard site comes as no surprise because, as he said, he made the Government Office for the East of England aware of his concerns about this matter back in February. I am also aware that he subsequently wrote on 30 April to the then Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, my right hon. Friend the Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers), setting out his concerns in more detail and requesting that the planning application be called in for my right hon. Friend's determination. Tendring district council was formally directed on 14 June, under article 14 of the Town and Country Planning (General Development Procedure) Order 1995, not to grant planning permission until we have had the opportunity to decide whether call-in would be appropriate.

Before I proceed, it might be as well to remind the hon. Gentleman that our general approach is not to interfere with the jurisdiction of local planning authorities unless it is necessary to do so. Parliament has entrusted them with responsibility for day-to-day planning control in their areas, and it is right that they should normally be free to carry out those duties. There will be occasions, however, when we may consider it necessary to call in a planning application for determination by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister instead of leaving the decision to the local planning authority. Our policy is to be very selective about using that power and, in general, we will take that step only if planning issues of more than local importance are involved. We have given as examples of cases that might be called in: those which may conflict with national policies on important matters; those which could have significant effects beyond their immediate locality; those which give rise to substantial regional or national controversy; and those which may involve the interests of national security or of foreign Governments. I am not saying that the shipyard falls into the latter category.

In addition, potential candidates for call-in are those applications that raise significant architectural and urban design issues. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will appreciate that our consideration of this case has only just begun, and that it will be a while yet before we will be in a position to reach a view as to whether call-in would be appropriate.

Mr. Jenkin: I had not thought of raising the issue of national security, and I shall refrain from doing so. I submit that I make this plea on the grounds of architectural and urban design. I ask merely that the Minister refers to some of the very enlightened spatial development policies that the Government have introduced in recent years and that the Deputy Prime Minister has championed. The Minister will see that this development falls far short of what we expect in modern planning guidance. I hope that he will consider it in those terms.

Mr. McNulty: If the hon. Gentleman bears with me, I will touch on many of those policies and policy documents to which he refers.

As I was saying, I can give no undertaking at this stage about a call-in, and neither would the hon. Gentleman expect it, given my position. I can assure him, however, that the case will be looked at on its individual merits, and that very careful consideration will be given to the arguments for intervention that he has made today and in writing. I should make the point that in reaching our decision on call-in, we will look solely at the issues raised by the proposed development and not at its planning merits. It is not for us to judge whether planning permission should be granted, but only to decide whether that decision should be taken by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister rather than Tendring district council, which is, essentially, the call-in process.

The hon. Gentleman underlines the importance of design in new development, and the Government are committed to encouraging good design. It is central to creating high-quality, sustainable places wherever new developments take place. It is central to delivering the vision set out in the urban White Paper, and is integral to the rural White Paper. Urban design is the art of making places for people. It is not just about making places visually attractive, important as that is, but is crucial to how places function, to maintaining and enhancing the vitality and viability of villages, towns and cities, to regenerating rundown areas, and to creating safer communities where people feel secure.

The planning system is a key means of delivering good design. Planning policy guidance note 1, "General Policy and Principles", sets out what is embraced by design and looks to all developments to uphold the principle of good design. It is policy to encourage good design and reject poor designs. That is underlined in more recent PPGs, and in particular in PPG 3 on housing. We expect local planning authorities to promote developments that bring together environmental, transport and planning best practice to create places with their own distinct identity and yet which are sympathetic to the local built environment. New development should help make places that are safe, attractive and of a quality that will endure. It should also be in sympathy with the character and setting of its surroundings.

Policy on design is supported by a number of good practice guides, and the hon. Gentleman alluded to some of them. "By Design", the companion guide to PPG 1, sets out the key principles of good urban design, how they might be applied and how to incorporate them into the planning and development process from the pre-application stage right through to the planning decision. "By Design" makes it clear that, as a matter of good practice, the fundamental design principles of a scheme should not be relegated for later consideration. They must be acceptable at the time that planning permission for the development is granted. "Better Places to Live", the companion guide to PPG 3, sets out the design principles and good practice that can secure quality in the design and layout of new residential environments, and it is equally important. "Places, Streets and Movement" emphasises the importance of designing new housing developments with people, and not just traffic, in mind.

Local planning authorities may have produced their own design guidance to aid applicants to bring forward development proposals, but they are expected to have regard to the more recent advice on design published by the Department and to ensure that this advice is reflected in any future revision of local design guidance that might be necessary.

In this case, the hon. Gentleman will be aware that an extant outline consent for development of the site to provide a mix of residential, leisure, marina and ancillary uses was also granted in 1994, with all matters reserved for subsequent approval. That permission was renewed in 1997, and I understand that an application for further renewal is also before the district council, although the article 14 direction, which I mentioned earlier and which has been served on the council, prevents it from determining that renewal application.

Local planning authorities are able to grant outline planning permission and reserve decisions on certain details until a later stage. Applications for approval of reserved matters—siting, design, external appearance, means of access and the landscaping of the site—effectively convert an outline into a full permission and must be approved before work can commence. Although design is a separate reserved matter, as is external appearance, it is important for local planning authorities to remember that urban design goes much wider than simply aesthetics. Siting, means of access and landscaping of the site all impact on the overall urban design.

My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister is able to call in an application for approval of reserved matters, but I must emphasise that intervention at the reserved matter stage is likely only in wholly exceptional cases. It must relate solely to the reserved matters and cannot look to reopen issues concluded by the granting of the outline planning permission.

Mr. Jenkin: Given that the previous planning permission is up for renewal and that, if there were a public inquiry, it would consider the renewal of that planning permission, am I wrong to assume that, within the purview of that inquiry, it could conclude that the number of dwellings in previous planning permissions granted has been excessive?

Mr. McNulty: With the best will in the world and given that I have had this role for only four weeks, I shall certainly not speculate on the outcome of public inquiries that may or may not happen in the immediate future. I am not entirely sure whether the article 14 direction, which would prevent a determination of the renewal, would lump the application for renewal in with the initial application that is before my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister. I shall write to the hon. Gentleman on that, because I am not entirely sure of the answer and it would be wrong of me to suggest that I am. I shall not be going into the other elephant trap that has been set because I have been in this post for only four weeks.

Once again, I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate on what is clearly an important issue in his constituency. At present, however, we are concentrating on examining the case for calling in the latest full application. His points, together with those made in the petition when it is presented, will—if they raise material planning matters—be taken into account together with all other material planning matters.

As I said, I have a personal knowledge of Brightlingsea; I like the town. I have not been there for ages but, given the comments about beach huts, I may be tempted to visit them as well as the hostelries.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-six minutes to Eight o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 27 June 2002

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

MILFORD HAVEN PORT AUTHORITY BILL *[LORDS]*

Read a Second time, and committed.

LONDON DEVELOPMENT AGENCY BILL (*BY ORDER*)

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Thursday 4 July.

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Abandoned Vehicles

1. **Bob Russell** (Colchester): What additional measures she plans to take to prevent vehicles being abandoned. [63000]

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher): We are determined that keepers of vehicles should take full responsibility for them. An accurate and complete vehicle register is crucial. We are legislating through the Finance Bill to improve the register's accuracy, and we are talking to the motoring organisations and the motor trade about implementing reform of the vehicle licensing system.

Joint action by all enforcement agencies in Operation Cubit has led to nearly 7,500 more vehicles being on the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency register. Finally, we are extending DVLA's powers to wheel clamp and remove unlicensed vehicles after 24 hours.

Bob Russell: I am grateful to the Minister for the measures that are being taken and the new measures that have been proposed to tackle an antisocial menace. I invite the Minister and his Department to examine the best practice being carried out by Colchester borough council. The number of abandoned vehicles is increasing, but because of the expertise of Geoff Kirby, the street care officer, and work in the DVLA and other agencies, the number of vehicles destroyed has been almost halved. Coupled with the *Evening Gazette*'s "clear the wrecks" campaign, the battle is being won. May I suggest that other local authorities around the country look at that best practice?

Mr. Meacher: I am happy to do that. Operation Cubit operated in Kent, but there has also been a successful pilot in Newham, and I understand that three other local authorities—Wandsworth, Croydon and Southend—are following. We want to learn from good practice. If the hon. Gentleman will send me a statement or get the police and fire authorities and the local authority in his area to provide a statement, I will ensure that it is fully taken into account.

Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): Does my right hon. Friend understand the tremendous frustration in the London borough of Lewisham, my local authority, where, despite a pilot project in co-operation with DVLA, there is an enormous problem of abandoned vehicles, and particularly of fictitious drivers and no records at the DVLA? Will he and his colleagues look at the very best practice, which I understand is in Holland, where the owner of the vehicle and the new buyer together have to sign the registration document?

Mr. Meacher: I am happy also to agree to that. We have been considering a system of dual registration, both by the last owner and by the buyer. There is a great deal to be said for such a system. I am conscious of the number of unlicensed vehicles that are often abandoned. As I said, we have reduced the period that unlicensed vehicles removed by local authorities must be stored before they are destroyed. The proposals that my hon. Friend makes with reference to the licensing system are good ones, and the Government will make a further statement on the subject soon.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): Does the Minister accept that his proposals announced today are long overdue, and that the situation is getting worse in most of our constituencies? It is essential that the owners of cars are traced and prosecuted, and that cars are removed quickly. Is it possible to ensure that more facilities are available for people who have a car that has reached the end of its life to have it decommissioned and destroyed effectively and cheaply? If that were the case, there would be less dumping.

Mr. Meacher: I agree with both points. The problem has arisen as a result of a collapse in the value of scrap metal, in conjunction with the deficiencies of the vehicle register. We are not responsible for the first; we are trying to deal with the second. I indicated that in the relatively small area where Operation Cubit was put in place and in the relatively short time scale in which it operated, 7,450 motorists were induced to relicense their vehicles, producing £1.3 million of additional revenue. In order to get the licence, motorists had to produce MOT and insurance certificates. It is a major effort to ensure that all motorists meet their responsibilities. I had a long and useful meeting with the authorities responsible for Operation Cubit, and commissioned a report from them as to the basis on which the success of that experiment could be extended across the country. I expect to receive that any day.

On the question of motorists having opportunities to send or take their cars to an appropriate place, under the end of life vehicles directive, which becomes fully operational for manufacturers and importers in 2007, appropriate facilities are already being put in place. We announced on 21 April that the last owner will be responsible up to 2007 for ensuring that the vehicle is taken to a proper place for disposal.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): Regrettably, many vehicles that are deemed abandoned were originally stolen. I urge the Minister to take up with his Home Office colleagues the need to ensure that the police communicate expeditiously with owners, as cars that languish stolen and abandoned are often vandalised, which is the real problem in a very large number of local authority areas. The police must also be sympathetic to people; when they say that they want the vehicle for forensic information, they should not present the poor owner—the victim of the crime—with a bill for its recovery, as they currently do.

Mr. Meacher: My hon. Friend is right. Many unlicensed, uninsured vehicles without MOTs are owned by the local criminal fraternity. I understand that cars change hands in the local pub for £40 or less. We are making changes to the vehicle registration system to ensure that the last owner will be responsible, but if he wishes to avoid responsibility, the new owner is required to notify as well. That dual registration system is a way of protecting the last owner. The police whom I met as part of the meeting on Operation Cubit were extremely enthusiastic about that arrangement and were keen for it to be extended. I take his point about undue liabilities being placed unfairly on the last owner; we are alert to that issue.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid-Bedfordshire): We support the principle of the end of life vehicles directive, which comes into force in some four days' time, but we have to question the way in which it is being implemented. Why will the Government not say how much it will cost owners to dispose of their redundant vehicles? Will the Government compensate local authorities for the inevitable increase in dumped cars and tyres? Will they give extra support to the fire and police authorities for the £5,000 to £10,000 cost of dealing with a burnt-out vehicle? Does the Minister understand that if he fails to learn the lessons of recent history, he will be doomed to repeat the environmental mistakes of not ensuring that we have the ability to deal with problems before they occur—and the car calamity will follow the fridge fiasco?

Mr. Meacher: I am aware that the hon. Gentleman likes to make the comparison with fridges at every single opportunity, but he is way off the mark. As he well knows, the point about fridges is that, because we were informed extremely late, after two and a quarter years' waiting and nine separate approaches to the Commission, we had only seven months in which to implement the regulation and did not have the proper technology.

On cars, many dismantling and scrap yard facilities already meet the increased treatment standards required by article 6 and annexe 1 of the directive. We do not anticipate any problem. We have the technology, the numbers and the standards—it should not be a problem. With regard to help for local authorities, all I can say to him is that we are aware of the situation and are considering it in the context of the current spending round.

Packaging

2. **Mr. Bill O'Brien** (Normanton): If she will make a statement on the impact of EU directive 94/62 on the packaging and packaging waste industries. [63002]

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher): A number of industries have obligations to recover and recycle certain tonnages of packaging waste under the producer responsibility obligations. Obligated businesses have together increased the UK's recovery performance from some 30 per cent. in 1997 to 48 per cent. in 2001.

Mr. O'Brien: I thank my right hon. Friend for his response, but the industry and local government are concerned about the impact of the directive on business through the increase in targets and the way in which the targets are operated. Those in local government are particularly worried about the impact on their collection and recycling systems and reclaiming of landfill. Under a recent declaration, we could be flooded with waste tyres from Europe. Will my right hon. Friend meet representatives of the industry and take note of the anxieties that are being expressed by those in local government? Will he also ensure that we do not allow waste tyres from Europe to be dumped in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Meacher: My officials and I have had repeated meetings with industry representatives about targets. I have to say that the recovering and recycling performance of UK industry is low compared with the rest of the EU. We inherited one of the lowest recycling and recovery rates in the EU. Recovery has substantially increased from 30 per cent. in 1997 to 48 per cent. in 2001, and recycling has increased from 27 per cent. in 1997 to 42 per cent. in 2001. The European requirement is that there should be a steady increase in the level of recovery and recycling, and other states manage to do that. We must ensure that we have sufficient time to put in place the necessary infrastructure to enable our industry to achieve what are intended to be stretching targets.

On tyres, there are two target dates of 2003 and 2006. I have discussed the targets with industry representatives, and we believe that we can meet them perfectly well. I am happy to receive further representations from the industry. I take note of my hon. Friend's point about not receiving waste tyres from Europe, and I am happy to talk further about how we can prevent that.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): As the Minister considers the complications of the issue, will he point out to those in the industry that they could achieve a great deal by reducing the amount of packaging that they put on their goods—they seem to have made no movement whatsoever towards doing so? Do companies have any incentive to do that, or does it mean that they have to meet higher targets on recycling?

Mr. Meacher: No, there are strong incentives for companies to reduce packaging. The regulations provide an incentive to reduce the amount of packaging by placing a tonnage recovery and recycling obligation on business, so the less packaging a company handles, the lower are its costs. Where a business is re-using a certain tonnage of packaging, that tonnage is excluded from the obligation. That is a powerful internal incentive to reduce packaging.

Recycling

3. **Gregory Barker** (Bexhill and Battle): What progress the Government's packaging recovery note scheme has made in encouraging the growth of new recycling initiatives. [63003]

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher): The UK's packaging recovery system, including the packaging waste recovery note and the packaging waste export recovery note, has succeeded in increasing the UK's packaging waste recovery level from some 30 per cent. in 1997 to 48 per cent. in 2001.

Gregory Barker: I welcome that increase, but the Minister would admit that we still lag way behind our European partners in recycling rates. Does he agree that that disappointing performance is not the fault of Wastepack, and can he give examples of further initiatives that have been taken since the new Secretary of State was appointed last year?

Mr. Meacher: I am very surprised that the hon. Gentleman refers to relatively poor performance, given that I have said three times in the past 10 minutes that there has been an improvement of some 60 or 70 per cent. since 1997. Performance was extremely poor before 1997, and the hon. Gentleman's Government were responsible for that through their arrangements with industry. We have made a dramatic improvement, although it is not enough and I entirely accept that we must go considerably further. I agree that our performance is not outstanding compared with that of other EU member states, but it represents a major improvement and we are on a steady and rapid upward curve.

The hon. Gentleman also referred to Wastepack. We did not achieve our recovery obligation in 2001–02 because Wastepack, one of the 19 registered compliance companies, failed to meet its obligation by a large margin of 235,000 tonnes. It is based in Scotland, and is therefore a matter for the Scottish Environment Protection Agency. I understand that the Scottish Minister for Environment and Rural Development is considering whether to withdraw approval from the scheme. However, the UK achieved its recycling objective and its material-specific targets. Despite the Wastepack episode, UK industry did well last year.

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): What progress has been made in extending the packaging waste regulations to wood recycling? The introduction of packaging recovery notes—PRNs—would encourage recycling schemes for timber, thus reducing the amount of new timber that we must use in this country. As far as I know, the regulations do not extend to wood products.

Mr. Meacher: My hon. Friend makes a good point. The scheme has been primarily aimed at paper and board and has not concentrated on wood as a form of packaging. Discussions have taken place about that in Europe, and I agree with my hon. Friend that we need clearer targets and a clearer commitment to reduced wood packaging.

Foot and Mouth

4. **Mr. Peter Luff** (Mid-Worcestershire): If she will visit Throckmorton to discuss with local residents the management and consequences of the foot and mouth disease burial site there. [63005]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): That is not possible at the moment. My officers are working closely with the local community to develop site restoration and management plans; I anticipate an early, satisfactory conclusion to their efforts.

Mr. Luff: The hon. Gentleman is a compassionate, humane and diligent Minister. I therefore urge him to reflect again on the implications for local residents of the Department's actions at Throckmorton. There is growing anxiety that the cells in which 130,000 animal carcases have been buried were not properly constructed. Mysterious illnesses, such as throat infections, are striking people who live near the burial site. Their homes have become unsaleable through a combination of those circumstances and the Home Office's decision to go ahead with an asylum accommodation centre in the area.

The Department has established a precedent by buying two houses from local residents. The Government are renting them out on the open market, and effectively they thus cost them nothing. Will the Minister consider extending that precedent to other local residents who are in pressing personal need of making a move and selling their houses, which are currently unsaleable on the market?

Mr. Morley: The hon. Gentleman makes a strong case on behalf of his constituents, and we recognise that it was unpleasant for anybody who lived near any sites where animals were being disposed of at the height of the national foot and mouth emergency. However, the site is now closed and being grassed over. It is being properly run and monitored, and we have no evidence of pollution there. At the hon. Gentleman's request, our head of the foot and mouth claims unit has visited every family to listen to their anxieties.

As the hon. Gentleman knows, we have no legal obligation to purchase houses, and we examine the cases on their merits. We shall consider his representation carefully.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): As my hon. Friend knows, the village of Great Orton in my constituency contained the largest burial site in England. I want to ensure that there are no more such burial sites anywhere—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but the question is closed and relates to the constituency of the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff). However, there is a connection with the constituency of the hon. Member for West Worcestershire (Sir Michael Spicer).

Sir Michael Spicer (West Worcestershire): For the reasons that my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) mentioned, does not the Minister have a duty to ensure that the existence of the burial site at Throckmorton is fully taken into account by the forthcoming public inquiry into the asylum centre?

Mr. Morley: All the relevant issues will be taken into account in the public inquiry, and I am sure that if there is any relevance in relation to the use of the site, that will also be considered. We recognise that there is a duty on the Department in relation to the proper management of all the sites, including Great Orton, which my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) mentioned, and I believe that they are being monitored and run in a proper and responsible manner. We also have a duty to minimise the cost to the public purse, and we have to look at those issues as well.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Do Opposition Front Benchers wish to come in? The same rules apply. No, they do not.

Special Extinguishment Orders

5. **Mr. David Chaytor** (Bury, North): When she will issue a consultation paper on special extinguishment orders. [63006]

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): I have now published proposals on how we will enable local authorities to close or divert alleyways on housing estates, where this is necessary to cut crime. I have also published proposals on the closure or diversion of footpaths on school premises to promote pupil and teacher safety.

Mr. Chaytor: May I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply, and say how much the consultation paper will be welcomed by officers in the Bury division of the Greater Manchester police, who are keen to move to these special extinguishment orders? Does he agree, however, that it has taken rather a long time to get to this position? Will he assure the House that, when the consultation period concludes on 20 September, he will ensure that his Department analyses the response to the consultation as quickly as possible, so that police forces and highways authorities across the country can introduce the special extinguishment orders, in particular, to advance their work in crime prevention?

Alun Michael: I thank my hon. Friend for that comment. Yes, this has taken a long time. That is partly because the requirements of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 are complex, precisely because there is a need to balance the closure of rights of way with the protection of them. The designation process is being used to ensure that there is no inappropriate use of this facility. I will certainly take a personal interest in ensuring that the results are analysed as soon as the consultation period is over, and that the facility becomes available to police and local authorities as quickly as possible. We have accelerated the process, although I agree with my hon. Friend that this has taken longer than I would have liked.

Electrical Goods

6. **Mr. John Randall** (Uxbridge): If she will make a statement regarding her Department's strategy for recycling electrical goods. [63007]

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher): The Government are committed to increasing the reuse and recycling of all types of waste, including electrical goods. We welcome the EU waste electrical and electronic equipment directive—the WEEE directive—which may be adopted towards the end of this year, as its objectives are in line with our national strategies on waste.

Mr. Randall: Has the Minister made any estimate of the costs to local authorities of implementing the directive?

Mr. Meacher: The additional costs, over and above current practice, are estimated at between £190 million and £390 million. I hasten to add that the higher figure is entirely dependent on the adoption of the most expensive form of implementing the directive, which would come about if one of the requirements set down by the European Parliament in its vote on this issue were to be adopted—namely, the banning of the disposal of waste electrical and electronic equipment in the household waste stream. That has yet to be discussed, and there will be conciliation on this matter. The directive is still in draft; it will probably not be decided before the end of the year, and it remains to be seen whether that option will be adopted. It might be better to regard the additional costs as of the order of £200 million, and that will, of course, be taken into account in the current spending round.

Mr. Colin Breed (South-East Cornwall): The Minister will be familiar with the refrigerator situation. This week, we have learned that television sets might also be caught under the toxic waste provisions of the landfill directive that will come into force shortly. The recycling of television sets might seem rather strange, but, bearing in mind the change from analogue to digital, is any work being done to find out whether, rather than disposing of lots of television sets, some of them could be recycled as part of the digital switch-over?

Mr. Meacher: I presume that the hon. Gentleman meant recycling television sets, not recycling programmes, which goes on already.

The aim of the directive is not just to achieve a more environmentally sustainable form of disposal. The objective is to secure the recycling and reuse of component parts. That is what the directive is designed to do, and I believe that it will have a considerable effect.

As the hon. Gentleman was good enough to make the refrigerator comparison, let me again make it absolutely clear that the circumstances involving fridges were unique. We were given only seven months to implement an arrangement for which we did not have the technology. It consisted of a regulation that came into force in exactly the same form everywhere in the Community. Member states have greater flexibility in transposing WEEE because it is a directive. The current position is very different from that involving fridges, and I do not believe that those problems will occur again in the case of the WEEE directive or those relating to the end of life of vehicles, hazardous waste or landfill.

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): I wish the industry and the general public could share the Minister's optimism, but his record to date does not encourage such an expectation.

Will the Minister confirm that from next month European law will require every one of the 2 million television sets that are disposed of annually in this country to be treated as hazardous waste? That will require their collection and disposal by specially licensed operators. Is the Minister confident that the new arrangements for licensing and disposal will be ready on time—or was the spokesman for Dixons right when he said earlier this week that televisions could start mounting up like fridges?

Mr. Meacher: I should be very surprised if a representative of Dixons, which is a very responsible company, had made such a loose and idle comment. That is certainly not the case.

Before I answer the hon. Gentleman's question may I, with grace and enthusiasm, welcome him to his new position? I am sure he will do very well as Opposition spokesman, and I am sure he will maintain that post for a very long time.

As I have said, the WEEE directive is still in draft. We do not know the final details, and probably will not know them until the autumn. The hon. Gentleman, however, also referred to the hazardous waste directive. There has been a delay in the determination of exactly what the waste acceptance criteria are, but the Commission recently completed that determination—rather late, but not as late as previously—and the criteria will of course be adhered to.

I believe that the criteria are manageable, and that there will be no special difficulties. The WEEE directive will not come into operation until 2004, so we have nearly two years, and I am sure we can manage the criteria satisfactorily.

Mr. Lidington: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his gracious words of welcome, but I feel that the phrase he used earlier—"loose and idle"—in connection with the statement by the Dixons spokesman could serve as a summary of the Select Committee's verdict on his policy on refrigerators, which can be found in its recent report.

My hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) asked about the costs of the WEEE directive, which, as the Minister says, is due to come into force in about two years and will affect everything from freezers to electronic greetings cards. It will be complicated and expensive to administer. The industry and local authorities are asking the Government to make clear whether Ministers expect the costs of administration and recycling to be borne primarily by manufacturers, retailers or local authorities. The Minister has two years in which to give people time to plan. Will he now state clearly on whom he wishes the burden of those additional costs to fall?

We are currently hearing statements from the industry like that of the director of development at Biffa Waste Services, who said—again, earlier this week—

> "If you thought the fridges were bad, you wait until all these other things come through. We haven't got a strategy, we haven't got a plan, there's no consultation with industry and no communication with the public. Instead we are standing around in the corner of a field with our hands in our pockets."

Is that not an accurate description by an industry spokesman of the lackadaisical and complacent approach that the Minister and his colleagues are taking?

Mr. Meacher: I did see that alleged quotation from Peter Jones of Biffa Waste Services, and I was extremely surprised by it because I have always regarded him as a thoughtful representative of the industry. It was an extremely loose and rather silly statement, and when I see him I shall make that clear.

The truth is that the directive requires member states to set up a system for the separate collection of waste electronic and electrical equipment, with a target for private households of 4 kg on average per inhabitant per year. We have two years to implement that, but as I have already made clear, changes could be made in the common position as it was left by the European Environment Council. In particular, the European Parliament has proposed that there should be mandatory individual producer responsibility, or collective producer responsibility if the former is disproportionately costly. That is one unknown. Secondly, it is proposing a higher collection target of 6 kg per head of the population and, thirdly, the banning of the disposal of waste electronic and electrical equipment in the household waste stream. That would certainly be very costly.

It is impossible to calculate the final costs until the exact form of the directive has been decided. It is certainly not true that there has been no consultation with the industry. I cannot understand how any responsible industrial representative should say that. I have had discussions with the industry about this matter and my officials have had many more. I expect to have still more in future. We are prepared to look at the matter and to consider industry's requirements. Indeed, we want to do all that we can to assist industry, but comments such as that from Peter Jones are not helpful and not accurate.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Does the Minister agree that when Mrs. Thatcher was Prime Minister, she was the one who laid the basis for all these tinpot directives that he is having to deal with now, backed not only by the Tories who were in the House at the time, but by those tinpot fanatical Liberals? This lousy, rotten Common Market has a lot to answer for. There are a few moments when I have the desire to rush across there and tell them to get stuffed. Then I get back to reality and say, "Thank God I voted against it all."

Mr. Meacher: The only point where I can agree with my hon. Friend is that I also voted against in 1974. I have changed my mind, and quite strongly, particularly with regard to the environmental acquis.

Whatever one feels about the details of some of these directives, and I agree that they are contentious and we contend many of them, the thrust of the range of recycling and recovery directives has enormously improved the environment in this country. There is no question about that. The state of our water, air and contamination levels have significantly improved. That is largely due to Europe. That does not mean that everything it does is right—I certainly do not think that either—and we need to be much more active, and industry needs to be involved at a much earlier stage in producing the changes that we want. Change should not just be imposed by Brussels.

Common Agricultural Policy

7. **Mr. David Drew** (Stroud): If she will make a statement on progress towards the reform of the CAP. [63008]

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): We expect the European Commission to publish its proposals for reform of the CAP on 10 July, and expect a preliminary discussion at the Agriculture Council on 15 and 16 July.

Mr. Drew: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. Everyone now supports reform of the CAP, which is failing taxpayers and consumers. It is an important reason why we are delaying the entry of the new entrants to the EU. The environment is not doing well, while the CAP does not seem even to be supporting farmers' incomes. If we cannot have radical reform, is there not a case for abolishing the CAP, certainly as it is at the moment.

Alun Michael: My hon. Friend conditions his question by saying, "certainly as it is at the moment," but the point is that we want radical reform of the CAP. We are urging the Commission to publish radical proposals, and we are pushing for—for example—a shift in support under pillar one from production subsidies to environmental and rural development measures. Such changes have proved their value through the England rural development programme. We have made it clear that that direction—which is supported by the Curry commission report, and by other countries that want reform—is the right one to take. Let us hope that all other European countries support us in that.

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): As the right hon. Gentleman said, the Commission is publishing its proposals for the mid-term review on 10 July. At roughly the same time, the Government should know how much money they will have available in the fundamental spending review, and whether they can implement the Curry report's central environmental proposals. In the Government's view, should they implement the Curry report as soon as the money is available, or should they wait until the framework has been established as part of the negotiations for the mid-term review, so that the European framework—which appears to be quite similar to the Curry report—can be put in place and a coherence between the policies established?

Alun Michael: The Curry commission report provides a framework for reforming agriculture in this country, and we are looking to the Commission to introduce proposals on the direction of CAP reform. What would help is a significant increase in the UK's share of pillar two funding. As the right hon. Gentleman knows, such funding has historically been low—a fact for which the Conservative party is responsible. However, the most important thing is to examine the statement, and let us hope that it is as radical as this country and some of our reform partners want it to be.

Mr. Ian Cawsey (Brigg and Goole): My right hon. Friend may be aware that, this week, the report of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals on the future of farming was published. On CAP reform, it points out that Agenda 2000 kept in place too many subsidies that are detrimental to animal welfare, that pillar one payments should have animal welfare conditions attached, and that pillar two payments should reward producers who maintain higher animal welfare standards—many of whom are, of course, in the United Kingdom. Will my right hon. Friend support those proposals as part of the negotiations?

Alun Michael: My hon. Friend is aware of the Government's enthusiasm for improving animal welfare standards across Europe, and he is right to point to the importance of doing so. That is one way of achieving a level playing field, and the decoupling of direct livestock payments from production will assist in that regard, and in terms of addressing the environmental impact of farming.

Mr. Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): During last week's mass lobby on fair trade, much emphasis was placed on reform of the CAP to allow third-world farmers to get a fair price for their products in world markets. What discussions has the Minister had with the Department for International Development to ensure that such reform achieves fair prices for third-world farmers?

Alun Michael: We want to improve not only the working of the CAP, but of the world trade round. That was made clear in Doha, where my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State took a leading role in pushing for such change. The danger of building unfairness into the system is clear to us, and we want to see it improved.

Mr. Wayne David (Caerphilly): Will the Minister confirm that discussions on the mid-term review of CAP reform will, under the Danish presidency of the European Union, be conducted in parallel with discussions on EU enlargement?

Alun Michael: Both of those issues are being pursued in parallel, so the answer to my hon. Friend's question is yes.

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): I encourage the Minister to use the mid-term CAP renegotiations to put forward positive British proposals on issues that are of benefit to our own agricultural sector. For example, as he knows, British consumers and farmers alike find it immensely frustrating that we are unwilling, or unable, to ban the import of meat and meat products from countries where foot and mouth and other such diseases are endemic. The Government's argument has always been that such a ban would not be permissible under European law. Will the Minister therefore make it an objective of British policy in the negotiations to make whatever changes are needed to those European trade laws so that, in future, we are able to ban the import of meat and meat products from all countries where foot and mouth disease is endemic?

Alun Michael: We certainly want to have a level standard for imports. However, we do not want to introduce controls that would be impractical or inoperable in terms of market movements. The hon. Gentleman is, however, right to suggest that we should do all we can to achieve a level playing field and consistent standards with our European partners. We will also do all we can to push for radical proposals to reform the CAP to ensure that our farmers are assisted. That is why we want to see an increase in the UK's share of pillar two funding and to see the other changes for which we have argued.

Horticulture

8. **Mr. Michael Jack** (Fylde): What plans she has to help improve the commercial performance of the UK horticultural industry. [63009]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): The UK horticultural industry is rightly proud that it does not depend on EU subsidies and has a good record of innovation and customer focus. The Department funds a substantial programme of strategic research and development in the horticultural sector and there are various opportunities within the England rural development programme for assistance to horticultural enterprises. We have recently consulted on a new round of the agricultural development scheme. The Food Chain Centre, which has been established in response to the policy commission report on sustainable food and farming, is preparing a benchmarking study on fresh fruit and vegetables.

Mr. Jack: I am grateful for the Minister's positive view of the horticulture industry, especially as it is a fragrant day for the House with a visit by the National Farmers Union flower and plant committee. The committee's members and the rest of the horticulture industry would be interested to learn what the Department can do to help those parts of the industry that sometimes need the help of specialist chemicals that are available to our European competitors, but are not available here because of the costs imposed by the Pesticides Safety Directorate when approving the use of those treatments in the UK. Could he consider the issue again to see what may be done to ensure that our industry can compete on an equal basis?

Mr. Morley: I understand the right hon. Gentleman's point, which can be a serious problem in relation to specialist products for which the manufacturers think that the market in the UK is too small to go through the necessary procedures. The issue has been considered by the EU in relation to the permissions given for the use of various products, including pesticides and veterinary treatments, to try to minimise the bureaucracy and expense. I am informed that overall, however, most of the chemical treatments that our industry needs are generally available.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): I recently visited a chrysanthemum grower in my constituency who seeks to invest, not to increase the quantity of production but to improve the seasonality of his crop to meet the demands of the supermarkets. He has applied for England rural development programme support and been told that he cannot have it because it would be classed as state aid under EU rules. Can that be right, and will the Minister look into it?

Mr. Morley: I shall be glad to look into the details if the hon. Gentleman will provide them. The success of such applications depends on the detail. The ornamental section is very successful in this country, especially in the south-west, and I know several schemes that have been grant aided, such as packing houses and support for distribution and marketing.

Bali Summit

9. **Sue Doughty** (Guildford): If she will make a statement on the negotiations at Bali. [63010]

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher): Progress was made on the importance of sanitation in eradicating poverty and meeting the millennium development goal on safe drinking water. Broad agreement was also reached on key issues such as the urgent need to restore fish stocks and address illegal fishing. The meeting also recognised the need for a strong focus on Africa. However, other difficult issues remain outstanding.

Sue Doughty: I am concerned that the Secretary of State, yet again, has failed to come to the House to make a statement. On 16 May, she said that she was willing to consider making a statement to the House if she felt that there was something of substance to say on her return from Bali. Does that mean that the grave concerns here about agricultural subsidies are not sufficiently important to bring the Secretary of State to the House? Does it mean that, with only two months to go, everything is on course, apart from a few minor glitches? Does it mean that we have more or less thrown in the towel? Does it mean—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I count about four questions there. The hon. Lady is allowed only one. We will try the Minister and see what he can do.

Mr. Meacher: I understand the hon. Lady's frustration, but I can tell her that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State informed Mr. Speaker and, as a courtesy, the spokesman for the Opposition that she would be attending the EU's Agriculture Council. My right hon. Friend said that she would make a statement if there was a range of issues of sufficient clarity and substance to justify one. Regrettably, and for reasons that are well understood, that is not the case.

Of course the Government are wholly committed to a successful outturn at Johannesburg. The UK is playing a lead part in the EU to secure that, and the EU is at the driving edge of trying to achieve agreement before Johannesburg. We certainly do not lack concern about this matter. The opposite is true: we are hugely concerned that

Johannesburg should be a success, and that Rio plus 10 makes a real advance for the world environment and for sustainable development.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): In carrying forward the outcomes from Bali to Johannesburg, will my right hon. Friend make greater efforts still to involve and consult the UK food and drink sector? It has a great deal to offer in obtaining and achieving the sustainable targets that Johannesburg has set itself. Will my right hon. Friend say whether plans to involve that very important sector of industry are in place?

Mr. Meacher: I am sure that we are seeking to do that. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made it clear from the outset that he wanted a partnership involving UK business, especially in regard to water and sanitation, financial services, tourism, energy and forestry. However, we are pleased to respond to representations from any sector of industry that feels that it can make a contribution to Johannesburg. We shall certainly receive favourably any correspondence from my hon. Friend or industry representatives.

Fisheries

10. **Mr. Alex Salmond** (Banff and Buchan): What recent discussions she has had with EU partners concerning the fishing industry. [63011]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): I represented the United Kingdom at a meeting of the EU Council of Fisheries Ministers in Luxembourg on 11 June, together with Ross Finnie, Minister for Environment and Rural Development in the Scottish Executive, and Mrs. Brid Rodgers, the Northern Ireland Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development.

Items under discussion included the Commission's proposals for reform of the common fisheries policy, measures to protect deep-sea species, and the cod and hake recovery plan.

Mr. Salmond: The Minister and I attended a splendid lunch a couple of weeks ago with Commissioner Fischler, who was extremely reassuring about the concept of relative stability. However, the *Fishing News* has reported that Commissioner Fischler was extremely reassuring to a committee of the Spanish Parliament on the question of equality of access.

Does the Minister share my concern that between the draft and the final version of the Commission's proposals on CFP reform there seems to have been a significant weakening of the principle of relative stability? Does he accept that, without relative stability, there can be no acceptable fisheries policy?

Mr. Morley: I certainly accept the latter point: relative stability is an integral and important part of any CFP, including the reformed one that we want. I am confident that we can achieve that. I was reassured by what Commissioner Fischler said about relative stability, and do not detect the weakening that the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) perceives between the first draft and the final draft. I am convinced that the vast majority of member states regard relative stability as being in the best interests of all our countries, based on the historical track record of all EU members.

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): On behalf of everyone involved in the Lowestoft fish fair, which took place last Saturday, may I sincerely thank my hon. Friend for coming to Lowestoft to open it and for spending so much time meeting and talking to people? That was greatly appreciated.

On the reform of the common fisheries policy, fishermen in Lowestoft, while accepting the need to reduce fishing effort, are concerned that if that translates into a days at sea regime, our trawlermen, who travel a long distance to the Norwegian sector to catch their plaice, may be unfairly disadvantaged. Will my hon. Friend take that into account in forthcoming negotiations?

Mr. Morley: I will take that into account. May I say how much I enjoyed opening the Lowestoft fish fair? It was good to see how much support it had from the local community. It was also very nice to visit CEFAS, the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science. It is celebrating its 100th anniversary in Lowestoft, which is a great tribute and advantage to the area.

On a days at sea regime, the beam trawlers—there is a significant fleet based at Lowestoft—already work within an effort-controlled regime. What they have done needs to be taken into account in relation to future calculations on effort control. It is an important industry for my hon. Friend's area and we will be consulting closely with the beam trawler sector and, indeed, all sectors of the industry, on any proposals for future effort control.

David Burnside (South Antrim): The Minister will be aware from the Prime Minister's answer to my question on his statement about the Seville summit earlier this week that the right hon. Gentleman either forgot or did not bother to raise the subject of fisheries at a senior level at the summit. Did the Minister's Department make representation at that summit meeting for fisheries policy to be discussed, including the very serious allegations about the Spanish presidency's misuse of its position on fisheries policy? That has been widely reported in such papers as *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Sunday Telegraph* but not in this House.

Mr. Morley: Any member state is free to make representations to the President of the Commission. It does not necessarily mean that that will influence change, and I do not believe that the representations on the proposals for the CFP were changed. Indeed, an examination of the draft proposals, which were widely available before the final proposals, demonstrates that there has been no significant change in relation to the Commission's proposals.

We think that the Commission is generally going in the right direction. There are, of course, issues of detail that we will want to discuss, but we think it quite right that there is a new approach towards fisheries management in the European Union—given the mistakes that have been made in the past—that is based on putting sound science and conservation management at the heart of a sustainable fisheries management regime.

Refrigerators

11. **Barbara Follett** (Stevenage): What help her Department is giving county councils with the task of the disposal of used refrigerators. [63012]

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher): In December 2001, we announced a payment of £6 million to go to local authorities to cover their costs up until March 2002 for the disposal of refrigerators. We realise that local authorities are in need of further funding, and intend to make an announcement as soon as possible.

Barbara Follett: With Hertfordshire county council currently disposing of 3,000 fridges a month—and, despite its best efforts, it cannot do that for less than £32 a fridge—and with Government assistance unlikely to amount to more than £15 a fridge, will my right hon. Friend please look carefully at ways of helping councils meet this shortfall?

Mr. Meacher: Two mobile plants have been operating in this country for two or three months and three fixed plants will be in operation by the end of next month, which will be able to reprocess 1.2 million fridges. Given the state of the current technology and the level of plant that has been installed, my understanding is that a competitive cost for reprocessing is about £20 per unit but that as the technology improves and further plant is put in place, that may reduce to about £15 per unit. However, I am happy to look at any evidence that my hon. Friend can produce that suggests a basis for significantly different figures.

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid-Norfolk): I am sure that the whole House will welcome the Minister's comments on recompense for county councils, but is he really satisfied that they will have any confidence in the Government following the report of the Select Committee on the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, which estimated that the cost for this year alone would be more than £40 million? Some people reckon that the cost will probably be in excess of £100 million. The Minister has probably lost confidence in his own civil servants whom he blamed over the EU directive. If he blames his civil servants, will any of them resign or does he intend to sack them?

Mr. Meacher: Uncharacteristically, the hon. Gentleman is wrong in almost everything that he said. First, the cost has been estimated at about £40 million this year. The Government will be making a statement on that. I certainly do not accept the suggested figure, which is nowhere near £100 million.

Secondly, I did not blame my civil servants; they did exactly what they should have done, which was constantly to raise at formal meetings—nine times over two and a quarter years—the need for an answer to the question as to whether CFC should be removed from insulation foam. They were right to do that. The only comment that I made was that I should have been informed about the matter at the time—[Hon. Members: "Ah."] I was informed in July 2001. I should have been informed much earlier and had that been so, I should have approached the Environment Commissioner, Margot Wallstrom, at a much earlier stage.

I have not lost confidence in my civil servants, nor have I lost confidence in their ability to get on top of the problem. Indeed, by the autumn—probably October—we shall be beginning to reprocess more than the increase in the pile of refrigerators. The pile will disappear some time in the middle or latter part of next year.

Business of the House

12.31 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Will the Leader of the House give us the business for next week, please?

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): It will be a delight.

MONDAY 1 JULY—Proceedings on the Consolidated Fund (Appropriation) (No. 2) Bill. Followed by Second Reading of the Public Trustee (Liability and Fees) Bill *[Lords]*.

TUESDAY 2 JULY—Opposition Day [16th Allotted Day]. There will be a debate entitled "Crisis in Funded Pensions" on an Opposition motion.

WEDNESDAY 3 JULY—Progress on remaining stages of the Finance Bill.

THURSDAY 4 JULY—Conclusion of remaining stages of the Finance Bill.

FRIDAY 5 JULY—Debate on modernising Britain's gambling laws on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

The provisional business for the following week will be:

MONDAY 8 JULY—Consideration of Lords amendments to the Employment Bill. Followed by Opposition Day [17th Allotted day, 1st part]. There will be a debate on an Opposition motion. Subject to be announced.

TUESDAY 9 JULY—Progress on remaining stages of the Police Reform Bill *[Lords]*. The Chairman of Ways and Means has named opposed private business for consideration at 7 o'clock.

WEDNESDAY 10 JULY—Conclusion of remaining stages of the Police Reform Bill *[Lords]*.

THURSDAY 11 JULY—Debate on intelligence agencies on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

FRIDAY 12 JULY—There will be a debate on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

The House will wish to know that on Monday 8 July 2002, there will be a debate relating to sustainable development and aid for poverty diseases in European Standing Committee B.

The House will also wish to know that on Tuesday 9 July 2002, there will be a debate relating to genetically modified food and feed in European Standing Committee C.

The House will also wish to know that on Wednesday 10 July 2002, there will be a debate relating to working conditions for temporary workers in European Standing Committee C.

Details of the relevant documents will be given in the *Official Report*.

[*Monday 8 July 2002:*

European Standing Committee B—Relevant European Union documents: 7727/2/02: World summit on sustainable development; 6863/02: Aid for "poverty diseases". Relevant European Scrutiny Committee Reports: HC 152-xxix and HC 152-xxxi (2001–02).

Tuesday 9 July 2002:

European Standing Committee C—Relevant European Union documents: 11576/01 and 11496/01: Genetically modified food and feed. Relevant European Scrutiny Committee Report: HC 152-xii (2001–02).

Wednesday 10 July 2002:

European Standing Committee C—Relevant European Union document: 7430/02: Working conditions for Temporary workers. Relevant European Scrutiny Committee Report: HC 152-xxviii (2001–02).]

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to the Leader of the House for letting us have that business.

Will the right hon. Gentleman tell us more about the comprehensive spending review? Rumours are circulating that it will be announced on 9 July, but it would be helpful to all concerned, given the importance both of the review and of people being prepared for it, if he were to give us some indication of the date, even if only to say that the rumours are not true. It would be helpful if we could have a more precise date.

The right hon. Gentleman will recall that on Monday evening the House passed, with a large Government majority—sadly, that is not unusual—a motion on the authorisation of human and veterinary medicines. I wonder how many Government Back Benchers were aware of what they were supporting on that occasion. Perhaps the House will want to return to this fairly soon, because I wonder how many of them realise that they were supporting the Government's position of broad agreement to the proposed amendments to the directive and the overall aims of the review. Let us remember that the measure affects medicines, herbs and other things about which I am sure Government Back Benchers have received a large number of letters. They then went on to support the draft directive on medicinal products for human use.

The point that I am making, and why I think the House may want to return to the issue, is that I wonder what the Leader of the House will tell his Back Benchers when they rumble the fact that they were dragooned through the Lobbies on Monday night to support those measures. What on earth will they tell their constituents, who are quite rightly writing to them, as they are to me and my right hon. and hon. Friends, to object to the intrusiveness of those measures and the effects that they will have on people's long-standing habits and use of legitimate herbs? So I hope that the Leader of the House can give his own Back Benchers some reassurance on that matter and perhaps give the House an opportunity to return to the issue, as I suspect some of them are already regretting the decision.

The other thing that we have got to return to is this: following the European Union summit, just about a week ago, the Minister for Europe was widely quoted as having said that the Government had got "exactly what it wanted" from that EU Council meeting, but the Prime Minister said:

"we did not get everything that we wanted."—[*Official Report*, 24 June 2002; Vol. 387, c. 624.]

Which of them was right?

Mr. Cook: It would be imprudent and unwise of me to tell the House anything about the comprehensive spending review until the Chancellor has done so, but the right hon. Gentleman is, of course, fishing for when my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will do so. I am very happy to tell the right hon. Gentleman that that will happen in July, and I hope that that gives him the guidance that he is looking for, but no Government can commit themselves to a specific date for the comprehensive spending review statement until that review is completed. The right hon. Gentleman will be aware from his own time in government that such matters are subject to extensive discussion between Departments, but I would anticipate that it will happen some time comfortably before the House rises for the summer recess.

It always fills me with great cheer when the Government have a large majority, such as on Monday. I would reject the right hon. Gentleman's suggestion that there are any grounds for sadness in the Government's ever having a large majority in any vote in the House. My hon. Friends are well aware that they will be perfectly well briefed by the Department of Health to ensure that they rebut any allegations on what they have done.

Mr. Forth: Spin.

Mr. Cook: No, that is not spin; it is a matter of substance. The substance is that we must ensure that we have rigorous and agreed methods in place to ensure that those who take medicines—herbal or otherwise—are fully protected and that we ensure that they are rigorously assessed; and the Department of Health will be very happy to assist Opposition Members, as well as those on the Government Benches, in ensuring that they can respond to their constituents.

On the European summit, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is, of course, absolutely clear in what he said in the statement on Monday, and I refer the right hon. Gentleman to that. Of course it is always the case that those who go to a summit seek to ensure that they get the best possible deal for their country, and we secured the best possible deal. The best possible deal is not necessarily the deal that we would have written had we been in a room by ourselves without people from 14 other nations. It is in the nature of the European Union that we have to reach agreement with what the other 14 nations will sign up to as well. I am bound to say that our process of engagement, providing leadership and setting the EU agenda, has given Britain a much better deal than it ever got in the days when Britain sat at the bottom of the table, heckling everyone else and never getting stuck in to reach agreement.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Can the Leader of the House find an early opportunity for a further debate on parliamentary privilege, so that we can revisit the recommendations [illegible] that subject of the Joint Select Committee, on which I was privileged to serve? I salute and very much welcome his statement about the RMT union in his own personal respect, but I also welcome the statement that the Deputy Prime Minister released overnight on resigning from the RMT, in which he said:

> "It is unacceptable that my trade union, the RMT, should dictate how a Member of Parliament should vote."

Does the Leader of the House accept that it is not just unacceptable, but a possible contempt of the House for any union or outside organisation to seek to influence the way in which those in this free Parliament vote and speak? He may not recall the particular incident, but perhaps I can draw to his attention to the fact that, in the summer of 1974, when my union sought to influence my vote and my voice in the House, the Speaker took a very dim view and the union had to come to the House to apologise, in effect, for seeking to influence the way in which Parliament operates. Does the Leader of the House accept that this is a very serious issue? He has taken a very robust attitude to it. Can the House as a whole have an opportunity of showing that it does, too?

On a separate matter, may I draw to the attention of the Leader of the House the fact that, in a debate in Westminster Hall on Tuesday this week, my hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) found to his dismay that in answer to his concerns about the Tanzanian air traffic control system, the Minister replying, as he was the Minister for Employment Relations, Industry and the Regions, had no knowledge whatever of the issue. The Minister responsible for export control was apparently visiting a factory somewhere else—he was in the House before and afterwards, but did not attend that debate. Can the Leader of the House at least make sure that Ministers who answer debates in Westminster Hall know what they are talking about?

Mr. Cook: First, on the question that the hon. Gentleman raises about the Joint Committee on Parliamentary Privilege, I am always happy to revisit areas of privilege, because it is of great importance to the House.

On the issue of the RMT, I am happy to repeat what I said to the House yesterday. I have a long and valued relationship with the RMT, which has been useful to both of us over many years, as a source of dialogue and information—

Mr. Forth: And money.

Mr. Cook: I can certainly say to the right hon. Gentleman that elections have to be fought in my constituency, as, I suspect, they do in his constituency, too. Everything that I have received has been openly declared and registered, as the House is well aware. Although I will welcome support in fighting those elections from anybody who broadly supports Labour's values and wishes to work for a Labour victory, I am not to be bought for any particular agenda. On that basis, I decline to sign up to an oath of loyalty. I know that every other RMT MP in the House has also similarly declined.

It is not for me to pronounce on any issue of contempt; the House has well established and well worn channels in which it can establish whether contempt has occurred. First, there must be an offence. No offence has occurred in this case, as all those involved have made it clear that we are not going to sign up to an oath of loyalty to anybody outside the House. It must be a cardinal principle of membership of the House that we come here as free representatives of our constituents with, of course, a political mandate as a party. We are here to exercise our best judgment on behalf of our constituents in line with the mandate that we receive. We are not here to act on behalf of any other specific vested interest or agency.

I note what the hon. Gentleman said about the question of the debate in Westminster Hall. I will look into it. I can surmise that, as the Minister for Employment Relations,

[Mr. Cook]

Industry and the Regions was replying to the debate, the Government concluded, perhaps without sufficient information, that the Member concerned wished to raise employment issues, and that the appropriate Minister was therefore present. The issues of the Tanzanian deal are well trodden and well understood, and have been vigorously debated in the House previously. I shall make sure, however, that the issue to which the hon. Gentleman refers is investigated, and I shall make sure that I write to him about it.

John Cryer (Hornchurch): My right hon. Friend will have seen early-day motion 1504 in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Lynne Jones).

[That this House notes that there is currently no provision for Early Day Motions with a high number of signatories to be debated; further notes that provision for Early Day Motions with the support of more than half the House to be debated automatically would make Early Day Motions a more effective mechanism for ensuring the concerns of the House are addressed; and calls on the Government to consider introducing such a provision.]

The early-day motion calls for a change of rules in the House whereby, if an early-day motion received the support of more than half the Members of the House, a debate would automatically follow. That would be a useful change, as issues arise frequently on which one can only secure an Adjournment debate, if one is lucky, in Westminster Hall or in the Chamber in the evening. An early-day motion on issues such as Post Office job losses would probably attract the support of at least half the Members of the House, and the suggested mechanism would thereby secure a debate on the Floor of House—and, of course, there could be a vote on the Adjournment.

Mr. Cook: I of course follow the early-day motion pages with close care and always find them rewarding. I was particularly struck by the early-day motion last week congratulating the No. 10 football team on having thrashed the Parliamentary Press Gallery football team 5:2. I am very grateful to the early-day motion pages for drawing my attention to that, since I have found difficulty in locating a description of this resounding victory for No. 10 over the Press Gallery in any of the press that I read.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (John Cryer) makes a broad point, of which I am well aware, that there is a feeling that there should be more opportunities for private Members to nominate the issues for debate in the House. The Modernisation Committee is considering that challenge, although I would not want to suggest that we will necessarily go down the route to which he points.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): As the Chancellor of the Exchequer has just made what is generally regarded as a very significant speech on the euro, do the Government not consider it appropriate to have an early debate on their policy on the euro and on the proposed timetable?

Mr. Cook: I am very happy to hear the hon. Gentleman congratulate my right hon. Friend the Chancellor on a very significant speech. I look forward to more support from the hon. Gentleman for my right hon. Friend. The hon. Gentleman knows the Government's policy on the euro as well as I do, because he raises the issue even more often than I do.

Sir Teddy Taylor: The policy has changed.

Mr. Cook: No, the Government's position has not changed. Our position is that, if the five economic tests are met, we will put to the British people a recommendation that Britain should join the euro. Any timetable entirely depends on when we are satisfied that those five tests are met.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): May I bring to my right hon. Friend's attention the case of Christopher Walker, a British citizen who is the brother of Anna Walker, a resident of Cambridge and one of my constituents? Christopher disappeared from his home in Stockholm almost three months ago, and nothing has been heard of him since. The family are naturally very keen to get as much publicity for the case as possible, in case anyone has seen Christopher. I would be grateful if my right hon. Friend could give me advice about the best way of publicising this matter in the House.

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend has taken an opportunity to raise the case in the House. I hope to raise the matter and give it a higher profile in the media so that anyone who may be aware of the whereabouts of Christopher Walker can contact the authorities or his family. The whole House will fully sympathise with the suffering and the pain that must be experienced by any family whose relative has disappeared without trace or without contact. I hope that this case will find a satisfactory solution.

I also suggest to my hon. Friend that, if she has not already done so, she might wish to discuss the case with the Foreign Office. I am sure that it will be happy to help in Sweden, where we have an excellent ambassador who was one of my former private secretaries.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): Is the Leader of the House aware that his many admirers on both sides of the House felt for him a little yesterday at Prime Minister's Question Time, because he was not able to answer as straightforwardly and honestly as he always does from the Dispatch Box during business questions? Will he find time next week to put that right by suggesting to the Prime Minister that, when the Prime Minister comes to the Dispatch Box next Wednesday at Question Time, he apologise for misleading the House by saying that share prices were higher in 1997 than they were on the day the Prime Minister responded to a question about them? That was factually incorrect. It would help occasionally for the Prime Minister to say sorry. He would gain more respect by doing so.

Mr. Cook: I am very sorry that I disappointed my admirers on the Opposition Benches, but I am rather alarmed to hear that I have them. I hope to put that right over the coming weeks.

I have to say to the right hon. Gentleman that I have checked the facts about the movements in the stock market. What my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said to the House last Wednesday was factually absolutely arithmetically correct. Indeed, as the right hon. Gentleman queries the matter, let me share with him what the market capitalisation was on 1 May 1997. *[Interruption.]* The first of May happens to be a very important date in the life of this Government; it was our birth. On 1 May 1997, the market capitalisation on the stock market was £762 billion. That rose to a peak of £1.553 trillion in December 1999 and, as at 19 June, the figure stood at £1.121 trillion. That is £400 billion down on the peak, but it is still substantially—£350 billion—more than it was on 1 May 1997. *[Interruption.]* I am not making that up, but merely reading the facts and the figures for which Conservative Members asked. I hope that we shall hear no more about the Prime Minister misleading Parliament.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside): Is my right hon. Friend the Leader of House aware that, every week, four to eight apparently fit and healthy young people die of undiagnosed heart problems in the United Kingdom? The charity CRY—Cardiac Risk in the Young—is a self-supporting group that campaigns to increase awareness of this important issue. Will he allow for an early debate on the subject, and will he support the efforts of Doreen Harley of Connah's Quay, who lost her daughter Lisa to sudden death syndrome, and those of the *Chronicle* newspaper to raise funds to provide screening for hundreds of young people in north Wales?

Mr. Cook: I am aware of the organisation CRY, with which I have had contact in my constituency. I congratulate those parents who have discovered that they have offspring with heart failure on their work both to publicise the risks to young children with undiagnosed heart problems and to raise funds to take that cause further. My hon. Friend makes a valid point. The more children in such a position who are aware of it, the better able they will be to adjust to life and to ensure that they are not exposed to unnecessary risk.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): Does the Leader of the House accept that there is a great deal of uncertainty in the farming community about the proposals that are under active consideration in Brussels on the reform of the common agricultural policy? There is a mid-term review in the course of next year and a longer-term review as part of the enlargement process through to 2006. Commissioner Fischler will produce in the next few days proposals that are advertised, if we are to believe reports in the *Financial Times* earlier this week, as fundamental reforms of the current structural packages of support. Will the Government take the opportunity before the summer recess to organise a debate in Government time to clarify that uncertainty?

Mr. Cook: I can certainly assure the hon. Gentleman that the Government are following the issue closely and will of course pay the greatest of heed and care to proposals to change the CAP. I have not the slightest doubt that the matter will be thoroughly ventilated in the Chamber.

I would, however, enter one general observation without necessarily committing myself or the Government to what Commissioner Fischler may propose. Although we are all committed to reform of the CAP in the abstract, we mostly reject proposals for reform when they are made. We have to complete that bridge. Most hon. Members understand that we cannot continue through the 21st century with a system that is basically one of protectionism, which the growing freedom in world trade is bound to challenge and change. The sooner we ensure that it is changed on a basis that suits the farmers of Europe and Britain, the better it will be for us.

Mr. Paul Truswell (Pudsey): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the mounting concern in the House and beyond caused by the delays in obtaining police checks from the Criminal Records Bureau? If so, it will come as no surprise to learn that Leeds social services have not received one single return from the bureau since 1 April. As a result, 60 posts remain unfilled while they await the results of checks. That is 60 caring posts of which my constituents and those of other Leeds Members are deprived. In those circumstances, will my right hon. Friend arrange for an early statement to the House on what has gone wrong and what can be done to put it right?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend raises an important issue: we must ensure that those who apply for jobs with children are properly checked so that anyone who may have a record is identified before securing a post. I am not aware of the delays to which he refers, but if he writes to me I will be happy to ensure that the Home Office provides him with a full response and that we take what action we can to keep that important part of our system of protecting our children intact and expeditious.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): Will the Leader of the House find time for a debate so that we can discuss the importance of a new cardiac centre to the people of Essex? That would allow us to show why the facility should be provided at Basildon hospital, where it would greatly benefit those of my constituents who suffer from heart problems. We would also be able to consider ending the rather futile consultation process so that we get on with the job of providing the centre, which is much needed in Essex.

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman will be delighted to hear that the Whip, my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Angela Smith), who has a great influence on my life, is solidly in support of his proposal. However, I know enough from long experience not to get involved in the particular siting of a unit. We are fully committed to ensuring that we expand the provision for those who are in need of cardiac surgery, and I am delighted that we have the hon. Gentleman's support on that. Perhaps in return for my offering to look kindly on what he said about the need for a unit in his constituency, he will look kindly on the need to vote for the comprehensive spending review which will provide the money.

Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the deteriorating security situation in northern Afghanistan, and the fact that female foreign aid workers are having to be withdrawn because of repeated violent attacks, including the gang rape of a French female aid worker? Given that 60 Afghan and international relief organisations have now called for an extension of ISAF beyond Kabul, will my right hon. Friend discuss this very urgent matter with his Cabinet colleagues and consider how it might be debated in the House?

Mr. Cook: The House will be aware that the British Government themselves suggested that ISAF should be

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more widely deployed than it currently is, and that we were not necessarily satisfied with the outcome that it has been largely confined to Kabul. In order to ensure that we provided that wider coverage we needed the support of others, because it is not a task that Britain alone can, or should, attempt to undertake.

Our current strategy is to do all that we can to build up the police and military authority of the Interim Government rapidly, so that they themselves can provide better policing in the provinces within Afghanistan. In the meantime, I would join my hon. Friend, as will all Members of the House, in deploring the attacks on aid workers, which are not only distressing and horrific for the aid workers concerned, but have the result of denying the poor and the destitute of the region the assistance of aid agencies.

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove): Will the Leader of the House ask Ministers at the Department of Health whether they will adopt my Back-Bencher's Bill, the Vaccination of Children (Parental Choice) Bill, as a Government measure? That would have the effect of allowing parents the right to choose the single measles, mumps and rubella vaccines as opposed to the combined triple vaccine. I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman would be very concerned by research produced this morning by the Autism Research Unit in Sunderland—by Paul Shattock, the director there—which seems to provide fresh evidence that there may be a link between MMR and autism. It follows in the footsteps of other research that has been produced by Professor Andrew Wakefield and Dr. John O'Leary. If we are to protect the nation's children, is it not time the Government worked on the precautionary principle and allowed parents the right to choose between the single and triple vaccines?

Mr. Cook: I heard a very interesting dialogue this morning on the "Today" programme, which I always find a help to my digestion of breakfast, between Mr. Paul Shattock and the representative of the Medical Research Council. I hope that Paul Shattock will now respond to the invitation of the Medical Research Council to submit his research to peer group review and ensure that it is put through the same examination as other research in this area.

The fact is, though, that, as the hon. Lady will be aware, the overwhelming bulk of the medical literature on the subject, and the overwhelming tendency of the investigations that the Medical Research Council has validated, is that there is no link between autism and MMR; indeed, I heard the representative of the MRC say this morning that there is a positive case that there is no such link. It is therefore unlikely that the Department will sponsor a Bill that is contrary to the policy of that Department—a policy which is drawn up in the interests of parents and children to ensure that we provide the best possible protection for the children of the nation.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): Will the Leader of the House find time for a debate on ways to engage young people in politics, and particularly in the work of the House? Is he aware that when the singer-songwriter Billy Bragg recently appeared before the Select Committee on Public Administration, of which I am a member, he accused the Committee, and Members of Parliament generally, of giving off a be-suited image that is male, pale and stale? In our rather informal proceedings here, would it not therefore be a good idea if we were to institute dress-down Thursdays in the House; and would not that have the additional merit of allowing the shadow Leader of the House to engage more freely in his penchant for colourful retro-clothing?

Mr. Cook: I have always wondered what the clothes were that the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) wears; I am very grateful that they have now been satisfactorily labelled. This is not a matter for the Government to impose on the House, nor are there any obligatory dress standards on Members. *[Interruption.]* I am happy to reassure the right hon. Gentleman that I have no intention of bringing in any guidelines or statutes on the ties and shirts that he wears. It is open to Members to come to the Chamber in whatever attire they choose, provided it is seemly and decent and consistent with the Chamber. It is a matter for individual Members.

I shall be watching with the greatest interest to see what my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Kevin Brennan) wears next Thursday.

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): Today, many schools in Scotland break for the summer holiday. Meanwhile, the House will sit for a further four weeks. I know that the recess is timed to coincide with the English school holiday. That means that English Members get an extended opportunity to spend time with their families; Scottish Members do not. We also have to make sure that we get our complicated child care arrangements put in place for the school holidays; English Members do not have to consider that. Does the right hon. Gentleman consider that fair and right? I know that he is looking at the summer recess for next year. Will he accommodate all parts of the United Kingdom in that review?

Mr. Cook: I fully understand the point that the hon. Gentleman makes. I recall one occasion when the House went into recess the week before the Scottish schools went back. At that time, I had two children of school age. The happy consequence was that I was in London all through August, when it turned out that my opposite numbers in the Department of Health for the Conservative Government were absent, and it was a rather useful month for me. That is inadequate compensation for being able to go on holiday with our children.

As the hon. Gentleman is aware, the Modernisation Committee is examining my memorandum, which suggested that we should rise earlier in July and come back for a period in September, before going off on a conference recess. I hope that we will be in a position to put those proposals to the House some time in the overspill, and that they will take effect next year. That will go some way to easing the problem that the hon. Gentleman identifies.

Mr. John Lyons (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): My right hon. Friend knows that the *Daily Record* in Scotland and the *Evening Times* reported yesterday on the re-emergence of a pyramid selling scam called "Women Empowering Women". That has surfaced in various parts of the UK, most recently in the Isle of Wight. The problem is that none of it is unlawful or illegal. Will my right hon. Friend consider legislative action against such schemes?

Mr. Cook: Pyramid selling can be a great menace, and unfortunately too many people—not just in Britain, but elsewhere—have been defrauded by it. Anybody who fraudulently or by misrepresentation obtains money from another is open to a legal charge and to legal remedy, although my hon. Friend draws attention to the question whether there is a need for a specific crime relating to pyramid selling. I shall happily draw his comments to the attention of my right hon. and hon. Friends at the Department of Trade and Industry.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): Will the Leader of the House arrange for a statement or a debate next week on school admissions? Is he aware of the case of Ecclesbourne school in my constituency, which tried to achieve a more co-ordinated approach to its catchment area? It was supported by Derbyshire county council and Derby city council, the two authorities involved, but the recommendation was overturned by somebody called the adjudication officer, who did not visit the site, but decided that no change could be made. That is a new office and the decision is nonsense. It causes great uncertainty, particularly to parents in Kirk Langley, West Underwood and Muggington, who now fear that they will not be able to get their children into the local comprehensive school. We need a statement and we need to know the Government's position on the matter.

Mr. Cook: I hear the hon. Gentleman's support for Derbyshire council, which I hold in high estimation. I will be happy to consider with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills the points that he makes. My own prejudice has always been that such matters and local issues are best determined locally, wherever possible. We obviously have to make sure that national standards are applied and that national guidelines are followed, but I understand the frustration of the hon. Gentleman's constituents if a decision is imposed by people outside their locality.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): May I ask the Leader of the House when he will consider, along with the Modernisation Committee, the more even distribution of parliamentary sittings? For many months of the year, we cannot table written questions and have them answered. I should have thought that there was overwhelming support in the House for a swift resolution, which would allow that important tool for Back Benchers to be available throughout the year, instead of long periods when the Executive can be let off the hook and not subjected to the probing and scrutiny that are so essential to us.

Mr. Cook: I believe that the proposal that we should return in September will address part of the problem of the long recess in which questions cannot be tabled. My hon. Friend may be aware that the Procedure Committee yesterday published its report on questions and Question Time, which contains many interesting ideas that I am sure will repay careful study, and touches on the ability to table written questions during periods when the House may not be sitting. I hope that we can return to that matter when we debate the proposals of the Modernisation Committee in the spillover.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): The Leader of the House has always correctly registered his RMT interest, which so sadly ended yesterday, but is he surprised to learn that the Deputy Prime Minister has never registered exactly the same interest? Does he know that the Deputy Prime Minister's flat, which he is keeping on, is a benefit-in-kind of approximately £12,000 a year? Is he aware that the rent has not been reviewed in 10 years? Does he think that that huge benefit-in-kind is compatible with paragraph 122 of the ministerial code of conduct?

Mr. Cook: As I recall, that specific issue was examined by the Standards and Privileges Committee, which found that there was no obligation on the Deputy Prime Minister to register it. Nor is he required to register an arrangement that is not a personal sponsorship, but a constituency agreement with his union. As for myself, I have sadly to conclude that my entry in next year's register might be just slightly shorter.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): My right hon. Friend will remember that, this time last year, we were still in the middle of the foot and mouth outbreak. Following that period, the Prime Minister set up a number of inquiries. The Follett inquiry, which is chaired by Professor Brian Follett and deals with the scientific problems, and the Anderson inquiry, which deals with the lessons learned, are due to report in July. As the argument for those independent inquiries and against a public inquiry was that they would report and be debated quickly, can we have an assurance that the Government will find time to debate the reports before the summer recess?

Mr. Cook: I am sure that the House will want to examine the reports, hear about them and express its views. As Leader of the House, I fully understand that the House will want to ensure that these matters are adequately considered by it. Of course, neither I nor the Government can give an assurance on the date of the reports' publication, as that is in the hands of those who are carrying out the investigations, who will properly want to ensure that the reports are published at the time of their choosing rather than ours. None the less, we have made clear to them the great importance that we attach to their being published while the House is still sitting.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): The Leader of the House will be aware of the dips in the Royal College of Nursing and, in particular, the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting in terms of registering nurses. Does he share my concern about people who have come out of business to be retrained, but then discover that there is no employment for them because they are not registered? A greater concern is that, when we recruit people from overseas, should not we ensure that they are registered before they are brought here, instead of allowing them to be left in the lurch to be employed by others in lower paid jobs than those that they are qualified to perform? I understand the problems, but surely we should be doing something to ensure that nurses are not victimised in that way in future.

Mr. Cook: The decision about when foreign nationals who wish to come here and practise nursing should do so

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is essentially a matter for them. It is not for us to tell them not to come until a particular stage has been completed. None the less, we have had exchanges on this matter before in business questions, and I am aware of the delay in registration following the transfer, in which some teething problems occurred. We are working hard to ensure that that period of delay is cut to a minimum, so that those who wish to register can do so expeditiously and without the difficulties to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

Mr. Bill Rammell (Harlow): May I urge the Leader of the House to organise an early debate on the draft Local Government Bill? While the Bill contains much that is to be applauded, I am very concerned about the proposal to pool local authority housing capital receipts. In Harlow and throughout much of the south-east, there is an acute shortage of homes for rent and a significant backlog of housing repairs. I would view any proposal to take away the capital receipts on which we are relying to meet the Government's decent homes standard as a very backward step, and I urge an early debate on the issue.

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend raises an issue that is obviously very important to his constituency and others in the south-east. We have published the Bill in draft form precisely so that voices can be raised and concerns and views expressed about what is proposed. I am keen to ensure that the Select Committee on Transport, Local Government and the Regions has the opportunity to carry through its pre-legislative scrutiny of the Bill, in which it will address a number of such issues of concern. The more Bills we publish in draft, the better we will be able fully to examine them before the House is faced with debate on an official Bill. I advise him to ensure that his voice is heard by the Department and the Select Committee as these matters are considered.

Mr. Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks): Is the Leader of the House aware that in the past few weeks Swanley town council in my constituency has had to spend around £16,000 to move on three encampments of so-called travellers and to clear up after them? It is a difficult problem, but could we have an early debate in which the Government can put forward proposals that might make it easier to move on illegal encampments and to reimburse the costs that unfairly fall on very small town and parish councils?

Mr. Cook: Many hon. Members, myself included, are familiar with the problem to which the hon. Gentleman refers, and we have made efforts to deal with it in the past. He will know that it is a difficult and complex issue that is not readily amenable to a simple legal solution, but the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, which now covers local government, is examining it to see whether we can take further steps that would be helpful.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the world summit on sustainable development that will open in Johannesburg in August is a conference of enormous importance, not least for its potential to bring the United States Government back into the frameworks of international agreement on environment and development policies? Notwithstanding his earlier announcement that there will be a general debate on sustainable development in European Standing Committee C next week, will he provide Government time in the near future for a debate on the Johannesburg summit on the Floor of the House?

Mr. Cook: I entirely share my hon. Friend's commitment to the importance of the summit. It is important that we review where we stand 10 years after Rio and that we understand that, if we want to ensure that we preserve the climate and environment of the globe, we must have international decisions that secure that. I particularly welcome the summit's focus on tackling the environmental hazards experienced by the poorest people on the earth. A very simple environmental right will be access to clean water, which could remove the scandal that 2 million children die each year from drinking contaminated water. If we can get progress on that, the summit will have been well worth while. I will consider at what stage it might be appropriate for the House to hear about those matters and to what extent we can provide for that, given that we must balance it with the other commitments of business in the House.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): The Leader of the House will recall the very prominent role that he played in relation to the Scott report on the Iraq supergun. Will he suggest the best way of initiating a comparable investigative inquiry into the equally scandalous Tanzania air traffic control deal, and commend it to his colleagues?

Mr. Cook: I fully rebut any parallel between those two events. The Scott inquiry flowed from two things—first, the totally secretive basis on which the rules on exports to Iraq were changed without any report to the House or comment in public and, secondly, the subsequent attempt to prosecute and convict business men who had acted fully in connivance with the Government, who denied their own role. There is no parallel with the Tanzanian air traffic control case. Whatever hon. Members may think of that decision, it is in the public domain, it was fully aired in exchanges in this House and in Westminster Hall, and nobody has made any attempt to bring false prosecutions.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): Can the Leader of the House find time for a debate before the summer recess on new regulations, which come into force next week, governing access to local authority planning registers by those who wish to undertake searches as part of a house purchase? The regulations threaten the livelihoods of several successful private companies that offer a service to clients wishing to search such registers, because they will impede the ability of those companies to carry out searches. The regulations threaten the viability of a number of successful small businesses and threaten to slow up the whole process of carrying out searches on behalf of those who wish to purchase houses. That is an important issue, so can the Government provide time for a debate before the recess?

Mr. Cook: I am not sure that I can promise a debate in the Chamber before the recess because we have a crowded schedule. The hon. Gentleman raised some important points and goes some way towards reinforcing the case for a sifting committee to identify secondary legislation that requires debate. In the meantime, I shall draw his comments to the attention of the relevant Department.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Will the Leader of the House use his best endeavours to persuade the Chancellor of the Exchequer to be one of the Ministers responding to Tuesday's all-day Opposition day debate on the crisis in the funded pensions industry? The Chancellor could then explain precisely when he realised that his devious scam of raiding pension funds to the tune of £5 billion a year would come home to roost during his Chancellorship, not many years hence, as he obviously intended.

Mr. Cook: Decisions about who takes part in Opposition day debates are matters for the Government collectively, and we shall give due weight to the hon. Gentleman's representation. He asks about the precise point at which somebody changed their mind. Last Thursday, he mentioned opinion polls that showed that the Conservatives were on the way up. When precisely did he change his view on opinion polls? Was it possibly on Monday, when he read the latest poll, which put the Conservatives two points down and 10 points behind?

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): Does the Leader of the House agree that employees throughout the United Kingdom should be treated equally and have equal rights? Will he read early-day motion 1498, which draws attention to a loophole in the law?

[That this House deplores the behaviour of Argos, who are ruthlessly exploiting a loophole in the law, whereby shop workers in Scotland are not given the protection which is enjoyed throughout the rest of the United Kingdom, and sacking staff who between them have given years of loyal service to the company if they will not accept compulsory Sunday working, thus discriminating in particular against those who have family commitments or religious objections, and in general against employees in Scotland.]

Argos is exploiting that loophole, and employees who, for personal or religious reasons, do not wish to work compulsorily on a Sunday are being sacked. Will the right hon. Gentleman take steps to plug the loophole?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Savidge) raised that matter in business questions last week on behalf of his constituents who work for Argos.

We are not considering a loophole, but the fact that the legislation in Scotland pre-dates that in England. The legislation in England includes specific safeguards for religious and other principled objections to working on a Sunday. There has not been a problem in Scotland so far. As I said last week, I deeply regret that the company is not following the practice of other Scottish companies, which have worked on Sunday for many years, but managed to do so amicably, with the voluntary agreement of their staff. I hope that, even at such a late stage, the company will consider coming into line with normal practice.

Richard Younger-Ross (Teignbridge): In a debate on social care in January, the Minister of State, Department of Health, the hon. Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith), said that there would be an inquiry into why health authorities in the south-west were diverting money from services for the elderly to child care. I raised the matter with the Leader of the House, who promised to write to the Health Minister to ascertain whether there would be a statement and whether I would receive a response. I have written to the Health Minister, but I have not received a response. Does it take the Government six months to make an inquiry? How long does it take a Minister to reply to a letter from a Member of Parliament?

Mr. Cook: I am punctilious in drawing the attention of the parliamentary Clerk of the appropriate Department to matters that are raised in business questions. I shall ensure that we pursue the matter and try to get a reply for the hon. Gentleman.

Network Rail

1.18 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Alistair Darling): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement on progress in putting the ownership and operation of the rail network on a sound and sustainable footing, and, as part of that, steps to get Railtrack out of administration.

I shall keep the House informed over the next few weeks, but in the light of the conclusion of the sale and purchase agreement this morning between Railtrack Group and Network Rail, I thought it right to come to the House to set out the Government's strategy, progress so far and the next steps.

As the House knows, the High Court put Railtrack into administration last October. As the presiding judge said, the making of the railway administration order was

"not only appropriate, but absolutely essential".

The Government's objective is to ensure that Britain's rail network is owned and managed by an effective and competent body and thus secure a sustainable long-term future for the rail network. To achieve that, the next step is to remove Railtrack from administration as soon as possible and place the network under new ownership and strengthened management, which is committed to improving service and safety. That is in everyone's interest: that of the industry, the work force and the travelling public alike.

On the 25 March this year, my right hon. Friend the Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers) told the House of the bid made by Network Rail to acquire Railtrack from its parent company, Railtrack Group plc. Although other bids would have been considered, none was received. Network Rail is a public interest company limited by guarantee, and will be run for the benefit of the whole railway, concentrating on its core priorities of operating, maintaining and renewing the rail network. There will be no shareholders, and any operating surplus will be used for the benefit of the railway system.

The company will operate on a sound commercial basis with a board and management whose performance targets will be aligned to the Strategic Rail Authority's long-term plan, as well as to the obligations to its customers under its network licence. Its directors will be accountable not to shareholders but to the company's members, who will be drawn not only from the rail industry, but will include members representing the public interest and the Strategic Rail Authority. In this way, the directors of Network Rail will be answerable to people whose primary interest is in the long-term future of the railway.

Railtrack Group and Network Rail have now concluded a sale and purchase agreement to acquire Railtrack plc. I would like to set out in some detail the terms of that agreement. In line with its original offer, Network Rail will pay £500 million—of which £300 million will be provided by the Government—as well as taking over Railtrack's debt, which now stands at £7.1 billion. This includes loans from the European investment bank and the German bank, KfW, totalling just over £1 billion, which Network Rail plans to assume.

In parallel, London and Continental Railways is acquiring from Railtrack its interest in the first phase of the channel tunnel rail link for £295 million. At a cost of £80 million, Network Rail will acquire the right to operate, manage and maintain the channel tunnel rail link and the concession to manage St. Pancras station. I can tell the House that Network Rail has already secured up to £9 billion of bridge financing from commercial banks to fund its acquisition costs and to refinance Railtrack's existing debt, as well as to fund the immediate operation of the railway.

Network Rail will also put in place additional commercial financing of up to £7 billion for its medium-term requirements. This is necessary to cover operational expenditure as well as to cover substantial cost overruns inherited from Railtrack, which will have to be met. Network Rail will also need—as would any owner and operator—access to back-stop contingency funding. For this reason, the SRA will provide additional standby credit facilities; this contingency funding of last resort has been set at £4 billion. Further details of this funding and of the short-to-medium-term standby credit facilities offered to Network Rail by the Strategic Rail Authority are set out in the two minutes that I am laying before the House in the normal way. The House will also wish to know that the Rail Regulator has today issued a statement setting out his approach to a request for an early regulatory review.

These are large sums by any standards, but they are necessary, given the size of the task facing Network Rail, and they would be needed by any successor to Railtrack. There is no escaping the fact that Britain's railways need very large-scale investment—investment that we believe is essential. It is because of the need for long-term sustained investment that the Government are, through the 10-year plan, increasing the average annual investment in the railways—on top of continued support for running costs—to £4.6 billion. That is more than three times the annual average in the 10 years prior to 1997.

The public are entitled to expect that this investment will be spent efficiently and effectively. That has clearly not been the case in the past. The new company, Network Rail, faces a legacy of poor management, and of very substantial cost overruns which will have to be met. For example, when it began, Railtrack estimated that the cost of the west coast main line project would amount to about £2 billion. It is now clear that the actual cost of the work will be considerably more than that. What is now needed is a competent owner and operator, which is why Network Rail's acquisition of the railway network is so essential to the future of the railways.

This agreement is a major step towards removing Railtrack from administration and putting the rail network back on a sound footing. The next stage in the process will involve Railtrack Group plc putting this offer to its shareholders at a special meeting, which is expected to be held next month. It is for the company to decide how much it can offer its shareholders.

The European Commission is also considering whether any aspect of the support being provided needs to be cleared as state aid. However, if the shareholders of Railtrack Group approve the bid at the special meeting and the appropriate clearance is obtained from the Commission, I expect to ask the High Court for an order releasing Railtrack plc from administration thereafter.

It is obvious that Railtrack could not have carried on as it was. Even the company recognised that last summer. What is more, the division and lack of common purpose that characterised the railway system during the last few years was damaging and destructive to the interests of both the industry and the travelling public.

All the evidence shows that working together is crucial to the long-term success of the railway network. Over the past few months, despite the uncertainties of administration, the new management of Railtrack has enjoyed closer working relationships with the Strategic Rail Authority as well as the Rail Regulator and the train operators—which is essential if the network is to work effectively and efficiently to everyone's benefit.

The establishment of a public-interest company in which the Strategic Railway Authority is represented will continue to foster this climate of better co-operation to the benefit of all concerned in terms of achieving the objectives set. The railways are critically important to the economic and social fabric of the country. There is now an urgent need to give the rail system stability, and I believe that this agreement is the right and best way of building a modern and efficient network.

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement, and for giving me an advance copy. As this is my first opportunity to do so in the House, let me also welcome him to his new post.

I refer hon. Members to the declaration that I made on 14 January, which can be found in column 33 of *Hansard*.

Like the Secretary of State, I hope that today's announcement will bring an end to the damaging last few months of uncertainty on the railway, and that the new body will indeed succeed in bringing much-needed stability to the railway network—much needed because the Government's decision to put Railtrack into administration caused considerable and, in our view, unnecessary upheaval on the railways.

I am sure that the Secretary of State has seen this morning's press release from Railtrack Group. Page 8 says:

> "On Friday 5 October, neither Railtrack Group nor Railtrack plc was insolvent".

The right hon. Gentleman may recall his predecessor's claim that the reason for the decision to put Railtrack into administration was that it was insolvent. Indeed, on 7 November last year the Prime Minister told us

> "the fact of the matter is that the company was not solvent."—[*Official Report*, 7 November 2001; Vol. 374, c. 233.]

Will the Secretary of State take this opportunity to admit that his predecessor and the Prime Minister were wrong to make such claims?

The Government have belatedly decided to compensate the Railtrack shareholders whom his predecessor so deliberately wronged. Notwithstanding the caricature that the Government tried to create, the people who were really wronged were not fat cats but thousands of employees and vulnerable pensioners whose savings were put at risk.

When the Government put Railtrack into administration, the former Secretary of State said:

> "I decided that I could not give Railtrack a blank cheque."

At the time, Railtrack was looking at a possible financing requirement of £1.7 billion. Now we see the Government guaranteeing funding of up to £21 billion—£21 billion of taxpayers' money. They said that they would not give a blank cheque, but that is exactly what they are doing.

The Government also said, through the former Secretary of State:

> "we should not be seen as acting as guarantor of individual companies".—[*Official Report*, 15 October 2001; Vol. 372, c. 955.]

Yet now they are acting as guarantor to an individual company. Nine months after pulling the plug on the company, after increased misery for passengers and the spending of hundreds of millions of pounds of taxpayers' money, the Government have done what they said they would not do.

It is reported that administration has cost £1 million a day. Has this not been a very expensive way for the Government to do away with a company for reasons of ideology?

It is reported that the Government's guarantee for Network Rail's financing will be on the books of the Strategic Rail Authority, but not those of the Treasury—it sounds rather like WorldCom accounting to me. Can the Secretary of State confirm that the Office for National Statistics has determined that that guarantee and any further such sum can remain off balance sheet for the Government? We all know that the only reason why the guarantee is necessary is that the City has lost confidence in the Government because of the way in which they handled Railtrack.

In his statement, the Secretary of State outlined the structure of Network Rail but did not say who would own the company. The travelling public and the taxpayer have a right to know that, so that they can properly hold it to account. Will the Secretary of State answer the question of who will own the company, and will he confirm that the company's members will be Government appointees—Government sitting on the board and Government guaranteeing the funding? What comfort can he give that he will not need to give a further blank cheque to the company?

The Prime Minister promised that the railways would be "basically fixed". The only thing that seems fixed about this deal is the Government accounting. As I said earlier, Conservative Members hope that Network Rail can be made a success. We have concerns about matters such as the financing, the structure of the company and the cost to the taxpayer, but what people are worried about is whether their train will be on time tomorrow morning. The fact is that this Government have not treated transport as a serious priority. Five years and three Secretaries of State later, the Government have been forced to sit up and take notice.

We wish the new company well. The Secretary of State has promised

> "a major step towards . . . putting the rail network back on a sound footing",

but it will take more than a Government promise to sort out the mess that his predecessor created.

Mr. Darling: First, it would be churlish not to thank the hon. Lady for her good wishes on my appointment. I fear we part company on just about everything else she said.

I had not intended to spend too much time going over what has happened in the past but as the hon. Lady raised it, it is important to remind the House of the situation that the Government faced last autumn. It is not as if Railtrack was a healthy, flourishing, thriving company. Let us be

[Mr. Darling]

clear about this. Railtrack came to the Government about a year ago. Essentially, it asked for three things in order to carry on. One was that the Government should meet uncapped additional financial support. It also wanted us to underwrite the value of its shares, and a suspension of the regulatory regime for up to four years. No Government, of whatever political colour, could meet that sort of uncapped liability—[HON. MEMBERS: "They would."] I must correct my hon. Friends. No Government would. It is no wonder that the Opposition lack credibility. Let us once and for all be clear about the facts: we were faced with a situation where a company which we had given the benefit of the doubt for some time—perhaps too long—was completely unable to carry on trading.

The sole test that the judge had to face under the Railways Act 1993 was whether Railtrack could pay its debts. The Government's position was that it could no longer do so. That is why they asked the High Court to award the order. It is also worth reminding ourselves that sitting in that court was counsel representing Railtrack. Had he taken issue with anything said, counsel would have got to his feet and said so. Instead, he said absolutely nothing.

I turn to the other matters that the hon. Lady raised. She asked about the membership of Network Rail, a company limited by guarantee. Its membership will consist of about 100 or 120 members. On the assumption that the agreements will go through, a small nominating committee, completely independent of the Government, will invite applications to be members of Network Rail. It will include the train operating companies and people with an interest in the industry. Critically, the majority of its members will come from outside the industry—from passenger groups, and from the Welsh and Scottish devolved Assembly and Parliament—to ensure that a wide range of people are included, and it will be independent of the Government. That is a far better way to ensure that the money invested in the railways is spent on the railway system itself. I repeat that it is not the Government who will run the company; it will be independent.

Incidentally, I am glad that the hon. Lady now welcomes the fact that Railtrack is out of administration. When asked in February this year whether she still thought it right to invent Railtrack, she said that she did. She has changed her mind, which is very encouraging indeed.

The hon. Lady also asked an important question about support arrangements and the finance available to Network Rail. As I have said, no matter who took over from Railtrack, it would be necessary to find substantial funds to take over the debt and meet existing commitments, and to meet the substantial cost overruns that Railtrack face, and which the successor body will have to pick up.

There is another matter about which the hon. Lady has been spectacularly wrong in the past few months, which is probably why she did not mention it much today. She has always maintained that Network Rail would be unable to raise private funds, but it has already raised £9 billion, and at extremely competitive rates. It is of course absolutely right that, initially, the Government should stand behind the Strategic Rail Authority, which is providing credit facilities for Network Rail. Such initial support will fall away as the bridging loans are securitised, and ultimately, through the SRA, the Government will simply stand behind the £4 billion long-stop contingency funding that will be made available. However, on any view—be it a totally private or a totally public company—the Government, through the SRA, would need to help get the company out of administration.

I welcome the hon. Lady's concession that this Government are ending a period of uncertainty. I should point out, however, that above all we are ending a period of extremely damaging uncertainty, division and argument, which so characterised a botched privatisation that should never have taken place. More importantly, I also welcome the comments of those outside this House who are involved in the industry, who said today that this is a good chance to begin rebuilding the railway system, and to establish a properly operating system that is valued by public and private customers alike. I believe that this is a major step forward, which should therefore be welcomed by everyone in this House.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): I thank the Secretary of State for advance notification of his statement, and I welcome him to his new and very challenging post. I also congratulate him on beginning on a high with this welcome announcement of the start of the process of Railtrack plc's being taken out of administration. As he sought to dwell on historical matters, I hope that he will acknowledge a strange irony. It is almost a year to the day since his predecessor said that my proposal to turn Railtrack into a not-for-profit company would

"introduce paralysis into the system".—[*Official Report*, 3 July 2001; Vol. 371, c. 137.]

His predecessor carried out a welcome U-turn, and notwithstanding our belief that the handling of the issue led to some confusion, unnecessary cost and loss of confidence among private investors, we welcome it.

However, there is one U-turn that we do not welcome. The Secretary of State's predecessor told the House categorically that no additional money would come from the Government to compensate shareholders. Since May 1996, shareholders have received some £700 million in dividends and they bought Railtrack in the first place at a knock-down price because it was undervalued by some £6 billion. I therefore see no justification for further compensation to shareholders, especially in the light of the right hon. Gentleman's predecessor's assurance that it would not be forthcoming.

Will the Secretary of State acknowledge that Network Rail does not really know what it is getting with the deal? On several occasions before administration, Railtrack failed to produce a full asset register. The asset register that the administrators were expected to produce by April has not been forthcoming, and today's statement by Network Rail specifically states that it will take the company a further 18 months to produce a full asset register and

"robust and realistic forecasts of the level of expenditure necessary to meet its output obligations."

In view of those uncertainties, can the Secretary of State tell the House whether the deal includes those properties managed by Spacia? Will they now become part of Network Rail and can he tell us at what point Government underwriting for the company will end?

The statement is welcome, but I hope that the Secretary of State will acknowledge that ending the conflict between passenger safety and shareholder profit has been very necessary. We look forward to seeing whether the change of ownership will bring about an improvement in performance.

Mr. Darling: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his opening remarks and I look forward to working with him. He raises two substantive questions. First, he asked about the compensation for shareholders. My view on that is straightforward. The sooner that Railtrack is out of administration and the business handed over to Network Rail, the better for everyone concerned. The Government will receive a cost advantage for that, and that is why the payment to shareholders is justified. For the avoidance of doubt, I confirm that the payment is available now provided that the shareholders of Railtrack accept it quickly at the extraordinary general meeting. It will not be available indefinitely and no one should be under any illusions about that.

Secondly, the hon. Gentleman asked about Railtrack's assets. He is right to highlight one of the problems that faced Railtrack in that it did not seem to have a grasp of its asset base or its cost base. One of the problems confronting Railtrack was the upgrade of the west coast main line and one reason why costs overran substantially was that contracts were let before the scale of the work required became apparent. That is not efficient in business terms, but it is beginning to change.

My predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers), deserves credit for the fact that in the past few months the industry has worked together more closely than in the past. Railtrack, under John Armitt, its new chief executive, who is an engineer, has undergone a sea change in its attitude to what needs to be done, and that is very encouraging.

I should have dealt with a point raised by the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May), and the hon. Gentleman also asked me about transparency. Network Rail's accounts will be accounted for under the Strategic Rail Authority. The big difference with what happened with Railtrack is that we will be able to see exactly what money went in, where it was spent and what is owned. In other words, under the new system we will have complete transparency, which was not always the case with Railtrack. That is becoming increasingly obvious as more and more information comes to light.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Is my right hon. Friend aware that this is a most welcome and long overdue statement? Railtrack has not served the community well. Ever since it was pushed into the private sector at the time of the fragmentation of the railway industry it has faced enormous problems. With its poor management and poor targets to hit, it was not capable of providing the level of care that the railway system desperately needed. Will the Secretary of State undertake to look closely at the amount of money that the new company will need? It is clear that considerable shortfalls exist.

I am sure that all hon. Members strongly support the tribute that my right hon. Friend has paid to John Armitt, but will he also undertake to discuss with the new company the need to look closely at how it works with contractors? The travelling public are sick of constant excuses. The infrastructure is very old and needs considerable maintenance, but it is not being enhanced and improved at the speed or in the manner that is required. Will my right hon. Friend please look carefully at the system of contractorisation?

Mr. Darling: My hon. Friend raises two good points. First, in connection with the amount of money that the railway system needs, the Strategic Rail Authority has been speaking to Railtrack and its chief executive, John Armitt. It has been looking at a number of measures to determine what money is required and what investment is necessary, with a view to bringing benefits for rail passengers as quickly as possible.

In the past, too much attention may have been placed on what might be in 10 or 20 years' time, and not enough on what the position will be in the next five years or so. I am determined to ensure that we achieve year-by-year improvements in the service, and that the public see those changes as quickly as possible. One of the most urgent examples of where improvements are needed is the west coast main line, about which my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich knows a great deal.

My hon. Friend also raised the substantial matter of the use of contractors. That is of concern because one of the problems with Railtrack was that, when it was set up, it almost set out to be a virtual company. It did not do very much itself but used third parties to discharge its obligations and deliver its objectives—hence the growth in the use of the contractors.

I believe that, under any system—public or private—there will be third-party contractors. I have discussed the matter with John Armitt, and it is clear that, in the past, not enough attention was paid to ensuring that contractors did what they were supposed to do. There were many checks on the process—the tick-box approach—but not enough attention was paid to whether, and how satisfactorily, the work was done.

I have made it clear to John Armitt that, in future, the public will expect money to be invested properly, and that we will get what we pay for. I know that Richard Bowker, the head of the SRA, is also concerned about that. As far as safety is concerned, everyone must ensure that there is end-to-end accountability, regardless of who people work for and who they are answerable to. That is crucial, and we must see that the necessary mechanisms are properly in place.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich. The points that she made are extremely sound, and I attach great importance to them.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): I begin by declaring my interest in Railtrack. I welcome the Secretary of State to his post, and wish him every success where his predecessors have failed.

I wish to speak about the independent Rail Regulator. I do not want to go over the whole sorry saga, but many questions were raised about the advice that the Rail Regulator gave the Secretary of State's predecessor, the right hon. Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers), which that right hon. Gentleman indicated he would overrule. Does the present Secretary of State agree that if the new company announced today is to succeed, there should still be a prominent role for an independent rail regulator?

Will the Secretary of State explain why he proposes to downgrade the role of the independent Rail Regulator, and to institute a regulatory board? What will be that board's

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status? How important will be the advice that it gives to the Government? Does the right hon. Gentleman not agree that the board will compromise the very independence that I presume the Government hold dear?

Mr. Darling: No, I do not. The Government have made it clear several times now that, as and when legislative opportunities arise, we will establish regulatory boards to back up regulators. That is becoming common practice, and the help that it gives to regulators has been welcomed by them. The week before last, I made an announcement emphasising the importance that we attach to independent economic regulators. Before I made that announcement, I discussed the matter with the regulator. He is happy with the proposals, and in fact has an informal board already. There is therefore no difficulty in that respect.

The regulator has welcomed today's announcement. Strikingly, however, bodies such the Association of Train Operating Companies and Network Rail have welcomed the work of the economic regulator. Tom Winsor has done a very good job over the past few years and I am quite sure that he will continue to do so. However, I think that most people will welcome a regulatory board to help and give greater depth to his deliberations. That approach is not unique to the rail industry—the Government are doing it in relation to all other regulators as well. Therefore, I do not think that the hon. Lady's points have any substance and believe that most people outside this place would accept that.

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North and Sefton, East): I, too, congratulate my right hon. Friend on these proposals, not least because there will be appropriate and clear lines of communication.

Now that my right hon. Friend has the opportunity to turn his attention in a different direction, will he agree to meet my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle), myself and others to discuss the excellent proposals Merseytravel has for a tram scheme in Liverpool?

Mr. Darling: For the avoidance of doubt, we will not be transferring Merseytram to Network Rail. I am aware of the Merseytram proposal, and I understand my hon. Friend's concern. I will be more than happy to meet one or both of my colleagues to discuss it at a convenient time.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): Will the Secretary of State—to whom I also bid welcome—say who will set the financial performance criteria for Network Rail? To whom will it be answerable for the achievement of those performance criteria? Who will audit its accounts and, specifically, when can we expect a detailed statement of precisely what constitutes the upgrade of the west coast main line?

Mr. Darling: On the right hon. Gentleman's latter point, the Strategic Rail Authority is discussing with Railtrack, the train operating companies and, assuming that everything goes ahead, soon Network Rail how best to deliver an improvement to the west coast main line. That is likely to take a few months yet. I am not promising an oral statement but I will make sure that the House is kept informed in some way or another, because many right hon. and hon. Members have a direct interest in what happens on the west coast main line and we all want to see it improved.

The appointment of auditors is a matter for Network Rail. The company is limited by guarantee; its directors are answerable to its membership, and they will set the performance targets. Network Rail is also responsible for delivering the objectives set by the Strategic Rail Authority. One of the changes that we have made since coming to power is to bring more cohesion into the railway system. What was lacking in the past was a strategic direction to ensure systematic increases in investment that resulted in more people using the trains for travel as well as increasing freight. That is what the Strategic Rail Authority is there to do. However, Network Rail is an independent company, limited by guarantee. The directors are answerable to its members for its performance as well as its stewardship of the company, which is what the right hon. Gentleman is concerned about.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): May I welcome my right hon. Friend to his new position and also welcome his statement? With regard to investment in our new railways, who will have the lead voice in deciding the prioritisation and plan for work? Will it be Network Rail or the Strategic Rail Authority? Who will have responsibility for those railway lands still in existence which may not at first sight be necessary for railway expansion or modernisation but which could be further down the line?

Mr. Darling: I thank my hon. Friend for her welcome, and apologise to the last few speakers who also congratulated me—I appreciated their remarks. It is nice to make hay while the sun shines; I do not suppose that it will always be this way.

It is for the Strategic Rail Authority to set out the key objectives, and for Network Rail to deliver them. Network Rail is responsible for delivering on the contracts that it enters into, whether they relate to the west coast main line or the suburban rail network, but the SRA lays down the strategy. There is now a clear sense of direction. The SRA will discuss with Network Rail, the train operating companies and others what the priorities should be, something that was missing in the past.

On any lands that Network Rail has acquired that are surplus to requirements and not needed, it is for the company, not the Government, to reach a view on whether to dispose of them. I will certainly look at any particular point that my hon. Friend may wish to bring to my attention.

Mr. Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): Although he referred to it, the Secretary of State failed to answer one of the key questions put by my hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May): how will the contingent liability represented by the £4 billion lending of last resort by the SRA be accounted for in the national accounts? To that end, what is the right hon. Gentleman's estimate of the risk of its being drawn upon?

Mr. Darling: I thought that I had dealt with that point. The SRA is providing facilities, first, to enable Network Rail to raise money to acquire Railtrack plc, to meet its immediate operating costs and to take over its debts, which are about £7 billion. Network Rail has raised £9 billion commercially; it is also taking over the European investment bank loan and the other loan to which I referred. The company has already raised that money from the private sector and it intends to securitise it. The process will start later this year and, contrary to the comments of some Opposition Members, there is much interest in it in the markets. That contingent liability will therefore fall away.

Secondly, the regulator has indicated that he will hold consultations on an early review. My expectation is that, in due course, the second tranche of funding—the £7 billion—will also fall away, until it, too, is taken over by purely private sources. The remaining backstop finance is £4 billion and that will remain a contingent liability. I very much hope that it will not be called down, because I hope that by that time Network Rail will be operating on a sound basis.

I repeat what I said to the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster): the SRA will account for the moneys going to Network Rail, as the hon. Member for Maidenhead spotted—not difficult, as it was all over the newspapers. The process will be open, transparent and above board.

My statement may have been over long. I went into a great deal of detail because I was anxious that the House should understand everything, but finally—for the sake of completeness—I have laid two minutes before the House, which set out in full detail, chapter and verse, with all the supporting correspondence, exactly what the contingent liabilities are; how they will be covered; and where they are accounted for: so if the hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb) cares to spend the rest of the afternoon in the Library with a wet cloth over his head, he is welcome to do so.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): Is my right hon. Friend aware that there will be great enthusiasm on the west coast main line for the new rail company and that no tears will be shed for the demise of Railtrack? I have two questions. First, is my right hon. Friend convinced that money will be available to provide us with a fast, modern, reliable rail service on the west coast main line? This week, we have once again experienced tremendous disruption.

Secondly, Railtrack was negotiating with Virgin to buy up to 10 new railsets. As Railtrack failed to deliver the second phase of upgrading—PUG II—will Network Rail have to pick up that debt, too?

Mr. Darling: Perhaps I may repeat what I said earlier about the west coast main line and the upgrades: now that Railtrack's books have been opened by the administrator, it has become apparent that some of the assumptions that had been made do not hold good. During the past few months, the SRA has been talking to the train operators—other companies are involved as well as Virgin—and to Railtrack to decide how best the west coast main line can be upgraded to bring year-on-year improvements systematically. As my hon. Friend knows, urgent attention to many points on that line could bring substantial benefits, whereas other places could be dealt with at a later stage. That work is still under way. I am hopeful that it will be concluded in the autumn, as I have been told. At that time, I shall ensure that, in one way or another, my hon. Friend and the rest of the House are kept informed so that they know what is happening.

We are spending about £4.6 billion a year on average, which is three times as much as was spent during the 10 years prior to 1997. I am determined that, as that money goes in, we should try to ensure that people see improvements year on year. It may take a long time to reach the ultimate conclusion, but we need to make sure that each year brings changes that will make a difference, especially for passengers on the west coast main line. It is perhaps an indictment of successive Governments that the last substantial, large-scale investment in that line was in the 1960s when many of us were still at school.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. May I make a plea for concise questions and answers, as a lot of hon. Members still hope to catch my eye?

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): I shall be brief, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Will the Secretary of State further describe the new board of Network Rail? For example, what will be the proportion of rail user groups vis-à-vis rail operators? May I further press him to describe how the nations and regions of the United Kingdom will be represented in the new structure?

Mr. Darling: As I said earlier, it is absolutely essential that representation should be drawn from throughout the United Kingdom because, unlike the hon. Gentleman, I believe that the integrity of the United Kingdom is very important, not least in the railway system. I repeat that the company will have 100 to 120 members, and they will be widely drawn from different interests, as well as from different parts of the country. The board will be a very much smaller, more businesslike organisation. It will be focused on delivering the business, and it will not be a representative body of all the various constituent parts. The board will be a businesslike, commercially focused organisation; the membership will be more widely drawn.

Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): I welcome my right hon. Friend to his new post. Does he recognise that his predecessor's action last autumn was so warmly welcomed by the majority of the travelling public simply because they believed that the Government were prepared to put investment in passengers, trains, stations, track and signalling before the endless investment back into a failed company and its shareholders? That drove the public support, but may I ask for an assurance that the additional funds used to bring Railtrack out of administration quickly are not at the expense of any investment proposals at present on the stocks in the network? Furthermore, may I ask my right hon. Friend to ensure that the north of England and the north of this country, as distinct from the suburban areas around London and simply the west coast main line, get the proper infrastructure in the future? We in the north have our expectations, as well as the rest of the country.

Mr. Darling: As my hon. Friend will know, I have a passing interest in the northern part of the country. I am responsible for the rail track right up to the most northerly point of the Scottish mainland, as well as that around Sheffield, so I have some sympathy with what she says. Clearly, it is for the SRA to produce proposals to ensure

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that the money is well spent to benefit as many people as possible, but the travelling public are important, no matter where they are.

My hon. Friend asks about funding. Two things are necessary in relation to the railways. First, there has to be adequate funding. Through the 10-year plan, the Government have allocated very substantial sums on an unprecedented time scale. Spending is never normally allocated so far ahead. Secondly, it is necessary to have a competent operator. That was not the case with Railtrack. I believe that Network Rail has a far better structure.

In relation to my hon. Friend's last point, the Government, through the SRA, are providing credit facilities to enable Network Rail to raise commercial funding precisely because we believe that it is very advantageous to get private and public money into the system; it needs both. I want to ensure that as much public money as possible goes into improving the network, and the sooner we get the rescue of the railway system completed and Network Rail operating satisfactorily, the better things will be for everyone concerned.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): Will the Secretary of State tell us whether Network Rail be accounted for as a subsidiary of the SRA? Will any of its debt appear as public borrowing? Will any of the finances raised from the private sector not be covered by facilities or guarantees from the SRA?

Mr. Darling: I suggest that the hon. Gentleman joins the hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb) in the Library this afternoon with his wet cloth. He will see that it is all set out. The position is that the SRA will account for the business of Network Rail so that everyone concerned can see what money is going in and where it is going. The Office for National Statistics is another body, which is independent of Government, that simply classifies these things as economic statistics. The point made by Opposition Members therefore has no substance. The key point is that, unlike under Railtrack, people can now see where the money is going. I commend the minutes to the hon. Gentleman. He will find all the information that he wants in them, in some detail.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): I heard my right hon. Friend refer to the board a couple of times. He said that it would be cast in a broad fashion. Will he ensure that none of the invitations goes out to the usual chattering classes? Will he take close guard to ensure that there are no Tories among the 120 people, or the smaller group? They caused the trouble in the first place. If there are any Tories in that group, they will leak to their friends in the press before you can say "Jack Robinson". The last thing that we should do is force them to have a loyalty oath. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), we do not believe in them.

Mr. Darling: I strongly believe that the membership of the company should be composed of people who have the railways at heart, first and foremost. I take slight issue with my hon. Friend, however, in that I know that there are still many decent people who are Conservatives, who are appalled by the attitude of the current Tory party leadership towards these matters, and who believe that we are right about the future of the railway system, and that the Tory party is wrong.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): Will the Secretary of State make investment available to Network Rail to enable it to deliver on the London, Tilbury and Southend line the objectives that the Strategic Rail Authority has set, particularly the 50 per cent. increase in passenger numbers over the next few years, bearing it in mind that that line is already running over capacity? That will mean that Network Rail will have to put down new track and a new station, perhaps—I hope—on Canvey Island. I believe that 3,000 of my constituents on Canvey Island use that line each day, and 5,000 people in my constituency as a whole do so. They have been very long-suffering, and they deserve a break—they deserve new infrastructure.

Mr. Darling: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman's constituents are enjoying the fruits of the economic success in this country. I shall say two things to him. First, we have made substantial sums available to invest, and the Strategic Rail Authority has the job of identifying where that money is best spent. I have no doubt that it will consider many commuter lines running into London.

Secondly, when the hon. Gentleman is travelling on one of those trains, he might like to say to his constituents that a lot of money is being invested through the 10-year plan, and that, if the Tories were re-elected, that would be cut, as they oppose every penny of that additional investment.

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): There can be no doubt in anybody's mind that Railtrack was an abject Tory failure; it is as simple as that. I welcome my right hon. Friend's announcement today, and I wish him well in his new post. May I press him further on contracting out? I accept that there will be a need to contract out to third parties. What worries me, and, I think, other rail users, is contracting out to fourth, fifth and sixth parties, as there seems to be no mechanism for checking them. What we do not want is people working on rail maintenance who do not have a clue about what they are doing.

Mr. Darling: As I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), I am extremely concerned that there may not be the necessary supervision of contractors. As my hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes) says, it is not only subcontractors who are involved but sub-subcontractors. Many contractors work extremely well and efficiently, are very well supervised, and the job is well done. There is concern, however—in Railtrack, too, to give it credit, as well as elsewhere in the industry—that, in some cases, there is not enough end-to-end accountability, not just to make sure that a process was followed or that someone ticked the right boxes to say that they did certain things, but to make sure that whatever should have been done was actually done.

As I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich, I met John Armitt a couple of weeks ago to express my concern about that issue. He is well seized of the problem and very concerned about it. Before Railtrack comes out of administration, it and then Network Rail will pay a great deal of attention to this issue. It is important that we are satisfied that we are getting what we are supposed to be getting and—critically in terms of safety—we must be sure that the work that is supposed to be done is actually done. My hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, North makes a good point, and I thank him for his kind remarks.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): Is the Secretary of State aware that confidence in my local line is now picking up after the tragic Potters Bar crash?

However, there is a real problem with parking at King's Lynn station. My constituents find it very difficult to find parking places there after 8 am. The car park needs extending and, although the land is owned by Railtrack and the SRA, no one seems able to make a decision. Will the Secretary of State look at that issue urgently, because we need to encourage local rail users?

When does the Secretary of State expect the Health and Safety Executive report on the Potters Bar tragedy? If it finds that there was not malicious interference, but negligence on the part of the subcontracting firm, Jarvis, will he order a full public inquiry so that we can consider in detail the whole issue of subcontracting?

Mr. Darling: On the hon. Gentleman's final point, it would not be wise of me to pre-judge the HSE report's conclusions. Everyone believes that it is in the best interests of all concerned to have the report as quickly as possible, and the HSE may publish further interim reports to keep people informed. Once I have the conclusions, I will consider them and come to a view.

On the hon. Gentleman's point about King's Lynn station, I am intrigued by the fact that Conservatives Members, having argued for years that the railways should be privatised and taken away from Government, are the first to ask detailed questions about the parking arrangements at their local stations. The SRA is charged with that responsibility, and I will pass on his concerns to it. However, as he has now raised the issue and because the chances are that I will be in King's Lynn at some point, I shall find out what the position is. If there is anything further that I can add, I will let him know.

Ian Lucas (Wrexham): Will my right hon. Friend please confirm that responsibility for station maintenance and development will, in fact, rest with Network Rail, so that it will be the organisation to be approached if there are difficulties at local stations?

Mr. Darling: I shall be brief. That is absolutely right.

Kali Mountford (Colne Valley): I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend for his announcement. Its key elements are the move from shareholder interest to public interest and the programme of investment, and it is important to bring those two elements together. Given the many demands that have been made of him today and the high public expectations that will result from the announcement, is it not crucial that a programme of work is developed so that public confidence can quickly accrue to the new company? People's expectations will include better disabled access to platforms and improvements to railway lines. May I put in a bid for cross-Pennine routes while I am at it? Public confidence in the new network will be built if the SRA can announce soon how it will meet people's reasonable expectations.

Mr. Darling: My hon. Friend is right. Money and a competent operator are necessary. I hope that we now have both.

On my hon. Friend's more general point, we set up the SRA to ensure that we have a considered approach to these matters. It is now under extremely good management and I have not the slightest doubt that it will work with others to make sure that we get a decent railway. That will take time—let us be clear about that. There is a huge backlog of underinvestment over many years, but I hope that we shall see an improvement year on year. The SRA and others are very much seized of that point.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): In welcoming my right hon. Friend to his post, may I remind him of his words about the new company spending money efficiently and effectively, something on which I am sure we would all agree? On subcontractors, does the nature of the change give us an opportunity to renegotiate contracts with some of the subcontractors to bring about the changes that he described to my hon. Friends the Members for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) and for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes)?

Mr. Darling: I am sure that Network Rail will want to look at that, but I am not in a position to talk about individual contracts. However, I am sure that not only Network Rail, the Strategic Rail Authority and the train operating companies but, for obvious reasons, some of the subcontractors will want to ensure that the system works. The present situation is not entirely satisfactory.

Clive Efford (Eltham): My right hon. Friend will be aware that many Labour Members think that Railtrack was merely laundering public money into private hands while giving the illusion of trying to run a railway. His statement about its demise is welcome.

My right hon. Friend referred to the fact that it is essential to deal with repairs and maintenance and the scrutiny of the quality of work carried out. Will he also ensure that the accreditation of the workers who do the work that is essential to the rail service is checked and that training is provided to ensure that they are competent? Given that forewarned is forearmed, can we learn lessons from that specific issue for the management and running of the public-private partnership for London Underground, because some of the contractors are involved in both services?

Mr. Darling: As I said, it is not the employment of contractors in itself that is the problem because that has always been a feature of the railway system. What is at issue is whether proper controls are in place to ensure that contractors and subcontractors are trained and competent to do the work and, critically, to ensure that the work is done. I do not take the view that just because someone is not directly employed by the main owner-operator,

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whether that is public or private, there is something wrong with them. After all, most of the population work for companies in precisely that position. What is important, though, is to ensure that there is end-to-end accountability and that clear controls are not only in place but enforced.

Rob Marris (Wolverhampton, South-West): As a frequent user of the west coast main line, I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. The west coast main line, which serves my constituency, has improved in the past six months, but much more needs to be done.

Does my right hon. Friend share my lack of surprise that Railtrack continues to deny that it was insolvent, given that trading while insolvent is a criminal offence for which directors can be held personally liable? Will he say a little more about the membership of the board and of Network Rail, the company limited by guarantee, especially in relation to trade union representatives because it is important that they are fully involved in the interests of modern industrial relations?

Mr. Darling: In relation to membership, I said that there will be between 100 and 120 members, who will be nominated by a special committee set up for that purpose. Membership will be open to anyone who has the interests of Network Rail and the railways at heart. Of course it will be open to unions, although bearing in mind what I have read over the past few days, one or two of them may not want to be involved. If they do, however, I am sure that the invitation is there.

My hon. Friend is right about the west coast main line, which is improving all the time. New Virgin trains will shortly start to appear and people will see a difference in the quality of rolling stock, which Virgin cross-country trains are also using. I want to ensure that the changes announced today and the work of the Strategic Rail Authority and others mean that we get a better railway system year on year. I am confident that that will happen. The investment is available and the right structures are now also in place.

Mr. Tom Harris (Glasgow, Cathcart): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his statement this morning and express the hope that it will bring forward the day when we at last have a direct rail link between Glasgow city centre and Glasgow airport. Does he agree that the good wishes expressed by the Conservative party for Network Rail will ring hollow in the ears of the British public given that the only time that it expressed any interest in the rail network was when it hoped to make a fast buck by selling it off?

Mr. Darling: The Conservative party is very much on its own in still believing in its heart of hearts that Railtrack could have carried on. That is the view of the shadow Chancellor and the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May). They still think that Railtrack was a flourishing and going concern, whereas the High Court held that it was not. They have always had a rather grudging attitude to railways and public service in general.

I suspect that, as we move on over the next two or three years, the big issue will be this: we have put in place substantial long-term investment. On the basis of the Conservatives' current economic policies, they would cut it; they are against every penny of that increased investment. Without investment, all the changes to structures in the world will make no difference. It is investment—sustained investment—that will make the difference. As the hon. Member for Maidenhead has been wrong on just about everything that she has ever said about Railtrack, this is a golden opportunity to move on, as her former leader used to say, and start looking at the Conservatives' policy in relation to investment in the railways.

Mr. Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith): I very much welcome the clear message from my right hon. Friend to the shareholders that the current offer will not be on the table indefinitely. Given that, unfortunately, it appears from press reports that there are still some shareholders who are minded to reject the deal, does my right hon. Friend agree that it would be totally unacceptable if this revival of the rail network were to be sabotaged by anyone trying to extract an even higher settlement than the current one, which is very generous in all the circumstances? If any inordinate delay were to be caused by such tactics, would he consider legislating to bring about the establishment of Network Rail as soon as possible?

Mr. Darling: As I said, the £300 million is not there indefinitely. It is there provided we get Railtrack out of administration quickly. An extraordinary general meeting is to be fixed for, I believe, July, and I very much hope that a majority of shareholders will vote to go ahead with the sale and purchase agreement.

I am pleased that the board of Railtrack Group is recommending that the offer be accepted; a large number of shareholders have already said that it is the right thing to do. I hope that all the shareholders will reflect on not only the benefits of the offer but the fact that the alternatives, which do not include the £300 million, would mean a long period of litigation with lots of expenses. Surely it would be far better to put all this behind us and ensure that we get Network Rail set up.

Above all, let us remember that the principal people whom we are here to serve are our constituents as a whole—shareholders and non-shareholders alike—who want the railway network to be operated by a competent body, backed by the necessary investment. That is the best way to get the railways going again. I very much hope that all the shareholders of Railtrack Group will reflect on that and vote in the way that I think is appropriate.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. You will be aware that Mr. Speaker has, on a number of occasions, admonished Ministers and reminded them of the importance of making announcements first to the House and only then to the media. On Radio 4 at 12 noon today, the headlines and the attached story were that the Transport Secretary was going to make the announcement that we have just heard, and I believe that you will find, if you look into it, that the detail in that news story was too great to count as just a general airing of fact that a statement was going to be made. Will you please investigate this matter? Particularly bearing in mind the record of the previous Transport Secretary in spinning the news, it would be a shame if his successor were to go down the same path so early on.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I note what the hon. Gentleman has said but I think that on this particular occasion, intelligent press speculation would not have been too difficult.

ESTIMATES DAY

3RD ALLOTTED DAY

ESTIMATES, 2002–03

London Underground

[Relevant documents: Second Report from the Transport, Local Government and the Regions Committee, Session 2001–02, on London Underground, HC 387-I, Seventh Report from the Committee, Session 2001–02, on London Underground—The Public-Private Partnership: Follow-up, HC 680, and the Government response thereto, Cm 5486; and Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, Office of the Rail Regulator and Ordnance Survey: Annual Report, 2002, Cm 5405.]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): I must announce that the Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody.

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That further resources, not exceeding £32,972,185,000, be authorised for use during the year ending on 31st March 2003, and that a further sum, not exceeding £31,415,020,000, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund for the year ending on 31st March 2003 for expenditure by the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions.—[*Mr. McAvoy.*]

2.23 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): I beg to move, as an amendment to the motion,

That resources be reduced by £1,000 in respect of Request for Resources 2 (Promoting modern, integrated and safe transport and providing customer-focused regulation) relating to grants to London Underground.

The amendment would, at least officially, take away from the underground some of the moneys that are to be offered to it.

One hazard of being a country that has produced large numbers of engineers is that sometimes we are so used to our traditional backgrounds that we forget that it is important to understand why, if a country is to remain not only economically successful but capable of contributing to a very high standard of living of its people, it must continue to employ the best skills of its people. The British have been very good at engineering over many centuries, and particularly since Victorian times, when they were in the vanguard not only of creating fantastically good transport systems but developing them in such a way that those skills were spread throughout the civilised world. It therefore is rather sad that in recent years, and certainly under previous Governments, there has been a lack of consistent investment in good transport systems. Those systems, many of which we had ourselves initiated, were allowed to run down, and one classic example has been the London underground.

London as a capital city not only provides a most vibrant and exciting place to live but attracts some of the best brains in the world, and it is the centre of financial, political and cultural events that mean that its people require a high standard of infrastructure. Unfortunately, London Underground no longer provides that very high level of care. This is not a criticism of people who operate what is an old system; it is simply an acknowledgment

[Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody]

that successive Governments did not provide the cash that was essential not just to maintain but to modernise and enhance the system, and although at least one modern line has been built, that was still not enough to provide the level that is essential.

Therefore, the incoming Government decided that they were going to look at a new way of financing the underground, and the Select Committee chose to look very closely, over a number of reports, at how that was going to be done, what its purpose was and what it was going to produce. On one occasion, the Leader of the House did reprimand me when I suggested that we had still not discussed that sufficiently on the Floor of the House, by saying that he was convinced that we had had a number of debates that had covered every aspect of the public-private partnership, but the truth is that there has not been a substantive vote, and although today might not be either the occasion or the manner that is necessary to decide such an important subject, it is perhaps instructive, on a day when we have just been discussing the debacle of Railtrack, to tell the Government that we are not convinced, as a Select Committee, that the public-private partnership is the way forward, will provide what we want or indeed is what the general public want.

As a Committee, we looked at the history of the public-private partnership. We took evidence not only from Ministers but from those working in the industry—from those dealing with the financing and the structure, the maintenance and enhancement of the system—and we discovered that some aspects of the deal were exceedingly disquieting.

As a Committee, we were worried that most of the arrangements for the bids had been Treasury led, to the point where Treasury officials appeared to be taking precedence over the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions in the negotiating, and providing individuals who were themselves directly dealing with the applicants for the bids, and yet we were not able to persuade Treasury Ministers to appear before us to discuss the implications. We said very clearly that we thought that that decision undermined the work of Select Committees, simply because the House of Commons does have a responsibility not just to ask awkward questions but to obtain answers.

Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough) *rose*—

Mrs. Dunwoody: I shall certainly give way to my hon. Friend. I am delighted to see her.

Helen Jackson: Does my hon. Friend agree, particularly as we are discussing the matter on an estimates day, and because the thrust of the Government's decision on London Underground was based on financial estimates and so-called value for money, that on criteria that varied according to advice from the Treasury, it was difficult, if not impossible, to get a balanced view from the entire Government without being able to take full evidence from the Treasury and Treasury Ministers?

Mrs. Dunwoody: That was precisely the point that concerned the Committee. Under normal circumstances—I have been in the House longer than I sometimes care to admit in public—one would have expected a major scheme of funding for the London Underground to be not only carried forward, but controlled at every point by the Department that was directly responsible—the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions. Of course, the Treasury must have an important guiding role in deciding public expenditure. Nobody disputes that.

However, the normal procedures that all Governments follow have always meant that the Department with the controlling interest went to the Treasury, discussed the figures at various points in the spending review, asked for the amounts of money that it needed, and negotiated on the basis of information about the sum that the scheme demanded. When the Department received a reply, it undertook the negotiations with the people concerned. That is the traditional way of proceeding, and I have not heard it argued that it did not work.

What concerned the Select Committee was that the more evidence we took, the more it became clear that the Treasury had somehow reversed its role, and was negotiating directly on a transport scheme that would determine the future of transport in our capital city and had been going on for over four years. Successive Governments have not found the money to keep such schemes going and to improve them, but we are discussing a scheme that is so complicated, and which creates and even replicates so many of the difficulties that we saw in Railtrack, that we felt that we were almost in danger of doing the same thing again.

We wanted the Treasury to come before us and explain why it did not take that view. We produced not just one report, but reports that stated time and again that we did not think that that was the answer, and we gave our reasons.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): Will the hon. Lady make it clear that on this issue, as on so many issues that the Committee discusses, and following on from the intervention from the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Helen Jackson), those views were strongly held right across the Committee, regardless of members' party political persuasion and perspective on the Government?

Mrs. Dunwoody: That was not a party political view. The Select Committee was so worried by the evidence that it took that it wanted to have a series of questions answered, and it felt that it had the right to ask the Executive to demonstrate exactly where it was going.

Why do a Government choose to move outside Government funding for major infrastructure schemes, if they are a Government committed to improving the transport system? They do so because they have reviewed their finances and concluded that they have so many demands in any given period of time that they must prioritise, which may mean that the money that is needed for infrastructure systems is not to be found within existing Government funding. Fine.

The Government must then consider how they intend to involve the private sector and develop the partnership and what benefits there will be. Experience teaches us that if Government enter into a deal that may raise money from the private sector, but which does not move the risk from the taxpayer to the private company, they are not providing the benefits or the long-term undertaking guarantees that they should provide.

So we asked whether the Government could convince us that there was a transfer of risk from the Government to the private company. That was not at all clear. What was clear was that because of the complicated nature of the scheme and the very involved system that was proposed, not only would we almost inevitably get into complicated disputes with the individual companies and with contracts, but there would be enormous problems for the staff involved. That would mean constant references to an arbiter, and the need to extend the powers of the arbiter to look at all the implications and come to a just and sensible conclusion.

We considered the fact that already the shortage of funds available to London Underground was constraining capacity. The sheer length of time that the creation of the particular form of financing was taking was immediately impacting on the work of London Underground. We began to argue, as we had in an earlier report, that there should be an independent assessment, and the Government agreed, sensibly, that that was a good idea. The response that we got from the people concerned was that, unfortunately, many of the elements in the public-private partnership deal are subjective.

Four years, and we are told at the end of that time that many of the judgments needed to work out whether the scheme represents value for money are subjective! I find that very worrying indeed. We can all bring to the table our prejudices in terms of negotiations and objectives, but if a Government are entering into massive commitments, it is essential that they should do so on the basis of clear facts, clear responsibilities, a clear transfer of risk and a clear indication of the cost to the taxpayer over a number of years. After all, the bid will have implications for public transport for over 30 years. That is an extremely long time.

The previous Secretary of State accepted that it would not be possible to provide definitive answers on value for money; well, why not? How are we to proceed, if we are not convinced that we are committing the taxpayers' money to a deal that is in their interest? We were sure that we wanted the National Audit Office to give its view of the particular and subjective aspects of the deal. The NAO's response was sensible; it said that it could not make a political judgment.

The public, however, do make political judgments. They look at a scheme and say, "Is this going to be what we want? Are we going to get a modern, comfortable railway and are we going to continue to pay for it not just through fares, but through the considerable subsidies that the scheme will receive?"

Those are the considerations that should concern us. The kind of financing that was being discussed was decided, it seemed to us, not on the basis of what was essential to modernise the railway, but on the basis of what we could afford. In a sense, the matter was decided the wrong way round. The decision was taken on the method of funding, then the Government looked at what they would get under that particular arrangement.

Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): Does my hon. Friend accept that, contrary to a normal private finance initiative, in which money is lent to be spent up front, the nature of the scheme was that £1 billion would be spent every year and the Treasury would supply that on a yearly basis? The picture that my hon. Friend has painted in that respect is not a reflection of the deal. With reference to risk transfer, does she accept that the penalties in the contracts, which would mean the elimination of suppliers or penalties out of their profit, under pressure from the bank, which is the third player in the relationship, would ensure risk transfer and ensure project management such as we see in large projects in the private sector, which we have not seen from London Underground in the public sector?

Mrs. Dunwoody: The answer is no, I do not take that view. If I did so, I would not have been a party to the report that sets out in considerable detail why I think that it is wrong. I am sorry if I am not making myself clear; perhaps I should speak in simpler Anglo-Saxon terms.

We were promised an initial saving of £4.5 million in the deal, but the Committee found that the present arrangements were flawed. Let me explain to my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, Central (Geraint Davies) one of the reasons why. A large amount of London Underground's work is funded from the fare box. The amount that it takes from its fare box moneys towards its operating costs is higher than that which is taken in similar systems elsewhere. In 1998, London received 129 per cent. of its operating costs from the fare box, but New York received only 77 per cent. and Paris 63 per cent. When we consider the scheme, we must work out whether it will be heavily dependent on the amount that is receives from the fare box. If it will be, we should be aware that the amount that is available from the fare box is declining. Have the Government considered the implications? Who will find the difference? Will London ratepayers be faced with a considerable commitment of which they are not currently aware? If not, will the Government have to give much more substantial subsidies than we thought?

We must understand that the original Government estimates, which said in October 2001 that 45 per cent. of the deal would be financed from Government subsidy, 30 per cent. from the fare box and 25 per cent. from private finance, may no longer be valid. The figures may have changed so radically that the House should know about it. I am worried by the current proportions in relation to the various groups involved, as I am not at all sure whether the bidders are already laying down conditions that might mean that the figures that the House has been discussing are no longer accurate. Is it true that the people who are already involved in the deal are laying down a number of specifications and saying that they will require a certain number of millions of pounds in a single input of finance immediately when the terms are signed? If that is the case, why have we not been told?

Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): The hon. Lady will be aware of the Mayor of London's letter to a number of hon. Members, dated 12 June, in which he notified us that he had identified a large funding gap and was starting legal action against the Government and insisting that the PPP did not go ahead until an explanation was forthcoming. Would she consider it appropriate for her Committee to call in the Mayor of London and the Minister and try to resolve the matter?

Mrs. Dunwoody: My Committee may no longer be there. We have already taken evidence from Transport for London, but it may have been overtaken by changes in

[Mrs. Dunwoody]

the existing arrangements. That is what concerns me, and I hope that the Minister will give some clear indications about that.

There are other difficulties. London Underground will have to monitor the arrangements, and the Committee asked whether it had sufficient staff and money to do so. It will need to employ more people, not fewer. We have seen on overground rail that, unless maintenance and operation are very closely monitored and there is very skilled supervision of engineering, we will run into serious problems in operating railways. If that is so in relation to Railtrack, may not also it be true in relation to London Underground? If so, will London Underground have enough money and staff to carry out the very high level of monitoring that is required?

The Committee was also very concerned about the sort of deal that says that companies will be able to press for better terms after seven and a half years. We took evidence and asked questions about that. We asked what would happen if the companies said at the end of seven and a half years that they did not think that they could continue and wanted substantially to increase the amounts paid by tax and ratepayers. I am afraid that we did not get a very detailed answer, so I ask the Minister again to address that point. In effect, London Underground can be held to ransom by the companies, which will be in an extremely powerful position. Who will decide what is a fair deal when we get to that point? Why is there no public interest exclusion? Why will it not be possible for the Government of the day to demand that change should come about because of the public interest? That seems something that should be automatically written into the contract, and yet, somehow or other, it is not there.

Surely, we have learned by now in dealing with private companies that the overriding interest of the tax and rate payer on matters such as safety must mean that the Government should have the right to intervene and say that they cannot continue with the contracts in their present form because of the implications for the travelling public. If not, there will be considerable difficulties. Major upgrades and enhancements that are not properly spelt out will be another source of difficulty. Why will they not be the responsibility of Transport for London? Why will it not be possible for them to be planned and take a direct form?

There is no 15-year public sector comparator and I am afraid that some of the figures that have been quoted have no basis in any of the published reports. The dominance of the highly constrained financial analysis as the basis for the decision-making process is ill-founded and mistaken. The Committee said:

> "The level of cost overruns"—

we have also been discussing this issue in relation to Railtrack—

> "to which the Infrastructure companies will be exposed before they can seek an extraordinary review is paltry compared to the size of the investment programme."

Again, I emphasise that risk transfer was one of the key reasons given to us for undertaking the deals, but we think that it is seriously undermined and could mitigate the desire to go ahead with this particular public-private interest.

We pointed out that, even at this juncture, the Government should have an alternative. I feel great sympathy for a new Secretary of State who enters a Department and is faced with a number of deals that appear half done, but we have spent more than four years arguing about how we can best come up with such a partnership deal, it is still not completed, and yet the Government are still saying "Unfortunately, there is no alternative, and even if we think that it is flawed and cannot provide the House with accurate financial information, we must nevertheless go ahead because there is no alternative."

Governments always have alternatives. They have a number of them, as we have seen in relation to something as basic as Railtrack. They have a responsibility to exercise their political judgment. Who in the 21st century would imagine that a capital city of the size and importance of that of the United Kingdom should be reliant on an underground system that is more than 100 years old, but unable to conclude a deal to improve, change and modernise it even after four and a half years' discussion? Who would believe that a Government who are so strongly committed to transport and who care about people's quality of life could still be suggesting that we should wander forward with a deal—I say this without wishing to be unkind—that is unproven, has vast numbers of holes in its responsibilities and does not indicate that it will deliver the goods? After all, all that Governments should have the right to determine is the need to deliver the goods. We come here to decide how our public money should be spent—that is why we are elected. The link between elected Members and the prioritising of Government schemes is the fact that it is our taxpayers' money that we are spending, and we have a special responsibility to ensure that it is spent responsibly, sensibly and, above all, with a clear end in mind that will produce a good transport system.

The Committee was not convinced. We asked to see Ministers who should have answered our questions. We published reports that we thought spelled out to the House: "Beware—this is a bad scheme, which can still be dropped and should be abandoned." Frankly, we did not get the answers that we wanted, and we have had to use a particular device to ensure that the matter is debated on the Floor of the House today. They are a grown-up Government—they should demonstrate that they understand that it is better to tell people, "We have a made mistake, and on the whole we think we ought to start again."

2.51 pm

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), who is very experienced in these matters. We are happy to add our names to her amendment; I hope that that will not do her—or rather our—cause too much harm.

It would be churlish of me not to welcome the opportunity for the debate. I presume that this two or three-hour debate is the second and final phase of the wide consultation on the Government's part-privatisation plans for London Underground that was promised by the former Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. I hope that the debate will focus on the public-private partnership rather than on the personalities involved, including the Mayor of London, Bob Kiley, former Secretaries of State and the present Secretary of State. I deplore the way in which yesterday's debate, which was supposed to be about transport in London, was hijacked by the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mike Gapes). He made some very serious allegations during that debate, which he has declined to repeat outside the House. Yesterday's debate was all about getting Kiley and nothing to do with getting London moving.

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): Can the hon. Gentleman explain how it is possible to hijack one's own debate?

Tom Brake: Many hon. Members thought that a debate entitled "Transport in London" would be about transport in London, but that was not the case.

The Government have always stated that their approach to the modernisation of the underground would be based on three principles. I quote:

> "First, there must be no privatisation; secondly, safety must not be compromised; and thirdly, the contracts must offer value for money."—[*Official Report*, 7 February 2002; Vol. 379, c. 1126.]

In our view, PPP falls foul of at least two of those three principles. First, does PPP constitute privatisation? I do not want to spend valuable time debating semantics. Chambers dictionary defines "privatisation" as to

> "transfer from ownership by the state into private ownership".

The Government say that PPP does not represent privatisation, but Liberal Democrat Members and many others consider that handing over responsibility for the maintenance of the underground to two private consortia, Tube Lines and Metronet, for 30 years represents at least part-privatisation. However, the debate about whether it is privatisation or part-privatisation is not nearly as important as the debate about whether PPP compromises safety or represents value for money. I shall focus on those two points.

Is PPP compromising safety? There is no doubt that PPP will make managing safety issues more complex owing to the fragmentation that it introduces to the industry—the very sort of fragmentation that has caused so many problems on the rail network. A network broken up into two parts will have more interfaces and there will be more opportunities for safety standards to diverge. Of course, more complex does not necessarily mean less safe, but it does mean that a greater effort will have to be put into safety standards to achieve the same level of safety than would be the case if there was not that fragmentation.

Of still greater concern is Transport for London's assessment that PPP hands over to the infracos' financiers—not to the infracos—decision-making powers over safety matters. On 19 June, Bob Kiley wrote about that to Mr. Stephen Williams of the Health and Safety Executive. So far, he has not received a substantive response. In his letter, he said that

> "the JNP"—

that is, Tube Line—

> "finance documents we reviewed include unusual terms which will materially affect LUL's actual ability to control and/or work in partnership with the privately owned infracos."

He goes on to say that

> "the JNP finance documents detail mechanisms that convey to infraco lenders a panoply of powers to control or direct infraco activities. A sixty-two page 'Control Matrix'"—

identifies—

> "well over a hundred decisions Tube Lines and infraco JNP must take if the lenders so direct. These rights potentially include how works are performed, the scheduling of works, the choice of subcontractors and the settlement of disputes."

He also observes that

> "the Metronet finance documents, which may contain similar lender rights, have not been disclosed"—

or had not been disclosed at that point. He went to say that there had been very little in the way of a substantive reply from the HSE to the many issues that had been raised in previous correspondence, and that he wanted a full response to each of those issues. He expressed surprise that the HSE had

> "concluded that it was neither 'necessary or appropriate' for a face-to-face meeting to take place between its and TfL's counsel."

He and I find it difficult to understand why that is the case, given the level of experience that TfL's counsel will have built up in considering and reviewing the contracts. If TfL's reading of those documents is correct, this is a very serious matter.

Will the Minister confirm whether TfL is correct in its assessment of the documents and, if it is, what guarantees he can give the House that the financiers of the infracos will always make safety their priority? If he can provide none, PPP should be put out of its misery now.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): One of the issues that Bob Kiley has raised is the use of subcontractors. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that one of the most problematic aspects of Railtrack was the increased use of subcontractors, because much of the labour they used was not permanent or skilled? We do not want that to be replicated on London's underground.

Tom Brake: I agree. The management of subcontractors is a key priority. One of the concerns about the fragmentation of the network is that it will be possible for Tube Lines and Metronet to operate to different standards, thereby making it even more difficult to control the work that is done.

Geraint Davies: The hon. Gentleman seems to be saying that the banks play no role in this, and that they are just leeches taking the money without providing added value. Does he agree that the banks' role is to provide a discipline to the private supplier who offers the service to the public? Does he agree that, without the banks, we are less likely to meet our targets, and with them, if the targets are not met, those private suppliers will be removed and replaced or their profits will be penalised, which will ensure that projects are delivered on time?

Tom Brake: I agree with part of the hon. Gentleman's point. Clearly, the banks have a role in relation to infracos. However, they should not have a role in making decisions that could have an impact on safety.

The final key question is whether PPP represents value for money. We will know the definitive answer when the National Audit Office conducts its investigation. Unfortunately, that will happen only after the financial close, when it is too late to do anything about it for the next 30 years. The NAO's remit must be changed. What is the point of finding in the next couple of months that

[Tom Brake]

the Government have squandered billions of taxpayers' money on the scheme when it is too late to make any changes?

I wrote to the Comptroller and Auditor General on 9 May to ask him to consider several specific points. They were:

> "whether the rates of return the private consortia have been granted are reasonable . . . whether there are sufficient controls over the charges that the private consortia are able to levy . . . whether genuine risk transfer has been achieved at reasonable cost, and . . . whether the NAO's recommendations in their December 2000 report have been followed."

In his response on 17 June, he confirmed that the NAO was

> "continuing to monitor the PPP",

and that it would

> "produce a report as soon as is reasonably practical in the months following financial close."

Clearly, that is welcome.

The NAO will have much to consider and investigate—for example, the obscene sums of money that will be dished out to Tube Lines for its PPP set-up costs, which include £36 million of so-called success fees to be given to Tube Lines' parent companies, Amey, Jarvis and Bechtel, and the more than £100 million that the Government have spent on their consultants.

Metronet has refused to comment on the precise indecency of its golden hello, and stated that

> "it would not be appropriate to comment".

That is bad news for Londoners. Will that be Metronet's response to any query for the next 30 years? So much for accountability.

It is not surprising that Metronet refuses to answer legitimate questions about the amount of taxpayers' money it will receive for its efforts. However, I did not expect the same response from the Secretary of State. I wrote to him on 20 June and asked, among other questions:

> "Can you provide a detailed breakdown of the payments to be made to the two consortia?"

I also asked:

> "Has the Government made an assessment of the validity of the consortia's claims for consultancy fees?"

I commend the Secretary of State on the promptness of his response. He replied to me on 24 June, four days later, and I welcome that.

I do not however welcome the content of the Secretary of State's reply, which confirmed that

> "London Underground will be verifying all development costs before any such costs can be recovered from bidders."

That is commendable, but he has not been able or willing to state the size of Metronet's bounty. We are left to speculate about the Government's generosity and Metronet's greed.

When the NAO makes its value-for-money assessment, as well as the nine-figure sums, it will have to take into account the fact that the start-up costs for a bond issue would be approximately £40 million, compared with between £440 million, according to *The Guardian*, and £570 million, according to the *Evening Standard*, for the Government's plan. It will also have to take account of TfL's estimate that a bond issue would have cost £1.7 billion less over seven and a half years. That can easily be verified, because its borrowing arrangements would be cheaper than the PPP arrangements that the Government chose. For those reasons and many others, it is highly unlikely that PPP can or will represent value for money.

Five years ago, Labour promised miracles for the tube. The Deputy Prime Minister stated:

> "When the Greater London authority is established, the underground will, with the rest of London Transport, transfer to it."

Several years after the establishment of the Greater London Authority, we still await the transfer of London Underground to it. He also said that

> "we will return it to the people of London."—[*Official Report*, 20 March 1998; Vol. 308, c. 1541.]

Mr. Gareth Thomas (Harrow, West): The hon. Gentleman will remember that Ken Livingstone commissioned the Industrial Society to review the PPP arrangements in late 2000. He may know that part of its document suggested that preparing a long-term alternative, such as bonds, to the PPP would take at least two years. Given the distance that we have travelled on the PPP journey, do the Liberal Democrats seriously advocate throwing all the work to one side and allowing two more years of misery before we can get started on the investment programme?

Tom Brake: The hon. Gentleman's intervention has the useful purpose of pointing out that the Government's plan, which has taken four and a half years so far, has not been signed. A bond issue could have been resolved in a couple of years at much less cost.

Chris Grayling: The Select Committee on Transport took evidence from Mr. Kiley, who said that he had the finance lined up and that he was prepared to start work, not planning, in six months.

Tom Brake: I hope that Labour Members listened carefully to that helpful intervention.

Geraint Davies: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Tom Brake: I should like to conclude, but I shall give way again.

Geraint Davies: The hon. Gentleman should accept that the bond issue is a red herring. Bonds take a large amount of money up front for investment. We are putting in money year after year; the Treasury will stump up the money every year. The only difference is the added value of private sector. Why does not the hon. Gentleman admit that the bond issue is a red herring?

Tom Brake: I do not believe that. It is important to point out how much more the Government have spent on their proposals and how much more the bond issue could have delivered for Londoners.

Ms Abbott: If the Government had taken a timely decision to allow the democratically elected Mayor of London and his transport commissioner to go ahead with the bond issue proposal, there would be improvements on the underground now. Far from being a red herring, the bond issue was the way in which the New York subway got massive investment. It is important to note, as much for the benefit of my colleagues as anyone else, that a mayoral election was fought and won on the simple subject of the partial privatisation of the underground. The people of London said then as they say now that they utterly oppose partial privatisation of their underground.

Tom Brake: The hon. Lady is right. The mayoral elections were a referendum on the proposals for London Underground. She is right to point out that if the Government had handed over control of the tube to London's government and Londoners, the system would be up and running now, whether we accept the two years that the Industrial Society suggested for introducing the bond issue or Bob Kiley's six months. However, we still await the Government's response.

Four and a half years on, the PPP contracts have not been signed; the tube is not in the hands of Londoners, and uncertainty surrounds who will be able to make decisions about safety. Evidence mounts to show that, for Tube Lines and Metronet, PPP is a game of "Who Wants to be a Millionaire?", in which they have the answers to all the questions that Chris Tarrant will ask. Public-private partnership is unworkable, unwanted and we should put it out of its misery now.

I urge all the amendment's sponsors and all hon. Members to join us in delivering a vote of no confidence in the Government's handling of the tube PPP.

3.9 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson (Coventry, North-West): Madam Deputy Speaker, I am grateful to you for calling me to take part in this debate. I thank, in passing, the Chairman of the Select Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), for triggering the debate, because I can start by agreeing with her on one thing. When we started down the route of a public-private partnership—I was at the Treasury at the time—it was precisely because we had to decide what our priorities were. Those were times of extreme financial stringency, because—among other reasons—we had to take certain measures to stick to the Tory spending plans to get the economy back into a stable condition to lay the basis for what we are now able to do. My hon. Friend will agree that it would have been unthinkable for us to vote billions to the tube and the then tube management while denying the billions that urgently needed to be spent on health and education.

Richard Ottaway *rose—*

Mr. Robinson: I am willing to give way, but I cannot see what possible point the hon. Gentleman can have. It was the Tories who got us into the mess by proposing to privatise the tube, trying to make an issue of it in the 1997 general election, and neglecting to invest in the system for 18 years. However, I shall be most interested to hear what the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Richard Ottaway) has to say.

Richard Ottaway: The hon. Gentleman said that he had stuck to the Conservative spending plans. If only the Government had really done that, there would be a lot more money in the underground today. In the last 10 years of the Conservative Government, we put £7 billion into the underground. Labour has come nowhere near that in the last five years.

Mr. Robinson: I was quite right; I should not have given way. I regret doing so and I do not intend to do so again.

We had to find a way forward, and we clearly had to go for a public-private partnership—there was no other way. Also, quite apart from the financial situation, there were other very good reasons for going for such a partnership for the tube, which I shall come to in a moment. We could skin a cat in so many ways, and when it came to public-private partnerships—which were quite innovative—there were many different options available. No. 10 had its view; the advisers to No. 10 had their view; the then Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions had its view; I had a view; the Treasury had a view; and the Deputy Prime Minister had very strong views. We had to find a way that we could all see would carry this forward.

With the Deputy Prime Minister's agreement—we worked together closely on this, and I pay tribute to the real work that he put in to get this going—I convened a group of four business men with experience of both the public and private sectors to make a recommendation to us. Essentially, that recommendation is what we have today: a split at a point that can logically be defended and can, from a business point of view, be implemented at least as easily as the proposal to leave it to the present London Underground management to continue on their own.

As of today, the situation, as I understand it, is that the contracts are signed, subject to only two prior conditions: sign-off by the Health and Safety Executive, and obtaining clearance in Brussels. There is £3 billion of private finance lined up to back the scheme. So what stands in its way? Unfortunately, we have two fairly difficult road blocks still to overcome. One is the continued opposition of the Select Committee. While I pay tribute to all its work, and I recognise that, in part, its job is to make the Government's life difficult, this sort of opposition cannot be carried on to the point at which it makes it impossible for us to modernise the tube. I shall return to that in a moment.

Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead): My hon. Friend made the interesting point that different people in government had many different views about the PPP, and some of us would argue that it has ended up as a bit of a dog's dinner. He also said that the present plan was determined by four business men. Will he put on record who the four business men were, so that we can analyse their knowledge of the situation to see whether they had a vested interest in it?

Mr. Robinson: I shall be very happy to do that. I shall make sure that my hon. Friend will be satisfied on that point, and I am sure that he will be. I am anxious to reassure him, but I want to push on, if I may. There was a lot of other input into the matter—it was not just the four in the working group—and there had already been a lot of thinking that pretty much tended in the same direction.

The other road block involves the opposition from the Mayor and Mr. Kiley, which is now bordering on the irresponsible. I have no personal attack to make on

[Mr. Robinson]

Mr. Kiley; I do not know the gentleman. I think that I have met him on only one occasion, and I have certainly not had any extended conversation with him on these matters. I would, however, say to the House that he has been out of the business for 11 years, he has six Americans working in his office, and I think that a statement was recently made in the House—which I cannot verify—that another British manager had been dispensed with.

When Mr. Kiley made his first presentation to the London Underground board, he spoke for 55 minutes, and I am told that he spent precisely 90 seconds on what would be his plan for the underground. Whatever else one might say about the gentleman, he is not a team player; everything always has to be on his terms, or he will not go along with it.

Mrs. Dunwoody: I do not have any mandate to defend Mr. Kiley, but I want to address this particular point. If my hon. Friend would like to look carefully at the evidence that we took, in not one but two Select Committee reports, he will find that Mr. Kiley not only spelled out what he wanted to do—and why and how he wanted to do it—but gave clear evidence to us that he knew what he was talking about. Frankly, that was quite refreshing.

Mr. Robinson: Well, Mr. Kiley certainly talks a good fight, but if we ask, in modern parlance, whether he can "walk the walk", I do not think that we will ever know, because I hope that he is not going to be given the opportunity. My hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich referred to the minutes of the Select Committee evidence; I have read them all.

Tom Brake: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Robinson: I want to make a little progress.

What Mr. Kiley is saying, if we boil it down, is that Ken and Kiley together can do the job, but they cannot do it on their own. No whizz kid could do that. They are going to be dependent on London Underground management—as it was then, and as it is now—to do the job with them and for them. They are saying, "Because it is us, we'll get it done." But where is the evidence for that?

I pay tribute to London Underground management. Given that they have been so constrained financially, and given the difficulties and pressures under which they have worked, they do a good job in running the system—particularly the public-facing operations. I regret to say, however, that they do not have experience of spending on and controlling major projects, and their track record on that is one of fiascos. They have never had the opportunity to do that in a sustained way, because of the way the finances were run—principally by the Conservatives—and, whenever they have been confronted with such a project, it has proved a failure.

We have only to look at two examples to see that what I am saying is correct. Let us take the construction of the docklands light railway. That was in such a mess by the end that the management had to call in the private sector to finish it off. More recently, the Jubilee line extension was running into the sand. What did the management do? They had to bring in Bechtel to complete the job.

Tom Brake *rose—*

Mr. Robinson: I will give way in a moment.

Lord Levene intervened in both cases. If you have to bring Lord Levene in to intervene, you are in a pretty bad state. The idea, therefore, that all we have to do is give the money to Ken and Kiley Inc. and they will magically transform the ability of London Underground management to invest in, control and successfully bring to a conclusion the major projects that need to be implemented, is just wishful thinking.

Ms Karen Buck (Regent's Park and Kensington, North) *rose—*

Tom Brake *rose—*

Mr. Robinson: I shall give way to my hon. Friend first, and then to the hon. Gentleman.

Ms Buck: My hon. Friend is making a powerful case against the former management of London Underground. Why, if we had no confidence in them to manage those projects, do we have confidence in the very same people to manage the contract procurement for the PPP?

Mr. Robinson: They were not managing the contracts well. On a point of general relevance, it was London Underground management who were managing the projects, splitting them up into many separate contracts, making a mess of it and not finishing it—they were failing to do the job. The point is that they had to bring in Bechtel to finish the job. It is no good trying to blame Bechtel, just because it happened to have one part of the contract but could not finish it all. It was brought in to finish the job because London Underground could not. That is London Underground's track record.

When it came to the failure to complete the Jubilee line extension, and the need to bring in Bechtel, one of the greatest protagonists of leaving it to the tube—prior to Mr. Kiley—Mr. Dennis Tunnicliffe, finally agreed. We all felt, "Let's go for this split whereby we can have infrastructure companies that are specialists in those areas doing that particular work, and London Underground can run the tube operations and the trains as London Underground, which it does well."

Tom Brake: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way, but I urge him to continue his speech afterwards, as he is revealing some very interesting facts. I hope that before he sits down he will give us the names of the four business men who decided how the PPP should be structured, for instance. He has revealed another interesting fact, however: he has said that Bob Kiley will not have an opportunity to run the tube. Is he saying that there will be a veto on Bob Kiley keeping his post after the handover?

Mr. Robinson: I do not want to deal with interventions from Members who have nothing much to say about the real issues.

I shall return to certain other aspects of the Mayor's position shortly, but first let me say a few words for the benefit of members of the Transport Sub-Committee, many of whom are my hon. Friends. All the Labour Members are my hon. Friends, of course, as are many from the Opposition. I believe that they are sincere in their opposition, and I think they have made some good points. Indeed, I consider that the Committee may have improved some matters. I part company with the Committee on its continuing insistence on esoteric, pseudo-scientific calculations as the be all and end all of its assessment of the PPP.

When it comes to value for money, social cost benefit analyses and so forth, I can speak on the basis of some experience given my time in the Treasury. The whole thing is rather like a grand prize fight. In one corner we have the public-private partnership and its accountants PricewaterhouseCoopers, seconded by KPMG; in the other corner we have Transport for London. I cannot remember which accountants it went for, but I think it was Deloitte and Touche. It is seconded by a host of academics. The Government have appointed Ernst & Young as the referee who will try to find a way through the middle.

All those people and organisations will have been commissioned at enormous cost, and each will of course come up with broadly the view that those doing the commissioning wanted to hear. Anyone with any experience of business, contracts or courts, from whatever walk of life, will know that if a consultant, an economist, an accountant or a lawyer is paid and given a brief, he will give the answer that whoever has paid him wants to hear. That is all that has been going on here.

It is funny that Transport for London's advisers, seconded in the ring by the Select Committee, say that the PPP would be a disaster. It is equally funny that those commissioned by the PPP say that it represents value for money—that it will save £2 billion, £4 billion or whatever. Not surprisingly, the chap in the middle, the umpire, will say "It is a subjective judgment, but it is based on an objective assessment." I do not quite know how the circle can be squared.

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): Exactly the same criticisms could be made of Ernst & Young, which was employed by the Government to justify the PPP. My hon. Friend describes Ernst & Young as an umpire, but in fact it is there to advocate a course on the basis of only half the available information. As more facts emerge, Ernst and Young's analysis becomes increasingly dubious.

Mr. Robinson: My hon. Friend should have listened to what I was saying. I said that there were two sides, the PPP and its lot doing their stuff and Transport for London and its lot doing theirs. The Government then appointed Ernst and Young and gave it pretty independent terms of reference, and it came down somewhat in favour of both sides.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Robinson: In a minute. I have already given way an awful lot, and I need no encouragement from Liberal Democrats.

Issues such as this cannot easily be resolved in a matter of nice calculations. I do not really believe that this is what makes Londoners anxious. If we organise the partnership properly and devolve responsibility for delivery of infrastructure improvements to the private sector, we are more likely to obtain value for money than if we choose a route that has proved disastrous in the past.

What is of real concern to Londoners? They fear that by making a division and handing responsibility for the infrastructure to the private sector in the hope that it will produce the goods, we will create another Railtrack. Indeed, many have assiduously fomented precisely that impression, perhaps because they believe in it or perhaps because they are irresponsible. Let me say as objectively as I can, however, why I think that we are not doing that.

To understand why we are not doing that, people must first understand what went wrong with Railtrack and why. Railtrack was part of a botched, rushed privatisation, which meant that it was quoted on the stock exchange and subject to the disciplines not of the need for investment and services, but of the need to produce profits to justify a high share price enabling high dividends to be paid. There was clearly an inherent tension in the situation, to which Gerald Corbett drew attention after his resignation. Having tried to balance investment and safety needs with the pressure for profits, Railtrack was driven in the wrong direction by the three-monthly reporting systems of the City and the requirement to show ever-increasing profits, at the cost of safety and investment in services and infrastructure.

That is not what is happening with the infrastructure companies, which have not been privatised. First of all they must provide a service. Their only remuneration relates to the service, and to the number of passengers they carry. If they do not meet the required service level—that will improve with time—they are penalised. If they do, they are rewarded. There has been talk of sanctions, which is already a big sanction. Those companies are rewarded only if they succeed—that is, if they carry passengers at least as well as is being done at present. Improvements should be built in, and the most important—which can only result from modernisation and investment—is a 20 per cent. increase in capacity, and in the number of passengers carried, over the next five or six years. If they do not achieve that, they will not be rewarded. It is as simple as that.

Opposition Members shake their heads because they do not want to hear the facts. The sanction is this: if the companies do not provide the service, they will not be paid. If they do not improve the service, they will not be paid. If they do not increase capacity, they will not be paid. They can do all those things only by investing, which is why they have £3 billion lined up for the purpose in the City.

Given a proper account, we can allay the public's fears. I am sure that, if we are given a chance to press ahead with the programme, benefits will result.

Mr. Gardiner: Does my hon. Friend agree with the Comptroller and Auditor General, who said that under the PPP the private sector would not have any operational responsibilities on the network but would mainly be responsible for the work that goes on overnight while the

[Mr. Gardiner]

system is shut down, and that operations, including those of drivers and station staff, and responsibility for safety, would remain in the public sector?

Mr. Robinson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend because I was about to come to those points, particularly safety, but let me clarify where the split in regard to operations takes place. Drivers will be provided by the public sector, which will also set the timetable and service levels. Safety levels are set by the Health and Safety Executive, which has yet to sign off on the contracts, so that safeguard is already built in. They will be controlled by London Underground, which is already subject to them. The same standards will be imposed on the major infrastructure companies and monitored very closely. The safety issue will be emphasised in the new arrangements.

As I have said, the contracts are signed subject to two qualifications. I sincerely hope that the judicial review will find in favour, that Brussels will not interfere, and that the PPP will be able to proceed. However, there is one very nasty storm cloud on the horizon. The Mayor and Mr. Kiley could seek to appeal the decision in Brussels if it is positive to the PPP. That could get us into another legal wrangle, which might, I understand, last up to 14 months. My hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich, the Chairman of the Select Committee, said that we had been at it for four years. We have completed it. We are now there, but there is that one last danger: a spanner could be thrown into the works at the last moment.

I sincerely hope that the Mayor will not allow that level of irresponsibility to be reached.

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Robinson: I will not give way any more.

I urge the Mayor to accept the decision from Brussels and to let us get ahead with this. If there were to be a further delay of that order, all the work that we have done would be thrown in the air.

Mr. Edward Davey: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Robinson: I am not giving way.

The private sector would walk. We know the damage that we are having to repair with Railtrack. The investment would not be there and we would really face delay. The only sufferers would be Londoners. Given the success that I am sure the PPP will enjoy, they can look forward to progressive improvements. If we can get ahead with the project now, those benefits will come over the next few years.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. This is a short debate and many hon. Members are hoping to catch my eye, so I hope that contributions will be brief.

3.31 pm

Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): I note that the hon. Member for Coventry, North-West (Mr. Robinson) is continuing the hatchet job on Mr. Kiley that was started by the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mike Gapes) yesterday.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) on securing this debate and on the way in which she introduced it. I congratulate the Select Committee on Transport, Local Government and the Regions on its work and on the two reports that it has produced, which have been very important.

My main concern about the way in which the matter has been handled so far relates to the delay. It was in 1996 that the right hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) said at the Labour party conference that we had to get on with it as quickly as possible. Mind you, in the same speech, he said that our air was not for sale, so we have to take his comments with a pinch of salt.

The point was then made in the 1997 manifesto. Then in 1997 a motion was debated on the Floor of the House calling for swift action. Then in 1998 the Deputy Prime Minister came to the Dispatch Box with full majesty and said, "I am not going to be rushed." That is one pledge that he has stuck to.

Then in 1999, the right hon. Member for Hamilton, North and Bellshill (Dr. Reid) said that the Government were making steady progress. Then the 2001 manifesto said that the move was

> "the best chance in a generation"

to help the people of London. This year, the Prime Minister said that the Government would proceed when they were ready.

In Hong Kong, a whole airport was built in four and a half years. Land was reclaimed, roads were built, railways were put in place and tunnels were dug, all in the time that the Government have been deciding what to do about the PPP. In the interim, the Government have bumbled along, making do as far as the underground is concerned, providing a patchwork service. The tragedy is that the underground has such potential, but it has been consistently underfunded.

In the last 10 years of the Conservative Government, in cash terms, they put in £7 billion—£700 million a year. Labour Members are keen to say, "If you took out the Jubilee line, we would match the funding." It is not true. If one takes out Jubilee line funding from both Governments, the previous Conservative Government still put in more funding than this Government have done.

Then we had the fiasco in June last year. The then Secretary of State with responsibility for transport proudly announced that the grant had doubled from £267 million a year to £520 million a year, when £775 million had been promised and work had started on that premise.

What about the people of London? What has been happening in the interim? Simon Jenkins wrote in the *Evening Standard:*

> "For millions of working Londoners, the Tube is their only experience of Third World squalor. They may not visit London's prisons, mental hospitals or sweat-shops. They may not frequent the ghettos of Hoxton or the tenements of Walworth. They live in tidy homes, work in neat offices and eat in clean restaurants. But they use the Tube. It is the nastiest thing they do."

In the meantime, the Government have been working on the PPP. The right hon. Member for Hamilton, North and Bellshill said at the Dispatch Box in 1999:

> "We have said that we will undertake that there will be a publicly accountable, publicly owned operation on the underground, that we will enter into negotiations and that we will complete those negotiations. If a mayor is elected in the course of the negotiations, we will do everything in our power to bring him or her into the consultation process."—[*Official Report*, 27 January 1999; Vol. 324, c. 409.]

So much for that pledge. The manifesto in 2001 repeated it. It said:

> "Our agreement with the London Mayor and the Transport Commissioner offers the best chance in a generation to upgrade the tube."

During the general election, there was an agreement. Mr. Kiley was appointed chairman of London Transport on 4 May 2001. It is a familiar date. People will recall that the general election was called at that time. On 17 July, with the Government's majority safely in the bag, Mr. Kiley was unceremoniously sacked. In the intervening period, the election took place. I say to the Mayor and Mr. Kiley that accepting that point was probably the dumbest thing that they did. It was probably the smartest thing that the Government did. It was certainly the most cynical thing that they could have done.

When the Greater London Authority Bill went through the House, the Conservative party warned there would be a fractious relationship between the Mayor and the Government, and indeed the Assembly. Labour's London manifesto said in 1997:

> "We believe that both the Greater London Authority and the Mayor are needed to provide a voice for London and to take the strategic city-wide decisions about the future—promoting . . . a top-quality transport system".

When the Mayor is not measuring walls to see how far his neighbour fell the other day, he has not one but two pieces of litigation on which he is embarked. I hardly call that promoting London's transport system. There is litigation over the Deloitte and Touche report, and over the funding gap to which I referred in an intervention earlier. That funding gap is serious.

In the Mayor's letter of 12 June this year, he identified a £1.4 billion shortfall between the Government grant and the authority's funding needs. When I asked the right hon. Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers) when he was Secretary of State how that gap would be filled, and said that the debt would otherwise be dumped on the people of London, he denied that that would happen.

The debt is going to be dumped on the people of London—unless the Minister wants to intervene now to explain how the funding gap is going to be filled. I notice that he has gone rigid in case any movement may be interpreted one way or the other. The truth is that there is a debt, and the people of London are going to have to pay for it. The Minister shakes his head. That is just what the previous Secretary of State did, but an explanation is needed for the people of London.

I turn specifically to the PPP. The Select Committee reports are devastating. The Government's response rejects those reports in language that they will come to regret. The Select Committee has an in-built Government majority. For it to call on the Government to abandon a major plank of their transport policy—indeed, it is at the centre of policy on the nation's capital—is high stakes indeed. Just to give the reason that there will be further delay is completely unacceptable, for reasons that were well explained by the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) earlier.

In one sense, the PPP is half right. It is right to involve the private sector, which has demonstrated through countless privatisations that it is more efficient, but this particular way of using it is wrong. One of the lessons that we have learned about Railtrack is that horizontal integration, separating railway from the operations of Railtrack, is a key factor in the failure of its operation. We should have vertical integration.

The Minister for Transport (Mr. John Spellar): Is the hon. Gentleman therefore saying that the previous Conservative Government got it completely wrong, and if so will he put on the record his denunciation of that decision?

Richard Ottaway: The Minister is asking me to exaggerate in a way that I am not prepared to do. I am the first to admit that—for the reasons that I have just explained—things have not gone right, and I thought that that point had indeed been put on the record. I make no apologies for privatisations, 99 per cent. of which have worked. Privatisation of the airlines and the public utilities has been a tremendous success. *[Interruption.]* I make no apology for going ahead with the privatisation of Railtrack, but the manner in which it was done was wrong. It should have been split into the Great Western railway, the Great North Eastern Railway, and so on.

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend will be aware that, in restructuring the industry, the Government have chosen to pursue exactly the same model—an infrastructure provider and train operating companies—as that employed under privatisation. That is presumably a vote of confidence from the Government in the making of such a division.

Richard Ottaway: My hon. Friend makes my next point. The Government ought to be learning from Railtrack's difficulties and adopting vertical, rather than horizontal, integration. We should have an integrated management system that hires private contractors who are paid on delivery of a service. The nub of the difficulties with the PPP is that London Underground is going to pay the infracos on the basis not of what they are actually doing, but of how they are performing. To that extent, TfL's hands are completely tied. The principle is okay in theory, but the formula is unbelievably complex. It is a completely untested mathematical model, containing thousands of minute elements, to which TfL will be bound for the next 30 years. Its complexity is outrageous. For example, Madam Deputy Speaker, if you look—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. I am beginning to get a complex.

Richard Ottaway: I do apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker; I was concentrating so hard that I had not realised that the occupant of the Chair had changed.

The formula for abatement service points for defects and failures is: ASP to the power of AS, which equals epsilon i {ASP to the power of AS, times (1 plus UT to the power of 1)} minus ASP to the power of AS over THD. That formula applies only if ASP to the power of

[Richard Ottaway]

AS over THD is less than epsilon i—and so on. The system will be unbelievably complex, and will provide ample opportunities for the infracos to play the system and find loopholes. Entire careers will be made out of working a way through those formulae. The situation would be comical if it were not so serious.

Mr. Mark Field: Is not the nub of the problem that this form of PPP—consisting of a very complicated mathematical formula that my hon. Friend described far more fluently than I possibly could—above all lacks political viability? Many of us who did not support the creation of a London government are not in favour of this form of PPP, and it is clear that many London Labour MPs—other than those who are crazed by ambition to get a Front-Bench position—the Mayor of London and TfL are not in favour of it either. How on earth can this form of PPP be supported by a Government who supposedly support devolution?

Richard Ottaway: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The 1997 Labour manifesto makes it clear that Labour wanted the Mayor of London to run a top-quality transport system. That is a broken pledge. The entire system will be maintained by people over whom TfL will have no control or direction. If TfL identifies a problem, it will be unable to do anything about it, provided that the infracos can show that the trains are running back and forth in accordance with a mathematical formula. The system is unviable, untested and cannot be taken seriously. That is why Ernst and Young described the idea that the system would prove beneficial as a subjective view, and I agree with the Select Committee that this is not the basis on which such decisions should be taken.

I ask the Government to think again, otherwise the people of London will be the losers. It is they who will have the ball and chain of the associated debt and problems clasped to their ankles for the next 30 years, and it is the Minister's party that will have to deal with the political consequences.

3.45 pm

Ms Karen Buck (Regent's Park and Kensington, North): If there is one person who is guaranteed to send me scurrying to the warm bosom of my own Government, it is the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Richard Ottaway). In saying that, I intend no slur on my right hon. Friend the Minister. The hon. Gentleman's description of the tube as a third-world system was completely unrecognisable. For the most part, my comments on the PPP will be rather critical of the position that we have got ourselves into, but as someone who has used the underground every day for the past 20 years, I can say that it does London no favours—and nor is it true—to describe the underground in the terms used by the hon. Gentleman. It is important that we place on the record a true reflection of the system as it is.

Hon. Members probably agree with the Select Committee in several respects. We know that the tube desperately needs investment for maintenance and upgrade, that there has been underinvestment for most of the past two decades, and that the last thing that the underground now needs is further delay. It is critical that we start investing money as soon as possible. Even if the PPP delivers a significant increase in transport capacity—a moot point, and nor am I entirely convinced by the figures given by my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, North-West (Mr. Robinson) on the scale of the increased capacity that the PPP will deliver—it will constitute only a small contribution to the additional capacity necessary to make London work. Concerned as it is with maintenance and upgrade, the PPP is not the same thing as the investment that is necessary for a first-class transport service for London in the 21st century. That is why I want to concentrate on the absolute and overriding importance of in no way allowing Transport for London's contribution to the running of the PPP—assuming that it goes ahead—to undermine other transport projects in the capital.

The other point on which we probably all agree is that, whatever model we proceed with, the private sector—be it private finance or private companies—will have a major role to play. The Mayor of London spelled that out last week, as has Bob Kiley on several occasions. Sometimes, we descend into a crude debate on private versus public management models, but such debates completely miss the point. The question is whether the PPP before us is the right model for procuring services that will deliver improvements to our underground, and in that regard I congratulate the Select Committee on the rigorous work that it has undertaken.

There are two areas of concern: safety and value for money. I should point out that I am not one of those who are convinced that the PPP is a major compromiser of safety on the London underground. I deplore the shroud-waving tactics that are sometimes employed in this debate. It is much too easy and glib to reduce very complex questions about resource investment, management, lines of accountability and the supervision of subcontractors to a simple formula that states that privatisation equals death, and the public sector necessarily equals top quality, guaranteed service delivery. However, the fantastic complexity of the PPP contract system does raise legitimate questions about how safety will be guaranteed and assured.

When these issues have been discussed in the House—not least thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Harry Cohen), whose forensic analysis of them in Westminster Hall could be usefully studied by the world's leading accountancy firms, especially at the moment—the other models of PFIs that have been used to provide transport in London have been cited to demonstrate that the private sector can deliver where the public sector cannot. The Croydon tram is one example. My hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, Central (Geraint Davies) is in his place, and I acknowledge that it is a model of good practice; the Docklands light railway is another. However, those PFIs are dwarfed by the PPP contract process, and that is an important point.

Nobody is claiming that it is impossible to put together a public-private partnership or a PFI to run transport projects. Of course that can and has been done. It is almost certainly the way forward. However, does a PPP of such epic scale and complexity offer the same scope for ensuring accountability, value for money and safety? I do not think so. The walls of the underground carry an advertising slogan for a film that claims that its plot has more twists than a bowl of fusilli, and that could also describe the contracts.

We all hope that the Government are right. If the PPP goes ahead, as I think it will, who cannot hope and trust that the safety case will be guaranteed? I have confidence in the Health and Safety Executive and no doubt that the Government are as committed to the maintenance of safety as anybody. However, the question of blurred accountability remains within the complex contracting system. That means that those who are charged with the operation of the service—Transport for London—have to pick their way through the contracts to ensure that the travelling public are protected every day.

Angela Watkinson (Upminster): The hon. Lady is right that the Government claim that safety is the first and overriding priority and that it will never be compromised. Indeed, they have claimed that there will be a double lock on safety. However, the actual PPP contracts say very little about how safety will be improved by the London underground PPP. Instead, they provide for time-consuming, convoluted, paper-driven exercises, so it is unclear how safety will be improved.

Ms Buck: I have absolute confidence in the Government's commitment, but the HSE and the scrutiny and step-in powers of TfL will guarantee safety. I hope that they do, but the complexity and fragmentation raise questions. My concern is political as much as anything. As I said when the statement was made in February, the proof will not be today, tomorrow and next month, but every day for the next 30 years. That is a long time to be sure that there will be no problems. If there is a problem—be it a cost overrun or an accident—it will unfortunately be irrelevant whether the fault for it can be traced to the structure of the PPP, because it will get the blame anyway.

In the past few years—and we can argue about who is responsible—the PPP, as currently constituted, has not gained the confidence of Londoners. If we are fortunate and the lock works properly, the problem will not arise. If it does arise, we will have a major political problem.

Mr. Gardiner: I compliment my hon. Friend on her thoughtful and well-informed remarks. She acknowledged earlier—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Could the hon. Gentleman address the Chair rather than his hon. Friend?

Mr. Gardiner: Of course, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Could my hon. Friend clarify her remarks about private sector contractors needing to be involved with London Underground in any event to achieve the improvements over the period of the contract? How would the safety concerns that she has identified—she mentioned the word "fudging" in relation to the PPP—be better delivered under the public sector model? That is critical to understanding why she favours that over the PPP.

Ms Buck: The answer is simply that if the whole of the maintenance and upgrading of the trains and track are bundled together into a 30-year package, it is much more difficult for the public sector manager to scrutinise those projects. Under the contracts as currently set up, a subcontractor will report any problem to the private sector company, which will decide where responsibility for it lies and if it is in the contract with the subcontractor, it might be passed back to them to deal with. Bob Kiley was worried about a step-in power for TfL, but he also asked why it was stepping out of some responsibilities. If a contract is bundled up and then subcontracted, it is much more difficult for the public company to scrutinise what is happening. The letting of contracts between TfL—or London Underground, as it currently is—and companies to perform specific and discreet tasks, with a direct line of accountability, would have made such scrutiny much simpler and more manageable.

In response to my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, North-West, I must say that the case made by the Government—which made great sense in 1998, and I was very sympathetic to it—was mostly based on value for money. Therefore, it is no good dismissing the various analyses of value for money—whether for or against—as almost irrelevant. I apologise for paraphrasing my hon. Friend's argument, but one cannot dismiss those analyses as biased because of how and why they were commissioned when the whole core of the argument for the PPP was based on value for money. The referee report by Ernst & Young does not offer us any great confidence in the value for money of the PPP. It says that the seven and a half year comparisons, which are the only ones that the public sector will have any contractual and legal power to control, are less likely to provide support for a value-for-money argument. Over 30 years, Ernst & Young are more sympathetic to that argument, but between seven and half years and 30 years there is no legal framework for enforcing value-for-money requirements.

The value-for-money case on which the Government rest their argument is fragile. Ernst & Young itself admitted:

> "The value for money assessment is . . . part art and part science and involves a blend of subjective judgments and fact-based analysis."

Alarm bells ring for me at talk of "fact-based analysis". It is like chocolate-based confectionery—not an attractive proposition. That whole description is so vague and unspecific that it is hard to have any confidence in it.

Geraint Davies: Does my hon. Friend accept that on some large projects, such as the channel tunnel rail link and the Jubilee line, the private sector has delivered on budget and to time? In the case of the Jubilee line, the private sector did so after London Underground had completely failed to do so. The issue is whether we should hand the management and maintenance to organisations that can deliver better than has been achieved in the past, in a way that is controlled through contracts with clearly specified outputs.

Ms Buck: I do not want to get into a dispute about examples of other projects, but I am not convinced that either of the ones mentioned by my hon. Friend came in on time and on budget. I have no problem with giving the private sector a major role under contract and financial disciplines.

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: I do not want to dismiss the value-for-money argument, as of course it is important and one has to do one's best with it. I hope that my hon. Friend accepts that what I have said is at least substantially correct.

There were two other reasons for doing it in the way that we did. First, we needed to get the money from somewhere other than from Government. I know that my

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hon. Friend will accept that. Secondly, we had to improve on the management of projects. I think that both those objectives will be achieved.

Ms Buck: I do not want to pursue that argument much further. However, money coming from somewhere other than Government will be repaid through the fare box and through Government grant, with a significant rate of return for the private companies. Of course we need to lever in private money, but the idea that is sometimes implied—although not by my hon. Friend—that private companies will make a philanthropic contribution to public transport is slightly inaccurate.

I happily supported the idea of the PPP in 1998 for precisely the reasons set out by my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, North-West. In the absence of unlimited public money we need to bring in private money, but I remain unconvinced that this is the right way to go about it.

I return to the point that the PPP is only a small part of the formula for improving London's transport infrastructure. However, the major enhancements likely to be needed over the next 30 years to increase tube capacity—referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody)—are especially vulnerable to some of the value-for-money arguments about which we are concerned. When it comes to negotiating the scope for major enhancements under the PPP, Ernst & Young—the referee—said:

> "In practice, it will be difficult to resist the desire to maximise profit by the incumbent Infraco when Major Enhancements are planned. This is likely to have a negative impact on the value for money achieved although until such projects are brought forward, it is not possible to test the materiality of this issue. We have not tried to estimate what the costs of this behaviour might be, as the Major Enhancements are unknown".

That seems to me to make us extremely vulnerable. The major enhancements are likely to be the most important matter over the next 30 years.

How can we ensure that we can afford the whole framework of other major transport investments in London, whether it is additions to tube capacity or other transport projects such as crossrail and the east London line, if there is any risk that TfL's financial status will be compromised because PPP costs are not fully met? Other hon. Members have mentioned the matter, and I urge my right hon. Friend the Minister for Transport to do all that he can in the Department to ensure that Londoners—as taxpayers and fare payers using the transport system and London Underground—are not in any way disadvantaged by a contract between the Government and London Underground to which Transport for London is not party.

Transport for London will be contractually obligated to the PPP. Although the infracos within that partnership have received letters of comfort underpinning their financial security, Transport for London—which is responsible for the whole range of transport provision in the capital—will be exposed to a degree of financial risk, especially between years 3 and 7.5, for which it has not received comparable financial comfort.

If the PPP is to go ahead, the single most important thing is that TfL is given that financial security. It suggests that that might amount to £1 billion per quarter, but I am sure that negotiating positions on the matter are being struck already. We must make sure that the full operating costs of any PPP contracts are guaranteed by the Government, and that TfL and Londoners are protected from the financial risk. In that way, the other transport projects so essential to ensuring that London is a moving city in the early part of the 21st century can be guaranteed, and taken forward by Transport for London.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I make another appeal for brief speeches, as many hon. Members will be disappointed otherwise.

4.4 pm

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): I begin by paying tribute to the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), who sadly is not in her place at the moment, for the usual expert way in which she led the inquiry, and for the very fair way in which she chairs the Select Committee.

Perhaps the most telling point made in this afternoon's debate was made in the brief intervention by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Helen Jackson), who is not in her place either. Recently, she made a number of public accusations, one of which was that I and other Opposition Members had hijacked the Select Committee. It would take a braver person than I am to attempt to hijack the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich.

Even so, the fact that the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough chose to intervene to raise doubts about the proposal reinforces the degree of unanimity in the Select Committee. We heard wide-ranging evidence during the inquiry, and we concluded that the proposal was ill thought out and wrongly focused. The PPP will not work as it is supposed to, and the tragedy is that the ultimate losers will be the passengers.

The Committee's hopes were raised, briefly, when we took evidence from the previous Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers). He made it clear that he was willing to look again at the PPP. Sadly, two months later, he had looked at it again and had not reached a different view. That is why we are where we are today.

I want to raise four issues this afternoon. The first has to do with congestion and capacity on the tube, which is one of the biggest problems with the PPP. Those of us who use the tube regularly know just how full it can be. Last night, I boarded a tube train and people were pressing at the doors. Our underground is bursting at the seams.

Any project to modernise the tube must create additional capacity, yet there is abundant evidence that the PPP, and the Government's other modernisation plans, will not deliver that. The background document to the Government's 10-year plan makes that clear. It states:

> "An east-west rail link, such as CrossRail, will be the crucial element in providing crowding relief to east-west Underground lines . . . Our modelling suggests that, without it, most east-west lines on the Underground would be more crowded than today, despite other improvements."

That is the Government's own statement about what will follow from the PPP.

The Select Committee took much evidence from people involved in the process more directly than Ministers. Their views on the capacity issue were very clear. Dennis Tunnicliffe said that, assuming that the PPP was delivered successfully, the present system would expand its peak capacity by 15 per cent. That means that capacity will remain slightly behind growth.

London Underground admitted that overcrowding on the network would not be reduced, as demand for travel in London overall was at saturation. The practical reality of the PPP is that people of my age travelling to work on crowded tube trains today will probably be travelling on equally crowded trains for the rest of their professional lives. The PPP scheme is not the right one to resolve the problems people face every day.

Mr. Spellar: Has not the hon. Gentleman noticed that London's population has increased by the population of Sheffield in the past 10 years? It is estimated to increase by the population of Leeds in the next 10 years, and there are also a million more people in work in this country now. Has not the hon. Gentleman noticed those pressures on the system?

Chris Grayling: I have, and that is why I am looking to the Government to do something about the problem. The scheme that they propose, according to their own figures and those of London Underground, will not sort out the problem of underground overcrowding. The Minister has no solution to that—although he should, as it is his job to have one.

The second point that I want to make is that the PPP is wrong in developmental terms. The Select Committee took abundant evidence to the effect that the scheme focuses on stations in its early years, and not on tunnels or trains. We were told that PPP would deliver smarter new stations over the first seven years. That is a great idea, and means that we can have lots of new tiled walls, but Bob Kiley offered compelling evidence that we should first invest in trains and infrastructure.

We heard no evidence to suggest that at the end of that seven-year period passengers will have noticed significant improvements to their journeys, apart from smarter stations. Nine new coaches will be delivered in the first seven years. The hon. Member for Coventry, North-West (Mr. Robinson) was lambasting the record of the last Conservative Government but, between 1992 and 1997, they put new trains on the Central line, new trains on the Jubilee line, built the Jubilee line extension and put new trains on the Northern line. I will happily take an intervention from the hon. Gentleman if he wants to tell me how many new carriages this Government have added to London Underground. No? The answer is that there have been none—not one new carriage in the past five years.

The hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) was right when she wrote in *The Independent* five years ago that the priority needed to be channelling investment towards the core of our network. The tragedy is that, five years later, that has not happened.

Geraint Davies: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the Jubilee line has been started since 1997 and that it might have a few carriages?

Chris Grayling: I admire the hon. Gentleman this afternoon; he is clearly after a job on the Front Bench. I offer him my best wishes, and hope that he gets one. He might remember that it was the last Conservative Government who started building the Jubilee line. No new infrastructure project has been started on London Underground since 1997.

My third point in relation to the Select Committee's investigation is about the role of the Treasury. The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich referred to this in her opening remarks. A number of pieces of evidence about the Treasury's role in the project gave rise to concern. We need to bear in mind the Treasury's motivation for this project. As the hon. Member for Coventry, North-West was honest enough to say, the Treasury had difficult financial choices to make, and it chose to spend the money elsewhere. That remains true to this day. The fundamental reason for pursuing PPP is to keep the debt off the balance sheet. It is to be able to make investment without it appearing under public borrowing.

The total amounts that the Government are talking about are deceptive. As always, they have taken everything including the kitchen sink—every maintenance budget that London Underground has had—lumped it all together and multiplied the result by 10 to create a stunning figure for the next 10 years. In reality, the amounts of money going in to the underground are comparable to—and, in many cases, slightly less than—what was being invested in the early 1990s and certainly when the Jubilee line was being built.

One of the most disturbing things about the evidence taken by the Select Committee was the regular indication that the Treasury had intervened in the project to ensure that its phasing meant that the expensive projects took place in the later years while the cheaper projects took place in the early years. We heard evidence from a number of people that the Treasury had intervened during the process to ensure that not too much money was pushed upfront in the project. That is reflected in the fact that the focus in the early years is on smarter stations rather than on new trains or radical changes to the infrastructure. As a consequences, passengers will again have to wait for the improvements that they want.

It is scandalous, though not untypical, that no Treasury Minister was willing to appear to discuss the project. I give credit to the Transport Ministers for their assiduous attendance at the Committee and their willingness to talk to it on request. We can have no complaints about their behaviour in that respect. In stark contrast, their counterparts at the Treasury refused and continue to refuse to participate in debates on areas such as these, even when it is palpably clear that they are pulling many of the strings from behind the scenes.

Mr. Edward Davey: Is the fact that the Treasury intervened to make sure that the investment is backloaded, not frontloaded, evidence that public sector money will be used to invest, and that the route chosen will impose more of a burden on the taxpayer without producing value for money? The backloading proves that the taxpayer will pick up the bill.

Chris Grayling: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. This exercise is uncosted beyond the first seven years. If the more complicated projects are shoved into

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the second, third or fourth seven-and-a-half-year-period and not costed in the early stages, we have no idea who will pick up the bill in the end.

Mr. Davey: We will.

Chris Grayling: Well, it will be the taxpayer, as the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) says. The contracts for the private sector contractors are, as we would expect if they are looking after their interests properly, quite tightly phrased. There is no evidence that the private sector is taking on a huge risk. As the weeks have gone by, it is clear that the Government have been taking on more and more risk but pretending that the opposite is the case, in much the same way as happened over the setting up of Network Rail.

The Government have made great play in the past few months of the work done by Ernst & Young to assess the viability of the public and private sector options and which represents the best value for money. The former Secretary of State announced in February that he had decided to go ahead with the scheme, that he had looked at the Ernst & Young report and decided that the scheme represented value for money. Not only did the Select Committee take evidence that London Underground had not even concluded the contracts at that point and had asked the Secretary of State not to make a statement, so that he compromised London Underground in the negotiations with the contractors, but the great report upon which the right hon. Member for Tyneside, North based his judgment started with the most extraordinary health check. Ernst & Young said:

> "We have not sought to verify the accuracy of the data or the information and explanations provided by management."

In other words, Ernst & Young had simply checked that the sums added up. It is rather as if I said to the Minister, "I have six sweets in one pocket and six in the other. I think that I have 12—could you check that for me?" The Minister could get out his calculator and add six to six to make 12, but he has no idea whether I can count or whether I have three sweets in that pocket or 10. That is the problem. The consultants did not check the detailed assumptions but simply that the baseline sums added up.

Mr. Gardiner: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Chris Grayling: I will when I have finished this point.

To compound that shortcoming, we also learned from the report that the public and private sector comparators will cost the same amount of cash. The only difference is an accounting nicety, apparently designed to reflect a social cost saving of taking the private rather than the public route. That is not used in any other PPP or private financial initiative scheme; it is a nebulous counting concept used by London Underground. We did not even have direct factual information on which to base an assessment of the Government's judgment that one route was better value than the other. It was an accounting trick.

Tom Brake: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, at present, one has to be very careful of accounting niceties?

Chris Grayling: The hon. Gentleman's point speaks for itself. I apologise to the hon. Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) for not giving way to him first.

Mr. Gardiner: The hon. Gentleman claims that no substantive checking of the figures took place. I know that he must be aware of the National Audit Office report delivered on 15 December 2000 to his Committee, because his Committee commissioned it. Is the hon. Gentleman saying that appendix 2, which clearly sets out the methodology that the National Audit Office followed in establishing exactly what he claims has not been gone into is false, or will he accept that substantive investigations were carried out?

Chris Grayling: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the statement made by the former Secretary of State for Transport earlier this year, when he said:

> "Last autumn, I announced that I intended to take independent advice from Ernst and Young on the evaluation process that London Underground and London Regional Transport had followed, and on the robustness of their conclusions."—[*Official Report*, 7 February 2002; Vol. 379, c. 1126.]

I have referred to the health warning at the beginning of that report which, in my view, casts, at the very least, substantial doubt on the validity of the decision taken by the Secretary of State.

This scheme does not deliver real solutions to the congestion problems on the London underground. It delivers station improvements ahead of new trains and track improvements. It is financially questionable and does not enjoy the support of the public in London, the vast majority of London Members of Parliament, the democratically elected Mayor of London or any political party apart from the governing party, yet the Government are still determined to press ahead. All I can say to them is that it is not too late to change their mind; in Mr. Kiley, we have an impressive witness, with a track record, who came to the Select Committee with a clear action plan that, in our judgment, offered an attractive alternative. The Committee has seen no evidence that the Government have given full consideration to that option.

Mr. Spellar: If the hon. Gentleman finds the option so attractive, can he explain why his Committee said:

> "we have not been able to evaluate that plan in detail over the course of the inquiry"?

Chris Grayling: We took evidence. We did not make detailed evaluation—that is not our job; it is the Government's job to carry out detailed evaluation.

Mr. Kiley has a track record. He has delivered real improvements in other cities. He is the commissioner for transport in London, appointed by the democratically elected Mayor of London. At the very least, in the view of the Committee and in my view, we and the Government should be giving serious consideration to the options that he proposed. The Government constantly say that there is no alternative, yet we have heard strong evidence for one. It is not too late for the Government to take that alternative; I fear that the route that they are taking will not deliver the solutions for which they are hoping. I appeal to the Minister at the very least to think again.

4.21 pm

Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead): I remain convinced that the PPP system set up by the Treasury is not the best one and that it will not achieve the maximum modernisation of the tube. As I have told Parliament previously, I am not opposed to PPP in principle, but this model is especially poor. Four business men who gave the PPP its genesis in the Government and I question their credentials for operating a public service.

I doubt whether the total amount of private money promised for the system will come through; it certainly has not yet done so for the main line railways. The timing is likely to delay important infrastructure improvements; and the money will be repaid at a high cost to the public pocket.

We are living in the time of WorldCom and Enron, where there are no proper standards of auditing and accounting. Instead, auditors and accountants are complicit in deception.

When I asked a parliamentary question about the cost of underground projects undertaken by the private sector, the reply was given in terms of the value to LUL. Actual spending is very different from the assumed value to an organisation, when that value has been set by the organisation. As an accountant, I call that bad accounting practice—exactly like the WorldCom case.

The Treasury's alleged £2 billion saving from the PPP, based on that WorldCom approach and a comparator skewed against the public sector, must be deemed unreliable. Will the Minister tell us where the independent audit arrangements are for the PPP finances?

I hope that the Health and Safety Executive will not be complicit in the project. It has yet to report on the tube safety plans, but I was told in another parliamentary answer that the contracts were likely to take effect this summer. That could mean that the Minister takes a decision with no informed parliamentary debate on the safety issues. Will the HSE report be available before the recess, and will there be a parliamentary debate before the contracts go ahead?

A recently published report from the former Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions—its 2002 report—states that the 10-year planned investment for London—buses and tube—will be made up of £7.8 billion from the public sector and £10.4 billion from the private sector, making a total of £18.2 billion. A further £7.4 billion—described as public resource, but really a public revenue subsidy—is envisaged over the period, giving an overall total of £25.6 billion. Under the proposed system, much of the public money will not go directly into work on the tube but to company profits, dividends for shareholders and directors, and interest payments to City financiers.

Transport for London points out that there is a serious funding gap; it amounts to £1.473 billion for 2005–06 to 2009–10, including the sum of £771 million which is LUL's assessment of its funding needs in excess of the transport grant. TfL notes that an additional £170 million is necessary as a contingency reserve, for which nothing is provided in the current Government figures, despite the recommendation in the latest White Paper "Strong Local Leadership—Quality Public Services" that local authorities should have a duty to maintain adequate reserves. TfL also maintains that there is a £532 million gap over the period in provision for risks and other costs that need to be managed.

Under such contracts, too much risk remains with the public sector. In those circumstances—as my hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) pointed out—there is a powerful case for Transport for London to have the equal comfort that the Government have already provided for the private infrastructure companies. That would cover risks that were outside management's control—perhaps of magnitude or low probability—which it would not be sensible to fund from the transport grant.

The negotiations started at the behest of the Government have moved that risk from the infracos to TfL, so the Government should recognise their responsibility and provide the necessary comfort. The credit assessment agency, Standard and Poors, has already given TfL a "negative outlook" status, so the Government should rectify that with a letter of comfort and a proper funding agreement; otherwise TfL—and the tube with it—could go broke. Full-scale privatisation, which the Government say that they do not want and the public most certainly do not want, would inevitably follow.

The DTLR admitted a shortfall of £154 million per annum but maintains that it is

> "a reasonable target for management to reduce costs and increase revenues."

That sum is not a reasonable target; it approaches the entire operating budget of trains. PPP and PFI put more than 50 per cent. of TfL's cost base beyond its control. A high proportion of the remaining costs, such as business rates, are, in effect, fixed. The Government have pointed out that their PPP calculations were based on fares remaining constant in real terms. However, that leaves a huge rise in council taxes and huge cuts in services. The Treasury must think again.

The Treasury insists on unrealistic assumptions of wage growth—only 1 per cent. real wage growth. Public sector pay, London living costs, rail industry pay, higher national insurance costs from the recent Budget and extra management costs to cope with the complex PPP contracts all suggest that a higher figure will be necessary. The current assumptions are a formula for a showdown with the trade unions, which will be the Government's fault. The Government have also yet to agree, and pay towards, the administration arrangements of the London Transport pension fund.

Tube Lines, the infraco responsible for one of the three tube contracts, has submitted its draft financing documents. They show that lenders will have a panoply of powers to control or direct infraco activity in more than 100 decision areas. Bob Kiley said of that:

> "London Transport's assent to the ceding of such control to the private lending institutions would represent an extraordinary and inappropriate abdication of public responsibility."

The documents reveal that there will be no price protection after the first seven and a half years—that is, for the remaining 22 and a half years of the contract. Furthermore, contract termination would be exorbitantly expensive: LU would be forced to be pay whatever the infraco demanded to keep it going—not the market price.

There would be large windfall profits for the infraco's sponsors, lenders, advisers and insurers. In the case of Tube Lines alone, the amount would be more than £100 million—merely for getting the contracts, not for any aspect of its performance in improving the tube. Tube Lines' rate of return would be pushed up to 32 per cent.—not the 15 to 20 per cent. that the Under-Secretary of State for Transport told Parliament was likely. Such pay-outs

[Harry Cohen]

to the infracos' buddies on all the contracts are likely to amount to about £500 million—merely for getting the contracts, not for performance.

That is an abuse of public money. Bob Kiley said:

> "The Underground is in desperate need of investment, yet PPP has been allowed to degenerate into a simple fee-generating mechanism for investors and advisers who have so far taken no risk and will be signing contracts that shelter them from any real possibility of loss."

As the PPP will also impose a system of fractured management of the tube, it is plain that this financial scheme imposed by the Treasury is not the best way to achieve the maximum modernisation of the London underground, or of obtaining the best value for money.

4.30 pm

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): The most disturbing contribution to today's debate is that of the hon. Member for Coventry, North-West (Mr. Robinson). He talked, for example, about the capacity improvements that will come from the PPP. He showed a misunderstanding of the contracts and a lack of knowledge of the details of those contracts, which do not provide some of the benefits that he mentioned.

In an intervention, the hon. Gentleman said that there was no other way to find the money and implied that somehow we would magically find new money through the PPP. We all know that that is not the case. We all know that the Treasury and the GLA, through TfL, will have to provide large sums to make the PPP work, so I found his fundamental misunderstanding of key aspects of the PPP particularly worrying.

I want to take issue with the hon. Gentleman on two of his major reasons for justifying the choice of PPP. First, he argued strongly that London Underground did not have the skills or track record to undertake such a public investment programme. If that were the case, why have the Government allowed London Underground to be the main procurers and negotiators and to provide the main legal background in negotiating those highly complicated projects?

If the Government do not trust London Underground's management to manage programmes and projects for the next 30 years, why do they trust London Underground to negotiate those projects? London Underground has never before negotiated such detailed projects. The hon. Gentleman's views do not make sense. When the hon. Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) asked the hon. Gentleman those questions, he signally failed to answer. It is bizarre that London Underground has been given competence to procure, but not to provide.

The second major issue in the hon. Gentleman's speech about which I want to complain is his analysis that the Government had somehow to be the umpire and that the Government commissioned Ernst & Young to provide a report that would somehow choose between the many other reports that had been published. As the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) said, the Ernst & Young report failed to do that for the Government, but the hon. Gentleman should ask his right hon. Friend the Chancellor why he has failed to meet Bob Kiley throughout the process.

If the Government had wished to be an umpire, objectively judging the cases on both sides of the argument, why did the Chancellor refuse every single request for a meeting from the Commissioner of Transport for London? I find that deplorable. It came to the point where Bob Kiley's new year's resolution this year was that he would give up asking for meetings with the Chancellor. We know that the Chancellor is behind the opposition to alternatives to the PPP, so it really is a poor show that he will not even meet Bob Kiley, who has so much experience.

The hon. Member for Coventry, North-West then talked about delays. He made a plea to TfL and GLA: he asked them not to put further steps in the way of progress. In the past few years, many people have argued that the process should be speeded up and that Londoners wanted greater investment now, but the Government have stood in the way. I refer the hon. Gentleman to the debates in Committee when we considered the Greater London Authority Act 1999, under which the GLA was established. Liberal Democrat and Conservative members of that Committee predicted that it would take as long as it has done before Ministers could sign a contract. Ministers told us that we were talking rubbish.

I regret that we have been proved right, but that suggests that some of our other predictions about where the PPP will fail in due course may well come to fruition. I hope that they do not. I hope that we and some of the Government's critics on their own Back Benches are proved wrong, and I do so for the sake of our wonderful city—London—and that of the travelling public. However, all the evidence that we have heard from many objective people inside and outside, and in the Transport Committee and other Committees, suggests that the PPP will fail.

One of my major remaining concerns is that the public sector's ability to end those complicated contracts with the infracos is limited. The termination clauses are weak, and a substantial burden is likely to be placed on the public sector when those contracts have to be ended. I regret that. The Government ought to have insisted on sensible ways of ending those contracts, so that when common sense prevails it will not end up costing the taxpayer too much.

4.35 pm

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): We have had a very good debate, but it is a pity that each side has only 10 minutes for the winding-up speeches. It is also a pity that we are not debating a substantive Government motion in Government time, which is what the Select Committee requested, as we would have had a much more authentic idea of the House's view on the PPP.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) on tabling the substantive motion. I am not sure that even she would wish to vote for it, but it has certainly enabled us to have a constructive debate. I do not think that people would want to vote for it because it simply refers to reducing the resources by £1,000, which would achieve nothing. People outside the House would not really understand why we would want to reduce the money for the scheme given that most hon. Members have argued for more money.

I hope that the Minister will address the fact that the hon. Lady and her Committee have produced reports based on evidence. The powerful thing about Select

Committees is that, when they operate effectively, they ignore the prejudice and philosophical banter, and they go for the evidence. The Select Committee has carefully considered the evidence and reached its conclusions. The Government seem intent on rejecting all that evidence without putting any counter-evidence in its place.

The Government have insulted the people of London. They gave them the right to elect a Mayor, but when they did not vote for the right person, the Government no longer regarded the verdict of the people of London in that mayoral election as significant, and it is clear that the people of London think that this PPP provides the wrong solution.

Mr. Gardiner: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Chope: No, I will not give way at the moment because I have only a short time and almost all hon. Members who have spoken in this debate have done so at greater length than I will be allowed under these arrangements.

The present state of the London underground is unacceptable, and it has been getting worse during the past five years. We now have an underground system that is the most disrupted, overcrowded and costly network in the world. The hon. Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) said that we must not be too dismissive of the state of the London underground, but I refer her to the findings of the *Evening Standard* panel of commuters on 7 May. The panel went to Moscow, Paris, Berlin and New York and came to the conclusion that we in London had got the worst deal. On time, cost and comfort, the London underground is the worst.

My hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Richard Ottaway) rightly chided the Government for the long delay in getting to grips with the issue. We certainly had a clear policy at the 1997 general election, but I accept that it was rejected by the people. The Government had a clear policy at that election, but they have still to implement it. My hon. Friend referred to the statement that the Deputy Prime Minister made on 20 March 1998, in which he said that he would not be rushed. However, I remind my hon. Friend that the Deputy Prime Minister also said:

> "Our proposals will take a little time to establish and deliver."—[*Official Report*, 20 March 1998; Vol. 308, c. 1541.]

As he anticipated that there would be a delay of about two years before the PPP was up and running, he produced a two-year interim funding arrangement. Well, it is now four and half years later and we still have not got the PPP.

The hon. Member for Coventry, North-West (Mr. Robinson) said that the documents have been signed. I am not sure that they have. If they have been signed, why have they not been made available to TfL in their final form? TfL received documents on 8 May, but since then the documents have been further altered as a result of ongoing negotiations between the parties. I suspect that the Government will not make those documents available to TfL until after the challenge in the High Court later next month.

Mr. Gardiner: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Chope: Not at a moment, because of the time constraints to which I have referred.

The issue that is most worrying for Londoners is the funding gap. That has been referred to by several hon. Members including my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South. According to the Government and London Underground, that funding shortfall is £771 million in the first seven-and-a-half-year review period. Transport for London thinks that that is £400 million to £500 million lower than it should be; it thinks that the funding gap could be well over £1.2 billion. As a result of that funding gap, Standard & Poor's, a leading credit agency, has taken a very negative approach towards Transport for London, which, in turn, could lead to it having a high financial burden. Standard & Poor's stated:

> "In order to revise the outlook on TfL to stable, Standard & Poor's would require a funding agreement between TfL and the Government to provide sufficient cash to meet agreed costs in the first review period and to establish sufficient levels of reserves to enable TfL to manage short term risks; and clarification of the circumstances in which the Government would be likely to provide additional funding. If the funding concerns are not adequately addressed and significant uncertainties remain, the rating on TfL could be lowered."

That will add to the cost of Transport for London finding finance for all the projects that it wishes to undertake. The Commissioner of Transport for London, Bob Kiley, said:

> "The ultimate irony is that this highlights the weakness in the promise put forward by the PPP's most prominent supporters—that PPP would provide full and stable funding for rebuilding the Underground."

That funding gap can either be met by the council tax payers of London, by the Government—through national taxpayers—or by fares. The previous Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers) said that there was nothing inherent in the PPP that would require fares to increase. That, of course, is true. It is also true, however, that if there is a funding gap, and the Government refuse to meet it, the pressure is on Transport for London to raise the extra revenue from the people of London or through the fare box. We already have the prospect of the London underground being the most expensive such service anywhere in the world. Why should passengers have to pay much higher fares for a service that is still getting worse rather than improving?

Mr. Spellar: Will the hon. Gentleman tell us how much additional funding the Opposition are committing to London transport, so that we can add up their overall transport budget?

Mr. Chope: Clearly, the Minister anticipates that this process will continue until the next general election. If nothing is sorted out by then, we shall explain to the electorate exactly what we will do. We are facing up to the reality that there is a funding gap. The Government—for worse rather than for better—are in office, and they are responsible for answering the question of what will be done about that funding gap. The Minister is trying to find all sorts of excuses for not coming up with answers, and, up to now, he has blamed increased numbers of people living in London and the growth in the economy for the Government's failure to get to grips with the problems of London underground.

[Mr. Chope]

London underground users have become the victims of a squeeze by the Treasury, which is determined that any capital investment in the infrastructure is off balance sheet—Enron and WorldCom-style accounting—even if it means delay, poor value for money and de facto abandonment of the principle of risk transfer. Meanwhile, we have Transport for London, and a Mayor who is openly hostile to the private sector. Between them, the Mayor and the previous Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Tyneside, North have made the private sector unwilling to invest except very much on their terms. That is why we have a PPP for seven and a half years, after which it can be torn up by the private sector, leaving Londoners with an incomplete project and a substantial liability to repay the debt.

This saga is an appalling indictment of the Government. It is a betrayal of the interests of the people of London. They deserve better. I hope that the Minister, in his reply, will assure them that we will get answers quickly, and that we will see material changes for the better in the quality of London underground.

4.45 pm

Mr. Spellar: On 8 May, the Government responded in full to the Select Committee's two recent reports on London Underground's modernisation plans. We welcome Parliament's continued interest in this important subject. That is what it says on my brief. That interest has been pretty thin, however, on the Opposition Benches. We have had contributions from two London Conservatives and two London Liberal Democrats. My hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Harry Cohen) asked for another debate, but Opposition Members are not exactly bursting for it. They, like the public in London, are getting pretty bored with this subject; they want us to get on with it and start delivering improvements for the travelling public in London.

It is fair to say that these plans have been subjected throughout their development to an unprecedented level of scrutiny, and not just from Parliament. They have been examined and challenged at every opportunity by numerous critics, and they represent probably the most robust and rigorous public-private partnership proposal ever. Bluntly, we can either move forward with these plans or go back to methods that failed passengers in the past. Neither the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) nor the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) had a clear answer to that.

I also know that underground staff want to focus on running a world-class train service for customers. My hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) rightly took the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway) to task for his deplorable comments about London underground. No one denies that there are improvements to be made. We should also look at the real progress that has been made by London Underground. Last year, the amount of wasted customer time due to delays was cut by nearly 7 per cent., and more than 95 per cent. of its peak hour trains ran on time. Those improvements are being maintained—and in many cases bettered—this year. Recently, the tube broke a record by running more than 5,000 rush hour trains without a single cancellation due to missing drivers.

Instead of the talk about third-world services and all that nonsense written by journalists, we should be congratulating those staff who have successfully delivered a frequent and reliable service under the new Central line timetable. We should also congratulate the Northern line staff who have banished memories of the "misery line"—of which headline writers were so fond—by providing a service good enough to impress even the *Financial Times*. Across the network, customers are now giving London Underground some of its highest ever customer satisfaction scores. It is listening to its customers and finding new ways to improve its service—for example, by implementing a range of better ticketing facilities, and putting more staff on platforms to help reduce the time trains spend in stations.

I—even if the hon. Member for Croydon, South was not—was very impressed by the commitment and dedication to passengers demonstrated by the staff who ran a continuous 42-hour service during the recent jubilee celebrations. Within an hour of the event finishing on the Monday evening, 1 million people had been dispersed safely and efficiently, most of them on the special tube service. London Underground staff can be proud of the way that they served the public during the celebrations. They deserve better than the contemptuous remarks of the hon. Member for Croydon, South about a third-world service.

We also know, however, that London Underground's track record on the management of infrastructure projects is less good. It is almost a tale of two jubilees. Its success during the golden jubilee contrasts starkly with the Jubilee line extension project—delivered 20 months late, yet still not providing the expected level of performance. An extra £1.4 billion had to be found to complete the project. In answer to the Liberal Democrats, there is a world of difference between contracting for a service or undertaking the negotiations for the contract, and actually trying to micro-manage that contract. London Underground's performance in trying to pull together and integrate all the elements of the contract has not been good. It has a successive record of failure on price and on time in relation to trying to micro-manage that. However, projects such as that for the docklands light railway have come in to price and on time. We want to ensure that London Underground is able to do better in future.

We believe that the PPP will ensure better results, because it has been designed to put passengers first. Unlike alternative plans, it provides answers to the questions that really matter to the passengers. Will a service be available? How quickly will that service get me to my destination? Will the service be clean, comfortable and pleasant? Another aspect is not part of the PPP, but it is important. British Transport police are doing much work to make the service safe and secure.

The companies involved will have to meet demanding targets to satisfy passengers on those issues. They must install high-quality equipment on time, make it work and maintain it well. However, they will also have the freedom to innovate and to look for new ways to satisfy their customers. If they succeed, they will be rewarded, not excessively, as the Mayor alleges, but with an appropriate rate of return. However, that will be balanced by the considerable risks that they will take on. If they fail, they will be penalised, with no limit to the size of the penalties. Every penny of the money provided by shareholders—some £500 million—is therefore at risk.

That is why the plans offer the right incentives. They concentrate not on administrative processes, but on getting the right results for passengers.

I was surprised by the comments of the hon. Member for Croydon, South who said that we should monitor inputs rather than outputs. I would have thought that the essence of modern contracting was to consider the outputs one achieves and to leave inputs to the specialists who are best able to deal with them. His remarks revealed very backward thinking.

We know that the proposed methods work. The new Northern line trains—I have mentioned the great improvements in reliability—supplied under PFI have helped underground staff to transform the old "misery line" into one of the best performing parts of the system. The trains run at about 98 or 99 per cent. reliability.

Mr. Gardiner: Has my right hon. Friend looked at the year-on-year funding for the tube against the successive three-year funding commitments given over the past 20 years? Has he noticed that Governments have consistently failed to deliver the investment that they promised? Does he understand therefore that, for many of my constituents, the chief attraction of the PPP is that the Government are contractually committed to putting the money in year on year and cannot suddenly decide in 10 years' time that their political priorities lie elsewhere? Does he understand that the public sector route is the route of uncertain investment—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is far too long an intervention for this stage of the debate, especially if it is being read.

Mr. Spellar: But it was valuable none the less, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and very well expressed. As my hon. Friend rightly suggests, £1 billion will be sustained year on year and that will be enormously welcomed by the travelling public.

Mr. Chope: In the time that remains, will the Minister tell us how the Government propose to fund the £1 billion funding gap that has been identified?

Mr. Spellar: The enthusiasm of Opposition Members for Ken Livingstone and their gullibility for everything he says are truly extraordinary. We do not agree with his figures that claim a funding gap. Every passenger transport executive and passenger transport authority in the country has schemes that they rightly want for their people. However, we do not regard it as appropriate to put up a wish-list and then claim that there is a funding gap. We shall have that argument with TfL, but I am surprised that Conservative Members have become such ready allies of Mr. Ken Livingstone on this issue.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Spellar: My hon. Friend will have an opportunity to reply at the end of the debate, so I shall rattle through this part of my speech.

This is by far the largest-ever commitment to public investment in the London underground. The plans will unlock £16 billion in all over the first 15 years, including £4 billion from the private sector. Vast sums from both Government and business will give London the modern metro that it deserves.

My hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North identified the most important question that passengers will ask. Are the plans safe? Throughout the development of the plans, London Underground has put safety first. It has worked with private sector contractors for many years and it has an excellent safety record. It will retain unified management control of operations and its overall responsibility for safety across the entire network. The plans will allow it to take swift action, if necessary, to ensure the safe operation of the system.

However, the assessment of whether the underground is capable of being operated safely is, quite rightly, a matter for independent experts, not politicians. The Health and Safety Executive's assessment of London Underground's safety case for the operation of these plans is continuing. Let me once again state clearly and categorically: if the HSE does not accept London Underground's safety case, the plans will not proceed.

We want to modernise the London underground system and we have to work with private sector engineering firms to do so. That has always been true. There is no wholly public sector alternative. The real question, then, is how we engage the private sector.

Even TfL does not oppose, in principle, a public-private partnership for the tube. Its consultation response makes this clear However, the Mayor says that he has a problem with his role under the PPP. In our view, under these plans, his role will be to ensure that London Underground and its contractors deliver the quality of service that passengers expect. That is exactly what he should be concentrating on. The Mayor's alternative plan suggests that he wants to return to the days when London Underground had to plan the details of what its private sector contractors did, when they did it and how they did it. That is the approach that failed passengers year on year. It led to the failures on the Jubilee line extension, the Central line upgrade, which has only now come right, and on dozens more infrastructure projects over the years. TfL says that it could do better, but we have to take that on trust. We must consider its track record.

Abandoning the modernisation plans now would mean years of delay and decay while the Mayor decides what to do and how he would like to fund it. His decision to take further legal action to try to stop the plans is extremely disappointing, because the public are getting fed up with the long delays. They want us all to get on with the work, and I hope that that message is heard beyond this Chamber. Our intention remains that the modernisation plans should come into effect as soon as possible. That is what is best for London and best for the travelling public in London.

4.57 pm

Mrs. Dunwoody: With the leave of the House, may I say that this has been an important debate, not least because London deserves a really good underground system. The Select Committee raised several vital questions that have, sadly, remained largely unanswered. I believe that the House of Commons will need to return

[Mrs. Dunwoody]

to this subject, but I am distressed that we have not at least considered alternatives to a scheme that the Committee found to be flawed and possibly unworkable. The House of Commons will, in due course, want to demand more answers and more action from Her Majesty's Government.

Debate concluded, pursuant to Resolution [11 June].

Questions deferred, pursuant to Standing Order No. 54(4) and (5) (Consideration of estimates) and Order [20 November 2000].

Individual Learning Accounts

[Relevant documents: Third Report from the Education and Skills Committee, Session 2001–02, on Individual Learning Accounts, HC 561-I, and the Government response thereto, HC 987; and Department for Education and Skills and Office for Standards in Education: Annual Report, 2002, Cm 5402.]

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That further resources, not exceeding £12,839,695,000, be authorised for use during the year ending on 31st March 2003, and that a further sum, not exceeding £13,409,689,000, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund for the year ending on 31st March 2003 for expenditure by the Department for Education and Skills.—*[Angela Smith.]*

4.58 pm

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): It gives me great pleasure to introduce the debate on the third report of the Select Committee on Education and Skills entitled "Individual Learning Accounts". This is an important day, because it is the day on which the House approves the moneys to deliver education programmes and policies. We also have the opportunity to debate individual learning accounts, which were an innovative and exciting new project to deliver lifelong learning and training opportunities for those who had never had them and to change the culture of training and education in this country. Ironically, however, because the programme bent too far towards a lighter touch and towards not taking too bureaucratic an approach, it ran into severe difficulties. Only last October, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills announced that the programme would be halted for the time being.

The Select Committee report was published on 1 May and it was an attempt to do what Select Committees can do best. It tried to analyse what went wrong, point out and underline the strengths of the programme and—in a creative dialogue with the Department for Education and Skills—give pointers to how it could reintroduce a new programme that would not run into the difficulties that the first one faced.

I believe that there is a renaissance of the Select Committee system and I am delighted to be part of it. I was pleased to hear part of the debate on London Underground and to participate in this important debate on individual learning accounts. However, it is a great pity that both debates have been severely truncated by the long statement arranged by Government business managers. Those of us who are interested in education do not have many opportunities to debate it, and it is deplorable that the debate in Westminster Hall on the Science and Technology Committee report on the research assessment exercise is being held on the same day.

Many hon. Members want to speak so I shall rattle through my remarks. The members of the Select Committee worked hard on the report. We knew that we would have to produce a report as soon as the Secretary of State made her comments in October. The Department for Education and Skills wants teachers to have a baseline assessment and performance review. When we formed the new Committee, we decided that what was good enough for teachers was good enough for Ministers. We introduced the same system and interviewed all six Ministers so that we could make a proper evaluation of how they intend to deliver their policies and so on.

Ironically, we started with the Secretary of State, who was a few minutes late because she had been conferring with senior people in the Treasury about pulling the plug on the ILA programme. It is also ironic that by the time we completed our fast-track investigation into ILAs, on which the debate is based, two of the Ministers on whom we originally did baseline assessments and performance reviews had moved on after 11 and a half months in the Department. Indeed, the Minister who gave most of the evidence has moved back to the Treasury, in a sense from whence he came, and a new Minister has the job of responding.

I want to draw the House's attention to the amount of work that members of a Select Committee put in to ensuring that we have a thorough investigation. We take, listen to and sift through evidence, both oral and written, before producing a report. It is the role of a Select Committee not just to lambast but to scrutinise the Government. We should come up with new ideas and innovations, perhaps by thinking outside the box, that the Department might find useful.

I believe that our report is even-handed. It says that the programme went severely wrong, but it also commends it for being good and innovative. The programme allowed some interesting work to take place. It opened the door to skills and learning to people who had not had that opportunity for most of their lives and who had not accessed learning for a long time. We tried to strike a proper balance, which is what a Select Committee should do.

I want to emphasise two things. The Government did a thorough job in their recent comments on our report. They largely took it on board in a positive spirit. As Chairman of the Committee I appreciate that. However, I was also greatly disappointed, as I told the permanent secretary when he came before the Committee for his annual visit and interrogation only yesterday morning. There is such a thing in the House as a bush telegraph. We heard that an announcement on individual learning accounts mark 2 would be made very soon, before the summer recess. Unfortunately, we have now heard that that will not happen because of the ministerial changes, and that was confirmed by the permanent secretary. People who are waiting to have a crack at gaining new skills through the ILA will not get that opportunity for several months. It is almost a year since the Secretary of State came before the Committee and announced that the programme would be pulled in favour of individual learning accounts mark 2. It seemed to us as we took evidence that the approach by civil servants and Ministers was too leisurely. They said that it would take a long time to get ILAs right. I said that in a commercial organisation the lights would burn all night for many nights until a new programme was introduced.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): The Chairman of the Select Committee refers to commercial organisations. Does he agree that it is not only the potential learners who suffer from the delay in introducing a new scheme, but also the many—and in particular, the small—learning providers?

Mr. Sheerman: I was about to come to that, and the hon. Gentleman is right.

In terms of being even-handed—and the report was unanimous—we went to the heart of the lessons that must be learned. The closing speeches in the last debate seem appropriate to our discussion, which also involves the relationship between a Department and a private sector partner. There are many forms of such partnerships and it is important to have the right one. The more we explored the relationship between the Department for Education and Skills and Capita in relation to individual learning accounts, the more we thought that that relationship was not right, and that there was something wrong with the contract. It seemed to us that here was a relationship with a major, well-known FTSE 100 company, with great experience in delivering services of this type. We looked beyond whatever went wrong with the wording of the contract. Sometimes we became rather irritated about commercial confidentiality; I am not sure that commercial confidentiality in these contracts was as important as was claimed. We said in our report that there should be a bit more transparency on what the deal was. Why should not the public know? It is their money. Why should we not have more knowledge?

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): I am extremely glad that my hon. Friend has made that point, because it strikes me that whereas in the past few weeks we have been able to read in the financial pages of the major newspapers full details of the accounts of Enron, and more recently WorldCom, in minute detail, we cannot find out how much the Department has paid, out of public funding, to Capita, or what penalties have been incurred as a result of the failure to deliver the skills training.

Mr. Sheerman: My hon. Friend makes a fair point, which needs no reply from me.

I was saying that, yes, we do criticise the Department for probably getting the relationship with Capita wrong. I thought that it was refreshing that the Department came back and said that we had been right—that in renegotiation of that contract it would hope to get, if Capita—

Jonathan Shaw (Chatham and Aylesford): Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the reasons why the relationship was not right may have been the pressure on time, as reported in the special internal audit review? That review says that the time pressures contributed to the problems experienced by the programme and that the Department was under severe pressure to deliver, leading to problems in setting up the contract with Capita?

Mr. Sheerman: There is a strong element of truth in that too; I believe that there were time pressures. However, we should also take into account the fact that the commitment to set up individual learning accounts was made in the Labour party's May 1997 election manifesto. The ILA experience developed over a very long time, and it is the responsibility in one sense of the Government and the Department that, when they decided that they had to get the programme up and running, they were under great pressure of time.

To finish my criticism of Capita, it seemed to me that the contract was not right for that major company. It seemed to the Committee that if one has a private sector partner, it should take a fair share of the risk, and it should be very clear that the private sector partner is taking a fair share of that risk; that should have been in the agreement.

Capita has great experience and knowledge across the piece and has entered into many contracts with the public sector—including, I admit, with the House of Commons

[Mr. Sheerman]

and the Select Committees, because it handled some of our recruitment—and with various Government Departments, including the Department for Education and Skills. The company claims grandly that its delivery goes beyond the terms of the written agreement and beyond the written word. We were therefore surprised that Capita was not able to flag up at an early stage the problems that might occur in this type of programme, devised and constructed as it was, or to give early warning when things started to go wrong.

Some people were blowing whistles. Some were pointing out that the programme would be prone to abuse; they tended to be the little people—the small companies that were the training providers. They gave a lot of evidence to our Committee to the effect that they were worried about the laxness of the structure, and very soon after about the way in which it was operating. We have tried to ensure that our criticism of Capita is fair, and I believe that we all agreed that there were severe shortcomings on Capita's part. We also criticised the Government for not getting the contract right in the first place, but we wanted to go beyond that and say that there were lessons here for all Government Departments. We do hope that this knowledge will not remain in the Department for Education and Skills silo. Everyone should read about problems that can arise in relationships with the private sector.

My colleagues on both sides of the House know that I am not the sort of person who is averse to private sector partnerships. In fact, I believe that they are a very creative way to deliver policy and I have no qualms about that; but they must be right. They must be businesslike, and the people in the various Departments must know what they are doing when they are signing up. I believe that a reading of our recommendations will do all Departments good if they are about to embark on a relationship and a contract with a private sector partner, however complex. This contract was not rocket science; it was quite simple, and if it could go so wrong, it is no wonder that it is so difficult to get right very sophisticated contracts such as that discussed in the Chamber earlier. That is what our colleagues on the Transport Committee have argued as well. Let us use the experience creatively and learn the lessons.

We have criticised the Department, but we support the general principle of the light touch. There should not be so much bureaucracy that it prevents people having access to the programme and kills excitement and innovation. We said strongly that the criticism of events surrounding individual learning accounts should not force any Government Department, especially the Department for Education and Skills, to cease being innovative and flexible and exercising a lighter touch. Departments can still do that and take the precautions suggested by the Committee.

Our message to the Department is strong and clear: do not be deterred from being innovative and trying to avoid a vast bureaucracy every time a programme is introduced, but bear in mind the fact that there are people out there eager to learn and to get the skills for this century, who want to be more productive in their employment. They are waiting for the programme to come back, and it has been a long time a-coming. There are also, as the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) suggested, many small providers who have been hurt by the experience.

Without being too negative, I end on a note of warning. It is good to see my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (John Healey), who is now the Economic Secretary to the Treasury, with us. We got good value from him as a Minister in the Department for Education and Skills, in terms of his willingness to come back to the Committee time and again and to supply a great deal of information. We were very grateful for that.

I understand that the National Audit Office has almost completed its investigation. The ombudsman is also looking into the matter. We never argued that everybody who had been hurt by the cancellation of ILAs should receive compensation, but if the Government are to be true to their word, they should be honourable. They said that they would pull the plug on the programme on 7 December, but they pulled it three weeks early, on 23 November, and people were hurt by that process. We said clearly in our report that if the Government are honourable, the people hurt by that three-week change of mind, whatever the reason, should be compensated if they can prove—yes, if they can prove—that they were harmed financially by the change of date.

The Government replied that they could not give compensation across the piece. Of course they cannot. We do not expect the Government to give compensation for training that was geared up for but never delivered, but they can give compensation for a three-week period to providers who were geared up and able to supply the training, which was no longer paid for.

I shall not prolong my remarks, as I know that many other hon. Members wish to speak. I hope that people will read the report as an exemplar of a good Select Committee report and as reflecting the right relationship between a Department and a Select Committee. We achieved a balance between scrutinising a good programme that went wrong, and making sure that we drew the general lessons from the mistakes that occurred. That is what the House is about.

If there is to be a renaissance of interest in our debating Chamber and in what Parliament does, and if the Select Committees play their cards right and we do the job well, we can be at the heart of the regeneration of the life of Parliament. I know that all my fellow members of the Committee worked extremely hard on the report on a cross-party basis and are proud of it—and they have every right to be so. I am very proud to be their Chairman and I commend the report to the House.

5.20 pm

Paul Holmes (Chesterfield): As a member of the Select Committee on Education and Skills, I am pleased that the importance of the report has been recognised by our debating it on the Floor of the House. The permanent secretary at the DFES said only yesterday that the report was very accurate and very good. The Government's recently published response accepts a good many, although by no means all, of its findings and recommendations.

The report is an important illustration of the key role that Select Committees can play in scrutinising the Executive, even though they do not as yet have enough independence or resources to do the job properly. It is also worth noting that the former Minister for adult skills, now the Economic Secretary, and his departmental officials were, as the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) said, in the main refreshingly open and forthright in giving evidence to the Committee about what had gone wrong with the planning and delivery of the ILA scheme. It has to be said that that approach could be commended to other Departments, some of which are less willing to admit to their mistakes.

In principle, ILAs are an excellent scheme with wide support throughout the House and the country. Many reputable and capable training providers use them to deliver high-quality training to a very large number of learners. It is therefore all the more regrettable that the report had to be a damning account of what went wrong with their design and delivery at even the most basic levels.

First, the DFES devised a scheme that had absolutely no safeguards for the legitimacy or quality of those who were registered as training providers. It provided a cowboys' charter for the unscrupulous to rip off the taxpayer and the learner alike. All that people had to do was fill in one side of A4 with their name and address and details of the bank account to which taxpayers' money could be sent. That was it; there were no quality controls whatever and no prior registration or inspection system to ensure that a company was legitimate, or that it could deliver quality training with qualified trainers or provide quality distance learning materials. The scheme was a licence for the unscrupulous to print money.

DFES officials told us that they were trying to be innovative and to avoid bureaucracy to attract non-traditional learners and new learning providers. They certainly did that; by throwing the baby out with the bathwater, they created a scheme that soared past its 1 million user target in record time, but also exceeded its £201 million budget by 50 per cent. We will probably never know how much of that £300 million was lost to fraud and scams. The question also remains whether the main reason for the scheme's sudden closure was massive budget overrun, massive fraudulent abuse or a combination of both.

Secondly, Capita—a company that was supposedly expert in such work—failed to warn the DFES of the glaring scope for abuse in the scheme. It went on to run a scheme that was widely criticised by legitimate and experienced training providers because of its poor complaints system, a call centre that often could not cope with the volume of work and computer software systems with inadequate security built in. Capita, which was paid more than £50 million for the contract, boasts in its annual reports of its experience in handling Government and local government projects, including housing benefit schemes with complex systems designed to try to prevent fraudulent claims.

Not once, however, did Capita warn the Government that, although it could implement the scheme as the Government had devised it, there was no quality control on purported training providers, which left it wide open to abuse. Worse still, Capita went on to devise software that assumed that training providers were all genuine and which had inadequate safeguards. Mr. Simon Pilling of Capita told the Committee that

> "an authorised learning provider with their authorised user ID and password could go on the system and draw out information from the system."

Mr. Paddy Doyle of Capita admitted to the Committee that it was "a very open scheme".

How far the fraudulent abuse went is unclear. York Consulting was given 1,500 account holders' numbers by Capita, which said that they belonged to people who had used their accounts. When York Consulting contacted those people, however, 27 per cent. of them said that they had not used them. That shows one of two things—staggering incompetence on the part of Capita, whose records were so inaccurate, or a level of fraud that if repeated across all users would amount to up to £65 million or more lost to the fraudulent plundering of accounts.

The Committee's evidence was damning on all those issues, but the Department's own internal investigations, which were published yesterday in response to the Committee's report, make equally damning reading. The special internal audit review said:

> "The target to achieve one million ILAs by March 2002, meant that the ILA Team were under severe time pressure to establish a . . . contract with Capita . . . The time pressures contributed to the problems experienced by the programme . . . and were further exacerbated by the fact that some other key areas of ILA development and operation did not demonstrate consistently good practice. These included: . . . No business model was developed to help identify strengths and weaknesses in the policy options available as the programme was developed . . . No decision log was set up to record and track decisions made . . . Although a great deal of management information appears to have been collected by Capita, it was not provided to the Department in a sufficiently helpful format to indicate possible abuse of the system . . . or to provide the information for Ministers to decide upon action needed . . . Departmental guidance to learning providers did not clearly specify the requirements and expectations of the programme."

Cap Gemini Ernst & Young was asked to carry out a security report on the Department's and Capita's operation of the scheme. It says:

> "The contract made no clear mandates or stipulations regarding the assessment of the security requirement or the ongoing security management."

It continues:

> "No requirement was specified with regard to the determination of the security requirement, nor were existing Government guidelines regarding Security Risk Analysis followed."

It goes on:

> "No structured mechanisms and procedures were established to identify promptly trends and patterns of access and usage of the system that might have indicated misuse."

It observes:

> "No procedures were established to ensure that the requirements of the Security Policy were being adhered to."

It further comments:

> "No procedures or plans were established for ongoing testing of the system".

It concludes:

> "No procedures were established for the archiving of relevant log files for retrospective analysis."

So the reports go on—damning list after damning list of things that were not done by the Department or by Capita.

Thirdly, the Government mishandled the closure of the scheme. When the level of fraud and abuse eventually became evident, the scheme's sudden closure led to financial loss by legitimate training companies.

Mr. Andrew Turner: Before the hon. Gentleman moves on to the closure of the scheme, which was clearly

[Mr. Andrew Turner]

a problem, he may be surprised to hear that in response to the Committee's recommendation—No. 30—that there should not be an automatic assumption that Capita should be the provider to take forward any new ILA scheme, the Government said:

> "We are continuing to work closely with Capita"—

to wind down the scheme. I understand that, of course, but they go on to say:

> "A successor scheme will be a major test for Capita".

That suggests that it has already been decided that those who failed last time will get a second chance, which the small private providers that have gone bankrupt will not get.

Paul Holmes: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman about the effect on small providers and about the fact that the Government are ignoring the Committee's recommendation that Capita should not go on to run the second scheme. I shall return to that later.

As a result of the sudden closure of the scheme, legitimate training providers lost jobs and money, and some went bankrupt. Some companies are pursuing claims for compensation by various means and have complained to the ombudsman. A particularly legitimate claim for payment can be made by companies and further education colleges that continued to complete and deliver courses that learners had begun before the sudden closure of the scheme last November despite the fact that the DFES would not honour the ILA payments for those legitimate bodies to provide that training. On 30 November, seven days after the plug was pulled on the scheme, the Association of Colleges surveyed its members. Of the 105 colleges that replied, 84 expected to lose more than £1.25 million between them, because they were continuing to provide training to honour commitments that they had made to students, but the DFES would not provide the money for that training. Surely we can rely on further education colleges to provide the documentation to show that they have legitimate students, who receive legitimate training, and that the Government should therefore pay.

The Government wrote to all training providers—more than 9,000—and learners, to tell them that they had until 7 December until the scheme closed. They warned learners not to panic, and emphasised the date. However, they closed the scheme, with no notice, late in the afternoon of 23 November. Critical Skills, an excellent training company in my constituency, consequently lost out. It completes its accounts at the end of each month and therefore intended to send the paperwork to the Government at the end of November. That would have left it a clear week until the announced Government deadline. It could supply documentation, which I have seen and has been sent to the Government, to show that it provided legitimate training to more than 190 trainees. Yet the Government will not pay for it.

Many small training firms throughout Britain are in the same position. However, I understand that the Derbyshire learning and skills council stepped in to support the legitimate training that not only Critical Skills but other companies in Derbyshire provided but for which the Department for Education and Skills would not honour its commitment to pay. If Derbyshire learning and skills council can do that, why cannot the Government?

What happens next? There are many unanswered questions and I hope that the Minister can enlighten us about some when he replies to the debate. I shall begin with some well-worn questions. How many charges for fraud have the police made? How many convictions have been secured to date? Has anyone been charged over the famous disk of fraudulently obtained ILA numbers that led to the scheme's sudden closure on 23 November? Has any file been passed to the Crown Prosecution Service about the infamous disk?

When will the replacement scheme be introduced? Small training providers throughout the country await the start of a new scheme, but many are going under or bankrupt while they wait. How will the new scheme work? Will it be confined purely to information and communications training? Will it aim only at those below level 2?

Who will run the new scheme? That brings us back to the comments of the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner). The Select Committee recommended that it should not be Capita; its record in administering the ILA scheme was appalling and thoroughly documented by the Department's inquiry and the Select Committee report. However, do the Government remain bound by their previous ILA contract to work with Capita, despite its shortcomings? I look forward to the Minister's answers.

5.32 pm

Jeff Ennis (Barnsley, East and Mexborough): I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in an important debate on the report of the Select Committee on Education and Skills on individual learning accounts. I associate myself with the remarks of the Committee Chairman, my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman), and the hon. Member for Chesterfield (Paul Holmes).

I am one of the 11 Select Committee members, who all fully support the objectives that ILAs set out to achieve when they were introduced. They were designed to open up the learning market and to place as few restrictions as possible on what people chose to learn.

The objectives included attracting new learners and providers and the programme was therefore designed to be simple and flexible for both categories, with the minimum of form filling. The ILAs fulfilled the objectives by attracting more than 2.5 million people to become account holders, and almost 9,000 training providers signed up to train through the scheme.

The concept of ILAs is especially important in constituencies such as mine, which has some of the greatest deprivation in the country. We have the lowest GDP per capita—62 per cent. of the European average—of any United Kingdom constituency. No wonder south Yorkshire is one of the three objective 1 areas in the country. We have low staying-on rates at schools, and low academic achievement. Both are a direct consequence of the heavy mining and engineering industries in constituencies such as Barnsley, East and Mexborough. We also have many adults with numeracy and literacy problems. The provision of some type of ILA scheme as part of an effective lifelong learning strategy is integral to the successful regeneration of former coal mining areas such as South Yorkshire, so it is vital that we get a successor scheme off the ground as soon as it is practicably possible to do so.

The report highlights in great detail serious failings by the Department for Education and Skills in preparing and running the old ILA scheme. It also severely criticises Capita, the Department's private sector contractor, for various shortcomings in its delivery of the scheme. Time is short, so I do not intend to go into great detail about how all this happened: it is all in the report. Instead of focusing on the flaws and weaknesses of the old ILA scheme, it is more important for us to focus on what needs to be incorporated into the successor scheme, and it goes without saying that that scheme needs to be introduced as soon as it is practical to do so.

One of the key lessons to be learned is that quality assurance must be a prerequisite for the successor ILA. After taking many statements in evidence from witnesses, the Select Committee recommended that the Learning and Skills Council should take the lead on accreditation, implementing a fast-track registration process for providers with a proven track record of delivering quality training.

With hindsight, it seems a pity that the Learning and Skills Council's involvement in accreditation was not incorporated into the original ILA scheme, because there is no doubt that, as far as the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education is concerned, there was little or no evidence of abuse of ILAs when they were first piloted by the old training and enterprise councils. I accept, however, that the 47 local learning and skills councils are still bedding in—having followed on from the TECs—and the Department will still need to be vigilant to ensure that each of them performs effectively.

One difficult issue in the report that will require significant attention has already been flagged up: the so-called dead weight factor. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield, the Chairman of the Select Committee, hates that expression, so I apologise to him immediately for using it. We are talking about the number of people who would have done their training irrespective of qualifying for an ILA. A figure of some 44 per cent. is widely quoted in the report.

I am not certain how accurate that figure is, however. Given that 57 per cent. of the working-age population in England are educated only to level 2, and that 24 per cent. of adults experience difficulty with either literacy or numeracy skills, that figure appears exceptionally high. This is the client group that the new ILA should specifically target, particularly as it is people such as these who are the least likely to be offered training in the work place, and the least likely to pursue learning opportunities at home or in their local community.

Given this background, I believe that the recommendation in paragraph 73 in the report is crucial, and should form the basis for the successor scheme. Because I consider it very important, I should like to read it out for the benefit of the House. It states:

> "We recommend that any successor scheme to the ILA should be focused on adults whose highest level of qualification is at level 2 or below and that particular efforts should be made to promote the scheme through employers, trade unions, community groups, approved training providers, schools and colleges."

I am delighted that the Government's response to that recommendation has been to include it in the remedial measures section of their response document, which states:

> "We recommend that the successes of trusted intermediaries, such as trade union learning representatives, should be taken fully into account in designing an ILA successor scheme".

Indeed, the Government's response highlights the fact that ILA community group projects attracted people who had never heard of ILAs. Two thirds of the people who came to ILAs through the ILA community group route had never heard of them before. They also encouraged more participation by ethnic minority groups—14 per cent., as opposed to 5 per cent. nationally.

ILA community group projects also attracted a larger percentage of people with no qualifications—22 per cent., compared with 16 per cent. nationally—and 73 per cent. of people said they would not have been able to fund their learning without ILAs. Only 50 per cent. said the same about other types of provision.

Evaluation of accounts opened through the union learning fund showed that 79 per cent. related to the groups least likely to participate in learning. A project in Leicester and Lincolnshire, using small firms to promote ILA take-up, was also very successful. Such initiatives are crucial. They must become more widespread if we are to target the successor ILA more successfully to appropriate client groups and non-traditional learners.

As the hon. Member for Chesterfield pointed out, the Government are still at variance with the Select Committee on the important and difficult issue of compensation for learning providers. Paragraph 127 of the Committee's report recommends

> "that the Department should at least re-imburse those bona fide learning providers who can demonstrate that they have been financially disadvantaged by the accelerated date of closure".

The Department brought forward the date by two or three weeks—I know this—after taking police advice.

The Select Committee fully appreciates the reasons why the decision was taken—the police advice aspect—and knows that, in the legal sense, the Government do not have to compensate the learning providers who have been affected. I believe, however—and I think the Committee believes—that in a moral context they should reconsider the decision.

It should be recognised that the ILA scheme was successful not just in attracting new learners, but in attracting new learning providers. Many provided courses that were out of the ordinary, some of which were both innovative and imaginative. We need to ensure that the new innovative training providers are encouraged to participate in the new ILA scheme. Some have had their fingers badly burned, while some have gone out of business.

I believe that all training providers would see it as an act of good faith if the Government changed their mind. The Select Committee is talking about compensation only for bona fide providers who can prove genuine financial hardship.

The Government have made clear their firm intention to introduce a new ILA programme, possibly in the autumn. Many Select Committee members may think that that is not soon enough, as the Chairman suggested. But we must all learn the lessons of the collapse of the original scheme. It takes time to get things right, but we must get them right this time. We must build on the many strengths of the original scheme for the benefit of all potential learners in our communities. We must again make the ILA a Government flagship that is an integral part of an effective lifelong learning strategy for the country.

5.43 pm

Mr. Richard Bacon (South Norfolk): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Barnsley, East and Mexborough (Jeff Ennis). I agreed with just about everything he said.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) and his colleagues on a sensationally good report, produced at amazing speed. I am not a member of the Select Committee on Education and Skills, although as a member of the Public Accounts Committee I sat in on some of its hearings, which I considered to be a model for the way in which other Select Committees should do their work.

The report contains much that is worth mentioning, but I do not want to take up too much of the House's time. Let me just quote a couple of quick headlines. According to page 14,

> "It should have been possible to design a scheme to encourage new providers that was not wide open to fraud or abuse by unscrupulous people posing as learning providers, but the lack of quality assurance made it almost inevitable that it would be abused."

The most extraordinary thing perhaps is that there were timely warnings. Perhaps most famously, Mr. James O'Brien of Pitman Training Group gave a warning on 20 September 2000. In criticising the lack of detail in a letter to the Secretary of State, he said:

> "As a responsible training provider we were worried that this lack of detail left the scheme open to abuse, which would not be helpful to either the initiative itself, or the majority of the training sector."

The report makes it clear that it was not clear who was responsible. Paragraph 154 says:

> "It is not clear who was responsible for delivering the specific outcomes of the ILA project. There does appear to have been some confusion of responsibilities."

Paragraph 169 states that the objectives were not clear:

> "We are not convinced that the Government had adequately clarified the precise educational and social objectives of the ILA scheme . . . With a target fixed in terms of the number of accounts . . . it was clear that the delivery mechanism had become confused with the educational objective."

I refer briefly to the role of Capita, as other hon. Members have done. The report says on page 16:

> "Surprisingly, the potential expertise of Capita in designing systems to be fraud-resistant was neither called upon, nor offered."

Later, paragraph 97 states:

> "We find it hard to credit that Capita, a major player in winning contracts for work contracted out to the private sector, should not have pointed out that, without a quality threshold for providers, the ILA was a disaster waiting to happen."

Capita is a major player in a variety of aspects to do with public administration. It provides advice and services to over 120 local authorities. It collects £1 billion in council tax and business rates. It administrates the teacher superannuation scheme, which has 1.2 million teachers and 400,000 teacher pensioners. It seems that there may be a role for the National Audit Office, in addition to the report to which the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) referred, in doing a study specifically on Capita and its relationship with the public sector, both at local and central Government levels.

As a member of the PAC, I am particularly concerned about the management, or rather the lack of management, of financial resources. I say in passing that the former Minister with responsibility for adult skills, who is now Economic Secretary to the Treasury, has been helpful to me personally and I am sure to other hon. Members in keeping me informed of progress, although there has not been as much as one would have liked. One of the most shocking things that I heard was in the evidence presented on 28 November last year, which is not in the report, but which I have a transcript of from the internet. The hon. Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Jonathan Shaw) was probing the then Minister and not getting very far. The Chairman intervened and said:

> "Minister, what you are being asked by"

the hon. Member for Chatham and Aylesford is

> "surely there must have been an estimate of how much this would cost year on year, an estimate. He is just asking what sort of level of overshoot is there . . . What are the ballpark figures you are knocking around the Department on this?"

The then Minister replied:

> "At the moment because of the uncertain number of individual learning account discount payments we are going to have to pay we simply cannot give you a sense, even a ballpark I regret to say, of what the possible overspends are going to be."

So there was no control of cash whatever. There was no control of information technology.

The Audit Commission report of February 1998 entitled, "Ghost in the Machine" says on the front page:

> "The overall position shows little improvement . . . Frauds or cases of IT abuse often occur because of the absence of basic controls, with one-half of all detected frauds found by accident. Senior management still appears to lack a commitment to improving IT security and cracking down on abuse."

Why did no one in the Department for Education and Skills take notice of that?

In relation to basic project management and financial control, again, a very good report was published by the Cabinet Office in August 1994. On page 60, at paragraph 4.42, it says;

> "A project plan is agreed to identify who does what and ensure different contributions are brought together effectively. It will set strict timetables, identify interim deliverables . . . establish clear performance measures . . . There will also be tight financial control throughout, with expenditure closely monitored."

That was eight years ago. Those are not new ideas; they are obvious, common-sense ideas, which many people who work hard to pay the tax that the Government sometimes waste would be able to come up with without too much difficulty. It is not surprising, therefore, that page 11 of the report reached the following conclusion:

> "We regard the failure of the Department for Education and Skills to learn from mistakes made in the past by its predecessors and other Government Departments to be one of the most disturbing aspects of the ILA experience."

I conclude by referring to the hugely important role of the accounting officer. If permanent secretaries of Departments, who are accounting officers, are not happy with the steps that Ministers propose to take, specific provision is made within British Government to enable them to flag up that fact. A document published by the Treasury in 2001, entitled "The Responsibilities of an Accounting Officer", establishes that, if a course of action is being followed that a permanent secretary is unhappy with, he can require the Minister to issue a ministerial direction, if the Minister chooses to override the advice given. Paragraph 15 of the document states:

> "If the Minister in charge of the department is contemplating a course of action involving a transaction which as Accounting Officer you consider would infringe the requirements of propriety or regularity . . . you should set out in writing your objection to the

> proposal, the reasons for your objection and your duty to notify the Comptroller and Auditor General . . . If the Minister decides nonetheless to proceed, you should seek a written instruction to take the action in question. Having received such an instruction, you must comply . . . but should then inform the Treasury"

and the National Audit Office. If that has been done,

> "the PAC can be expected to recognise that the Accounting Officer bears no personal responsibility for the transaction."

For a project with at best confused policy objectives, and which was not properly planned or implemented, one might have thought that a very good case existed for seeking direction. I tabled a parliamentary question, asking what directions had been given since 1997. The answer was that 14 were given: one by the Department of Trade and Industry, one by the Northern Ireland Court Service, one by the former Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, three by the Export Credits Guarantee Department, three by the Ministry of Defence, and—to no one's surprise—five by the former Department of Social Security. However, from the Department for Education and Skills there was a deafening silence. The scheme ended up sticking a fire hose out of a window and spraying taxpayers' money over anyone who happened to walk by.

All hon. Members will agree that the saddest thing is that this was such a good and noble idea. During the 1988 Democratic national convention, Jesse Jackson said:

> "I was born in the slum, but the slum was not born in me. And it wasn't born in you, and you can make it."

That should have been the message of this programme, but what kind of message is sent by its absence for nearly a year? The message is, "I was born in the slum, but I'll remain in the slum and I cannot make it" because the people who should know better—the people who are paid to know better—cannot put in place basic project management, basic information technology security and basic financial controls." That is the sad saga.

I hope that the Minister will talk about when the new scheme will be introduced to help the people who need it most. I agree that it should be directed towards low achievers, in accordance with paragraph 73. We need some specifics. The Minister needs to tell us not only when the new scheme will be introduced, but how much money has been spent in total, and how much of that was fraud. He also needs to tell us about compensation for providers. People who trusted the Government and took them at their word have gone bankrupt, and have had to sell their houses. It is not enough for Ministers simply to say, "I'm sorry, but it's not our responsibility." There is evidence on the record from departmental civil servants that the attempt was made to create a market and expand the number of providers. That places a moral responsibility on the Department to help providers who got into trouble.

The Minister should also say sorry, and if he does all of the things that I asked him to do, he will earn the respect of the House. *[Interruption.]* He looks as if he is about to intervene. He leaned forward with great eagerness, and I shall listen to his reply with equal eagerness.

5.54 pm

Valerie Davey (Bristol, West): As a member of the Education and Skills Committee, I am pleased to contribute to the debate and I hope that it will mark some progress. Let us remember that much was achieved by the ILA scheme. Thousands of people benefited from it and they look to continue to benefit in the future. The Committee's report and the response from the Department will, I trust, take us a step forward. I hope that the debate is also a step towards the launch of the new scheme and that the Minister will be able to tell us when that might be.

I shall comment briefly on the Government's response to our report. That response can be summarised in two words—contrition and commitment. It was clearly recognised early on that we need to strengthen the quality checks on the learning providers and to tighten security. The Committee recognised that the balancing of wider access for learners with less bureaucracy and a wide range of new training providers was always going to involve an element of risk.

It was in part the failure to evaluate the risk that was the fault and that has led us to the current problem. The Government's response states:

> "We are . . . reviewing our risk assessment strategy to ensure that the risks of fraud are fully considered across all of the Department's activities."

That is reassuring in one way, but those words follow a long list of groups that have sought to evaluate risk and try to prevent fraud, in the Department for Education and Skills and in other Departments. Those groups include the fraud response liaison group, which is chaired by officials from the Department for Education and Skills and involves officials from many other Departments. It was set up in 1997 and has met quarterly. The Treasury-led special investigation group was set up last year. The better governance and counter fraud group is chaired by a member of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy and it disseminates best practice on risk management, especially relating to fraud. All those groups are operating, and now we expect a departmental internal audit unit that will work closely with the development for the successor scheme, to ensure that the lessons learned from the ILA programme are addressed.

Given all those different groups, my concern is to ensure joined-up thinking not only for the Department for Education and Skills, but more widely across Government. We must ensure the learning of lessons between Departments. I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon) who clearly recognises the importance of that work. I trust that the Opposition have some constructive suggestions and will not only describe the faults of the past. It is their job as well as ours to ensure that lessons are learned and the outcome is positive.

The element of contrition in the response makes it clear that registration for learning providers will be strengthened. The complaints procedure will be more effective and random checks will be made on providers. Those who abuse the scheme will lose their registration. Quality assurance will be more rigorous and financial controls will be stronger. That is great and it is all necessary. However, like other hon. Members, I am disappointed that the Department still seems to have sufficient confidence in the work of Capita to continue to work with it.

From the Government's response to the Education and Skills Committee, it is clear that Capita's ILA centre allowed access by registered learning providers to information that they were not authorised to receive.

[Valerie Davey]

We need stronger security measures. The faults in the complaints system were clear. However, despite its faults, the Government and Capita took action in response to complaints, and the response lists the events that took place.

Thirdly, on risk management, the report states that the Department should have had a clearer agreement with Capita about the risks, their significance and how they should have been managed. The faults with the Capita programme were recognised, but the Government say that they are continuing to work with Capita in winding down the ILA programme. That is understandable, as has been remarked, but in their response the Government say that they and Capita gained a great deal of experience from running ILAs. We must ensure that that good experience is used in the future.

Finally, the Government state:

> "We have agreed, in principle, to work with Capita in developing arrangements for a successor scheme . . . subject to satisfactory progress."

The ILA scheme was about innovation, and it was designed to draw new people into further education. It was about quality for the future. The report expresses clear doubts, which I share, about whether the Government should automatically continue their work with Capita, given past experience. However, the Government appear to disagree with that assessment. I hope that the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills, my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, South (Mr. Lewis), will reassure the House that there has been greater scrutiny of Capita's work, and that alternative companies have been considered.

However, there are positive elements in the Select Committee report, which the Government have accepted and which will lead to an enhanced scheme in the future. One of those elements—the use of trusted intermediaries and the monitoring of group provision—was mentioned earlier, but I wish to revisit it.

For me, one of the most poignant moments in the exercise occurred when we met some members of the Union of Shop Distributive and Allied Workers who worked for a large company in the north of England. On a visit to Parliament to lobby hon. Members' they told us about what ILAs meant to them. The USDAW education officer said that the company employed between 800 and 900 people but that, before the ILA scheme was introduced, she had struggled to get as many as two or three into adult education classes at a local college.

The trade union officer said that the employer granted the use of company space for ILA participants. The scheme caused it to work together with the local education authority, a local college, and 300 employees entering further education for the first time. She told us about a man in his 40s with a severe sight impairment who had never expected to do anything other than cleaning in that company. The ILA scheme meant measures were taken to help him with his defective sight, with the result that he was able to take a computer course. The man had already applied for a more senior post in the company.

That is what ILAs do, and the effect has been replicated in work place centres up and down the country. The example that I have given shows what intermediaries such as the trade unions and others can achieve. I am delighted that the Government are looking to that good practice for the future.

I am delighted too that the Government have recognised that ILAs need to be taken forward with support from the learning and skills councils. My hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield and Mexborough—

Jeff Ennis: My constituency is Barnsley, East and Mexborough.

Valerie Davey: I apologise to my hon. Friend. However, I am afraid that I have now lost the thread of my argument.

Mr. Boris Johnson (Henley): May I intervene on the hon. Lady?

Valerie Davey: That would help me—it is very gracious of the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Johnson: The hon. Lady has given examples of the ways in which the Government could show contrition over this sorry affair. Does she also feel that they might show their contrition by compensating those very many learning providers who entered into commercial arrangements on the expectation that the scheme would keep going, then found it violently terminated, found themselves out of pocket and are now facing the loss of their homes and other severe financial embarrassments as a result? Does she not believe that the Government's contrition should extend to compensation for the ILA providers which have been done down by this collapse?

Valerie Davey: The Committee has made its view quite clear. If evidence can be supplied that people suffered in the gap of three weeks before the scheme actually came to an end, the Committee agreed that the Government should give their situation further consideration, and I agree with that position.

The future role of the learning and skills councils is important. Their understanding of quality trainers and the way in which they can ensure that they are fast-tracked into any new scheme is an important element. That also applies to further education colleges and new providers who come forward, provided that their track record and past quality of work can be clearly demonstrated.

I wish the Department well in taking on the breadth of experience that it has at its disposal. I trust that there will be, in the short term, a statement on the relaunch of the scheme and that it goes ahead with all the blessings of this House and the hard work of many in the country who also want to see it succeed.

6.7 pm

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon): I am most grateful to have the opportunity to speak in this debate. I am not a member of the Select Committee, but I congratulate the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) on an excellent report. I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon) on an extremely good speech; I agreed with almost everything that he said.

I corresponded on a number of occasions with the Minister's predecessor about an ILA provider in my constituency, the Open College for Distance Learning, which was forced into receivership on 23 March this year. The company owed more than £120,000, and although much of that was owed to the Inland Revenue, a significant amount was owed to local companies—office suppliers, accountants, local newspapers which had taken the advertising, the landlord of their office premises, and so forth. Ironically, the company was—and still is—owed approximately £140,000 from ILA schemes in England and Wales, if they had been operated properly. Incidentally, I am not sure why Education and Learning Wales, which always maintained that there was no fraud in Wales, closed its scheme, but no doubt the Minister will enlighten us.

The Open College for Distance Learning had 786 students who were enrolled before the schemes were scrapped. Of those, 100 had had their ILA accounts raided by the fraudsters, and the remaining 686 never received their membership numbers before the deadline was brought forward to 23 November because Capita was too slow. In other words, a perfectly good company has been brought to its knees through no fault of its own because of a combination of fraud and incompetence. Who is taking responsibility? After this afternoon's speeches, I am no wiser. Where does the buck stop? What plans, if any, does the Minister have to resolve this case, of which his Department has knowledge, in a way that will allow the Open College for Distance Learning to be brought out of receivership and to pay off its creditors?

East Devon—particularly Exmouth, in which the company operated—is not an area with a lot of big businesses, and the company was becoming a significant local player. Formed in April 2001, it achieved a gross turnover of £782,422 in its first financial year. In April 2001, it enrolled 166 people, and that figure increased every month until October, when the scheme was shut down without warning. The founders told me that they first heard about the closure on the 5 o'clock news.

The founders of the college, Mr. Simon Hall and Mr. Andrew Demetre, ran a good company. They employed qualified, experienced tutors and kept accurate records of their students' progress and achievements. They did that not least because they expected to be audited and inspected by the ILA scheme operators.

Who is the winner from this fiasco? It is not the local creditors or, indeed, the Inland Revenue—we have already established that. It is not the 93 people made redundant by the company, many of whom are struggling to find employment six months later. It is not the taxpayer—the company received more than £500,000 of taxpayers' money. It is not the 3,000 people who lost their money.

Almost 119,000 people registered for individual learning accounts in the south-west. The great majority of those who registered at the Open College for Distance Learning were aged between 25 and 35—just too old to have been taught IT skills in depth at school.

In a written reply, the former Under-Secretary for Education and Skills, now the Economic Secretary to the Treasury, stated:

> "We are developing future plans for a successor ILA-style scheme which build on the successful elements of the ILA programme."—[*Official Report*, 17 December 2001; Vol. 377, c. 57W.]

As my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) pointed out, that repeated promise has had a negative effect on genuine providers; people are waiting to register in the expectation that, at any moment, their training will be provided free.

Companies still struggling to operate in the sector continue to lose. As we have heard this afternoon, there is still no successor, so we have ended up with the worst of all worlds.

I understand that ILAs were originally a Liberal Democrat brain-wave, but a Labour Government implemented them and must take responsibility for the fiasco. There has been an almost unique combination of incompetence and inaction in which everyone is the loser.

The Select Committee's excellent report repeated the points made at paragraph 127 again in paragraph 25 of its conclusions and recommendations. I, too, believe that the Government should be proactive in offering compensation to the companies and people who entered into arrangements in good faith. I urge the Government to address that matter. As we all know, ILA is dead, so before continuity ILA is born—before the Government embark on a new scheme—the Minister, the Government and all those responsible should give some hope to the people who have lost their livelihood and their companies. There is not much to hope for in the Government's reply to date.

6.13 pm

Jonathan Shaw (Chatham and Aylesford): I am grateful for the opportunity to make a contribution to the debate. I begin by referring to the former Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills, now the Economic Secretary to the Treasury, my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (John Healey). Perhaps, last June, when my hon. Friend received the call from Downing street summoning him to see the Prime Minister, he did not know that ILAs were reaching boiling point. I do not know whether the Prime Minister said, "Look John, we've got the ILAs, they're a good idea and they are popular, but we think they might go belly up and you'll be in the firing line". My hon. Friend has left the Chamber, so we shall probably never know.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend, however. He continually came to the Committee, providing us with all the detail that we wanted. He went beyond what one might reasonably expect of a Minister and a Department in the provision of the information that we needed to complete our inquiry. Now that he is at the Treasury, I am sure that he is forging a good relationship with the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills, my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, South (Mr. Lewis)—I am pleased to see him on the Front Bench.

I am sure that when the new ILA scheme is introduced, my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary will ensure that there are no overspends, as occurred in the past. However, he did a good job, and it should be recognised that it was not an easy thing to confront as a new Minister, which is to his credit.

We need a new ILA, and we look forward to hearing from the Minister about when that is likely to happen. My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, West (Valerie Davey) gave an excellent example in referring to the trade unions. The Select Committee on Education and Skills has been provided with example after example of people who were not learning and who had the opportunity to learn. The system opened up the market for people to be entrepreneurial and to provide a new way to learn to meet the demands of modern living.

Regrettably, the safeguards were inadequate, as we all know. That is why we are in the current position, and it is why the Select Committee needed to undertake

[Jonathan Shaw]

the inquiry. I pay tribute to its Chairman, my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman), who steered us through this fast-track inquiry. *[Interruption.]* Does my hon. Friend want to intervene?

Mr. Sheerman *indicated dissent.*

Jonathan Shaw: There were early warnings. Not just the Department for Education and Skills, but all Departments have to take account of the reports that are written. The hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon) referred to a plethora of reports. He made a very good speech. He has clearly done a great deal of research on the many reports that have flagged up the dangers. If reports are written for Ministers and senior civil servants but no one looks at them, we will find ourselves in a similar position again.

The warnings in the report need to be heeded not only in the Department for Education and Skills, but right across the Government. Information technology provides us with enormous opportunities to learn, but it also provides enormous opportunities for crooks. As the pace of technological change increases, we have to keep account of the likelihood of fraud. One of the Department's own civil servants, Mr. Hall from the Learning and Skills Council, told the Select Committee that he had warned the Department as early as June 2000 that the safeguards in the proposed system were inadequate.

The Government responded by saying in paragraph 10 on page 11 that they did not want an over-bureaucratic system with lots of red tape. Of course such an approach is right, but simply saying that is not good enough. The infrastructure was in place, with the Learning and Skills Council and other agencies, to give accreditation. Too often, we heard about scams involving CDs and cold calling, and the complaints system was inadequate not just for ILA holders. If someone knocks at the door and says, "This is a CD to learn to type and the Government are paying for it", the person who answers might say, "Well, I've never heard of ILAs, but that's very nice. I'll sign up. Thank you very much." Why would anyone complain if they did not know?

There was no proper complaints system for the good providers who were angry about being ripped off by cowboys, as the hon. Member for Chesterfield (Paul Holmes) said, but they were infuriated when neither Capita nor the Government listened to them. That shows the quality of the complaints system.

There was also fraud, and we have heard how people could gain access to accounts. When the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) questioned Paddy Doyle, Capita's group board director, about one of his constituents whose account had clearly been opened fraudulently—she had not signed any piece of paper to say that she wanted to open an account—Mr. Doyle said:

> "We know that has happened and we know that there are instances of that happening. It is how it happened and there are actually different ways that it could have happened and that is what I cannot answer. I am not disputing the fact that it is has happened."

One thing that we can certainly conclude from that is that it happened.

Inadequate safeguards were in place. That has been borne out by the Cap Gemini Ernst & Young report and by the internal audit. There are lessons not just for the Department for Education and Skills but for all Departments. As a consequence, the Government and Capita have had a tendency to blame one another. That is perhaps a manifestation of a problem—when one is in a bind, one starts to look around for people to blame. Both the Government and Capita are at fault, as has been acknowledged.

As for the future, the Government are committed to learning—not just through the individual learning account system but through a whole range of different opportunities for people who have not accessed learning before and who can now take advantage of the many different schemes available. The ILA concept is a good one, but appropriate accreditation is needed. We need to use the infrastructure that is available, and, most importantly, we need to reward those who target groups who have not traditionally accessed learning. The ILA has had some success in targeting those groups, but the majority of people who were taking advantage of individual learning accounts had accessed learning before. That needs to be a priority. In response to the report, I hope that, when we see the new scheme, adequate measures will be in place to encourage learning providers to target that group.

It has been a pleasure to take part in the inquiry. I hope that we have made an important contribution.

6.22 pm

Mr. John Baron (Billericay): I am grateful to be called to speak in this important debate. It is a pleasure to follow the thoughtful contribution of the hon. Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Jonathan Shaw). I concur with others in paying tribute to the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) for his incisive, professional and objective chairmanship of the Committee that led directly to this report.

As a member of the Education and Skills Committee, I welcome this opportunity to address a particularly important aspect of the affair on which other Members have touched—the failure of the Government to compensate learning providers for the accelerated closure of the scheme and the implications thereof. As a Committee, we deliberated long and hard on this issue. We reached the following conclusion:

> "We recommend that the Department should at least reimburse those bona fide learning providers who can demonstrate that they have been financially disadvantaged by the accelerated date of closure of the scheme."

We felt that it is was wrong for a Government simply to turn their back on the large number of learning providers who had invested in good faith in a Government-inspired programme but who now faced financial loss, and, in some cases, ruin, as a result of mistakes made by the Government. It is wrong for a number of reasons.

First, an agreement existed between the Government and learning providers that, in my view, introduced reciprocal obligations between its signatories. Meanwhile, it is wrong because it is unfair. The Government and Capita can move on with minimal adverse effects—the then Minister even admitted that Capita was still in the running for major new contracts. The little people in this affair, however—the learning providers and the individual learning account holders—have suffered through no fault of their own. If there is any doubt about whose fault this debacle was, it may be worth briefly highlighting the twists and turns, especially towards the end of this unfortunate affair.

On 24 October, the Secretary of State for Education and Skills announced the suspension of the £200 million ILA programme from 7 December 2001. She said that the programme

"has exceeded the government's expectations in encouraging very large numbers of people . . . and has quickly expanded beyond its capacity."

However, on 23 November, another press release suddenly announced the immediate closure of ILAs two weeks earlier than planned. No notice was given. Training providers were neither consulted nor warned.

Even now we do not know whether the decision was taken because of fraud or because the scheme was so popular and over budget that the Government pulled the plug. However, as the report clearly states, the Select Committee is sure that Capita and the Department for Education and Skills were equally to blame for the fiasco.

The little people have suffered. For example, Roger Tuckett of Henley Community Online estimated that the closure of the ILA scheme would result in 2,000 to 5,000 job losses. Mr. James O'Brien of Pitman Training Group plc and the Association of Computer Trainers told the Committee that up to 5,000 people could be squeezed out from IT training centres. He stressed that the most important thing was that

"the government had set a legitimate expectation for individuals to be able to access that learning up until the 7th December and they should honour that commitment."

The National Extension College was

"dismayed at the lack of notice over the ending of the scheme".

In addition, as the hon. Member for Chesterfield (Paul Holmes) has already pointed out, a survey of 84 colleges found that they expected to suffer a loss of income amounting to more than £1.2 million as a result of the early closure of the scheme. The loss of that money will be deeply felt by the colleges in question,

There are many more examples of losses being incurred by learning providers. However, despite all the evidence, the Government refuse to compensate learning providers. The Government's argument is that there was no contract between the Department and learning providers, and hence that they are not obliged to compensate the providers. They are splitting legal hairs so that they can run away from their obligations. There may have been no contract, but there certainly was an agreement between the Department and learning providers, and that agreement introduced reciprocal obligations between the signatories.

The Government should honour their obligations to individuals and to organisations, particularly as they unexpectedly accelerated the closure of the scheme. Many learning providers who entered the agreement in good faith must now wonder whether they can afford again to take the Government at their word. As the Committee report put it:

"Many of the smaller and more innovative providers may be unwilling to risk entry into a second ILA scheme without a contractual arrangement with the Department."

Mrs. Sammy Betson of Ipswich ITeC summed the problem up very well. She told the Committee that her cash flow had taken a serious knock and added:

"The question of whether or not we would participate in a future scheme is whether we have a spoon long enough."

The Government's unwillingness to compensate learning providers for the early closure of the scheme in the two weeks in question is wrong for a number of reasons. It is wrong because there was an agreement that involved obligations on all the parties concerned. It is wrong because the decision is unfair. The Government and Capita can move on, but many small learning providers, who face financial loss and in some cases ruin, cannot. It is also wrong because learning providers will think twice before participating in any successor scheme. The parliamentary ombudsman is investigating several individual complaints and we await the findings with interest.

It is great shame that this good initiative has been so badly handled by the Government. What makes it worse is that they refuse to honour their obligations by compensating those learning providers who have suffered financial loss as a result of the accelerated closure of the scheme. It is a very high-handed approach, and some would suggest even an arrogant one. The Government must not underestimate the importance of trust in these matters. At present, very many learning providers, who will be essential to the success of any successor scheme, believe that they cannot trust the Government. I therefore ask the Government, even at this late stage, to reconsider their position and to honour their commitment to learning providers.

6.30 pm

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): I want to focus on the Government's response to the Committee report which was published a few days ago. Other hon. Members dealt effectively with the criticisms contained in the original Committee report.

A couple of points of detail have not been raised. First, paragraph 24 of the Government's response contains an error. It is entitled "Remedial measures". It seems that there has been a transcription error because of a mistake in the title of the corresponding paragraph in the Committee report which no one spotted. The title should be "Intermediaries".

Secondly, there is an ambiguity in the Government's response. On the one hand, the response was good. It dealt point by point with the recommendations and conclusions of the original report, in contrast to some previous responses to our reports which were, to be kind, generalised. On the other, however, although the response was detailed and specific it did not deal with the full horrors of the situation.

Paragraph 5 of the response refers to the cap on the 80 per cent. discount. What is not made clear is that the cap was introduced several weeks after the launch of the original scheme. Paragraph 18 of the response—I do not recall discussing this in Committee—tells us that the cap of £200 on the 80 per cent. discount was introduced within seven weeks of the scheme's launch because the unlimited amounts of money available had been exploited and £22 million had been paid out in course fees that cost more than £200.

The total overspend on the scheme is estimated to be about £60 million on an original budget of £200 million/ an overspend of just under 30 per cent. We now discover, however, that more than 30 per cent. of that overspend was incurred within seven weeks of the launch of the original scheme. That is significant new information which we did not have during the Committee's deliberations and it draws our attention to the importance of tighter budget monitoring in the Department.

[Mr. David Chaytor]

The permanent secretary hinted at that when he came before the Committee yesterday, although the focus was on the need to get a grip on the Department's underspend. The lesson is that financial monitoring needs to consider possible overspends as well.

In concentrating on three issues, I hope that I do not cover old ground, but instead give pointers for the future. The first is the scheme's objectives. One fundamental reason why the scheme got into difficulties was that the original objectives were not only confused but contradictory. There was a desire to open up the market and bring new providers into it, for which a generous subsidy was provided, and a desire to extend opportunities for lifelong learning to the whole population. There was also a specific objective to help people who were unable to afford further training or education.

The number of people for whom cost is a barrier to continuing their education is comparatively small—it is a minority of the population. Yet by making the scheme universal, we offered a subsidy to the public at large. A more focused objective on those who are most reluctant or least able to continue their education beyond school age is the right approach.

I shall digress briefly. I do not find the Opposition's argument about the use of the subsidy terribly convincing. They criticise the Government by saying that the Department was spraying cash around like a hosepipe out of a window, criticise them for switching off the hosepipe and then criticise them for not switching it on again to compensate for the problems caused by the switching off. It is not altogether a logical—

Mr. Bacon: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Chaytor: I am afraid that I will not give way because time is pressing.

The Opposition argument is not logical or convincing. However, I do think that the nature and eligibility of the subsidy are crucial. Therefore I was very pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, East and Mexborough (Jeff Ennis) and the hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon) both referred to recommendation 73 in the Committee's report, which suggests that a future scheme should be targeted explicitly at those adults whose existing level of qualification is level 2 or below. I am pleased that they supported that, not only because I was responsible for moving the amendment to the original draft of the Committee report, which is now in the Committee report, but because I consider that that is the most effective use of public money.

I also want to speak about the mechanism. The time may have come to say that the emperor has no clothes. That is not because we adopted the scheme rather uncritically from an original idea of the Liberal Democrats—there are lessons for all of us in that—but because the original pilot scheme, run by the training and enterprise councils, concluded explicitly that there was no demand for a savings account for learning.

There had been several discussions with financial institutions to explore the issue; the heart of the original concept of the ILA was a savings account for learning, not simply a subsidy. The experience was that there was no demand for it. The public did not see the purpose of it. Perhaps the mechanism was too complex; perhaps it was an idea whose time had not yet come, but I now suspect not. Even though the pilot schemes proved the lack of demand pretty conclusively, the Department went ahead with the concept of the account, although it became simply a means for giving a discount on courses.

Therefore, although the idea of the individual learning account is attractive—I am sure that there is the germ of a good idea there—we must ask whether it would not have been, and will not be in future, simply much better and more efficient to provide fee remission to eligible designated categories of students for designated categories of courses. I flag up that suggestion and hope that the Minister might consider it in his deliberations on the future scheme.

The third point that I want to raise concerns assumptions about stimulating the market. Having learned more about the ILA saga, I do not accuse the Department of incompetence as some people have done, but I do say that it was remarkably naive in its understanding of the behaviour of the private sector in post-16 educational training operations.

Various scandals operated throughout the post-16 sector from 1993 onwards, and no doubt before to a lesser extent. They were well publicised abuses of the system; whereby huge amounts of public money—far greater than the amounts lost in the ILA affair—were expropriated by different means. After all that had happened, particularly between 1993 and 1997, it was naivety of the highest order to assume that providing a universal subsidy to bring new entrants into the market would not equally be open to abuse and exploitation and would not be effectively a blank cheque for some cowboy operators. Therefore, a rigorous accreditation system for providers must be at the heart of any new scheme.

In my concluding minute, I shall flag up other points that I would have liked to discuss at enormous length. The first concerns the assumption in the Government's response that for the new learner entering the scheme, it was like entering any other marketplace, and it was therefore his or her responsibility to make a judgment about the quality of the product on offer. That is unacceptable. The motto "caveat emptor" is not appropriate for people coming back into education. We should build into a new scheme better advice and guidance for new adult learners.

Secondly, the courses on offer, as well as the providers, should be more rigorously accredited. Thirdly, we should consider the introduction of staged payments. If the provider can collect his money simply by enroling the student, that is a blank cheque for the cowboy operator. Staged payments, which are accepted practice in public sector post-16 education, ought to be accepted practice in private sector post-16 education.

Finally, I raise the question, which emerges strikingly from the Government's response, of the number of consultants other than Capita who were employed by the Department at various stages in the development of the scheme. I have counted six who are referred to in the report. It would be interesting to know the cost of employing the consultants whose advice was sought and who were asked to evaluate various stages of the scheme. Perhaps I will table that some time as a written question.

I endorse what several of my colleagues and several Opposition Members said about the role of Capita and the assumption that Capita will carry on as before.

[Interruption.] I am conscious of the time; this will be my final point. That sends a bad message to learning providers who feel that they have been cheated by the abrupt ending of the scheme. It seems that there is one rule for Capita and another rule for genuine learning providers. That is a problem which I hope that the Minister will address.

6.42 pm

Alistair Burt (North-East Bedfordshire): This has been an excellent debate. I am sorry that there was not time to call all the members of the Education and Skills Committee who would have liked to speak.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) on securing the debate and on the quality of the report. Through him, I thank all the members of the Committee, who performed such a valuable service.

As we heard, the report was hard-hitting, correctly describing an appalling fiasco of finger-in-the-wind targets, failure to heed advice, failed delivery and a walk away from the debris of lost businesses and jobs, as well as—worst of all—the hurt caused through the lost hope and aspirations of those expecting to benefit from the scheme. Despite the constructive tone of the debate, we cannot forget how dreadful the experience has been for some people. What I have just described is the kindest interpretation of the Government's activity. I will come in due course to their self-serving and ineffectual response.

I welcome the Minister to his new responsibilities, although he is not new to the Department and can therefore expect us to show him slightly less mercy on the issue than would be usual. It has not escaped our notice that all those previously connected with individual learning accounts have moved on, their lips sealed, their silence the price of their promotion—the original Secretary of State and his junior Minister who set up the scheme, and the last junior Minister, now the Economic Secretary to the Treasury, who I am delighted to see in his place, and who is obviously well thought of by me and others for his hard work in connection with the scheme. He found the fiasco going on under his feet and stoically lived with it, in a manner that I understand all too well. However, the proper scrutiny of Government failure cannot be diverted because of decisions made in the Government's personnel department.

I shall make three quick points. First, I make clear our support for the concept of what the Government were trying to do—the expansion of individual learning to those who need it. That is why the failure has been so acute, as a number of colleagues commented—the hon. Members for Chesterfield (Paul Holmes), for Barnsley, East and Mexborough (Jeff Ennis), who described his area, where such work would have been particularly welcome, and for Bristol, West (Valerie Davey), and most movingly, my hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon), who spoke with passion and genuine anger, as he should, and produced a quote from Jesse Jackson of which we would all have been proud.

Secondly, we want to be positive. Of course, the report contains positive recommendations, but I shall not labour them because of time. Thirdly, this is a serious business and it is not my job to act as a ra-ra for a Government failure. I will not concentrate on the positive recommendations, although if we had more time, I would be pleased to do so. I am afraid that it is time to fix on the Government's response, as the excellence of the work of the Committee and of this debate has been ill served by a very poor response from them.

Let me explain why I feel so strongly about the response. The first page states:

> "The original programme was successful and popular with both learners and learning providers. It was, therefore, with considerable regret that it had to be closed because of the serious flaws which we identified".

Hold on a minute—the serious flaws that the Government identified were those with which the scheme had been set up in the beginning. That is what caused the problem. The Government cannot claim to be the good guys who spotted what was going wrong and acted.

The response goes on to describe what the Government have done since that time. First, we are told that they have been "managing the closure effectively". Let them explain that to all the people we have heard about, who were messed up because of the problems of dates and ending the system. They include people such as Mrs. Barbara Walsh of the Longridge teaching centre, who says:

> "We are unable to plan ahead because we have been given no hint of a timescale, nor anything else which would indicate that the Government is sympathetic towards the unfortunate situation in which they have placed us. We are just hoping that a successor to the scheme will be announced soon."

Those hopes were dashed by the publication of the response yesterday. If that is managing the closure effectively, it is not very good.

Secondly, the Government say that they have been

> "establishing the full extent of misuse and fraud".

They have not, because that has not been done yet either. Thirdly, we are told that they have been

> "developing the outline design for a successor scheme".

As we have heard, however, the successor scheme may be up and running about a year after the closure.

That is just the Government's introduction. A series of comments suggest to the general public and the casual reader that, with hindsight, and having picked up on problems through experience of the system, the Government acted to deal with them. That is not true. The reason why the Government failed and why we are in our current position is not hindsight, but their failure to heed the advice that they were given on a variety of occasions about what they were doing. That is why public confidence in the scheme—and, alas, the Department—is at a low ebb.

Let me take a couple of examples. The hon. Member for Huddersfield, and my hon. Friends the Members for Billericay (Mr. Baron) and for East Devon (Mr. Swire), who spoke from personal experience, all raised the issue of compensation and spoke about the damage done in the market. Let us remember that the Government created that market. In paragraph 1 of their response, the Government admit that part of the intention of the scheme was to "attract new providers". Accordingly, they set up the market, but they have not dealt with the consequences of its complete destruction.

Mr. Andrew Turner: That is an important point that I do not think independent providers understood. Where Governments make markets, they can also break them, and that is exactly what this Government have done.

Alistair Burt: My hon. Friend makes an extremely good point. This afternoon, I spoke to the Association of

[Alistair Burt]

Computer Trainers, which tells me—this is significant in relation to Roger Tuckett's estimate of some months ago that 5,000 jobs might be lost—that some 15 per cent. of IT training provider specialists have closed down. Indeed, it reckons that about 5,000 jobs have been lost as a result. Some 75 per cent. of those providers have made people redundant or made serious cuts, and 95 per cent. of them have held back on plans for future investment. That all means that those people will be very unwilling to be considered for involvement in ILA2. That is the damage that has been done by lack of confidence.

Various points were made about Capita and its failings, and questions were asked about why it should get the new contract. There is a particular reason why it might do so. If hon. Members turn to sub-appendix A of the response, which is part of the Cap Gemini summary of what happened, they will see that paragraph 2 states:

> "The contract between DfES and Capita . . . made no clear mandates or stipulations regarding the assessment of the security requirement or the ongoing security management. This also resulted in no ILA-specific security policies or procedures."

Capita will keep the contract—unless the Minister is about to tell me that the Government are putting it out to public tender, which I doubt—because what happened was the Government's fault. They did not give clear guidelines, so they cannot blame Capita for it.

It has been suggested that the scheme was closed because of overspending. Paragraph 20 of the Government's response deals with the problems that arose in relation to the Treasury. I challenge the Minister to respond to this point. There was overspending, but the delay has already saved the Government money because the scheme has not been running. If the Minister can say that the new scheme will start with a budget that is equivalent to the old one, we will all be most impressed. He has the opportunity to do so.

Sub-appendix B of the Government's response contains this wonderful phrase about the internal audit review:

> "However, it has not been possible to identify when and how some decisions on the operation of the programme were arrived at".

How convenient. We are talking about the British civil service. When a Minister sneezes, the British civil service records which nostril they go to first. To discover now that it is possible that no one knows where and how some decisions were taken is a remarkably convenient error that suits the Government well.

The final failing of the Government's response is that it gives no indication of a new scheme. People around the country have been let down. Jobs have been lost, students who were looking forward to going back into education have been disappointed, and people are in despair that there has been no suggestion of a new scheme. The Government's response has been self-serving and disingenuous and has not done credit to the decent report that was produced. That is a matter for shame. It is not, of course, possible for the Minister to resign straight away, but I suggest that the best thing that he could do, bearing in mind the inadequacy of his Department's response and the degree of difficulty and despair that is out in the country, is to make his first word to the House, "Sorry."

6.52 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Ivan Lewis): I suspect that this may be an historic moment for the House, in that three hon. Members born in Bury have spoken in succession. Perhaps not many other hon. Members would find it so.

I begin by paying tribute to the work of my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) and his colleagues on the Select Committee on Education and Skills. I thank the members of the Committee for the fair and balanced way in which they approached their task. Undoubtedly, some differences remain between us, but we have accepted the vast majority of the Committee's findings and recommendations. I think that hon. Members will feel that the view expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, West (Valerie Davey) about the contrition and commitment of our response is far more accurate than that of the hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt).

I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the work of my former ministerial colleague, my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury. His decision, and that of the Secretary of State, to act decisively when the problems became clear, and his subsequent honesty and transparency, ensured the survival of the individual learning account concept. That point was well made by my hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Jonathan Shaw). I am sure that my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary will be remembered for his involvement in the scheme as the comprehensive spending review process reaches a conclusion.

My hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield takes a close interest in ministerial turnover, so he will know that I have graduated from being the Minister with responsibility for young people and learning to the Minister with responsibility for adult learning and skills—or, as some people told me, the Minister for ILAs. In that context, and in view of the questions that he asked, I can reassure him that I have discussed ILAs with my predecessor. I can also reassure him and all hon. Members that my commitment, and that of the Secretary of State, to the successor scheme is as strong as ever. We intend to announce details of that new scheme, including a start date, in the autumn. The ILA programme was a bold and virtuous attempt to expand adult learning and open up opportunities to many people who had consigned learning to a dim and distant childhood memory. We should not forget that for many, it achieved its goals.

However, the Select Committee has appropriately focused on why and where the programme went wrong. The report's detailed analysis, conclusions and recommendations will greatly assist Ministers as we consider the nature of the successor scheme. In the words of the Select Committee, we must be prepared to

> "learn lessons from the collapse of the first version of ILAs and to bring forward as soon as practicable a more robust version which is capable of expanding Adult Learning to the benefit of each adult learner and the nation as a whole".

Let me consider the contributions to the debate. Many hon. Members referred to Capita. It is important to emphasise that the Government have acknowledged that there are lessons to be learned from what happened to the ILA scheme. There are also important lessons for Capita. There is no done deal about the successor scheme and Capita's involvement; no decision has been made.

A series of criteria must be satisfied before we make any decisions about Capita's involvement in future. They include security, customer service, management capability, data handling, negotiating the overall financial settlement and appropriate revisions to the existing contract. We will have to be satisfied that Capita is best placed to ensure that the new scheme is the success that all hon. Members support.

Many hon. Members referred to compensation. The Government have no legal responsibility to compensate learning providers. [HON. MEMBERS: "Moral responsibility."] There is a debate about moral responsibility and we have had to make a difficult judgment in difficult circumstances. Labour Members have genuinely agonised over that moral dilemma. However, I cannot take lectures from Conservative Members, who told us for 18 years to leave it to the market. Those who talked about business risk and business judgment are now shedding crocodile tears for learning providers who made business choices and took business risks. I understand the genuine anxiety for learning providers who are in difficulties, but I shall take no lectures from the party that continues to believe in laissez-faire economics.

Let me deal with the points that the hon. Member for Chesterfield (Paul Holmes) made. Several investigations are under way, and some are with the police. To date, there have been 45 arrests, which have resulted in 10 people accepting cautions. Charges are being brought against 13 individuals, 12 of whom are waiting to appear in court. One person has been convicted.

On the successor scheme, I accept the points about trusted intermediaries and that trade unions and community groups have played an important part in ILAs. We want them to play an important part in the successor scheme. Many hon. Members talked about limited entry to a successor scheme. That is one of the points that we must consider to get the matter right. I do not apologise for coming to the House and not announcing details of a successor scheme. We will do that in the autumn, after we have considered all the important issues and got the framework right.

We will learn the difficult lessons of what went wrong with the ILA programme. However, I am proud of the Government's passionate commitment to the principle of lifelong learning, whether it is for the middle-aged father who is too ashamed to tell his children that he cannot read or write, for the mum who wants to return to work after years of bringing up a family, or for the low-paid, low-skilled worker who wants the chance to learn and open up new horizons. We owe each and every one of them the chance to learn. People of all backgrounds and ages having the opportunity to pursue their potential is the hallmark of a fair and decent society. It is also an essential element of our nation's capacity to compete effectively in the global marketplace.

It being Seven o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *proceeded to put forthwith the deferred Questions relating to Estimates which he was directed to put at that hour, pursuant to Standing Order No. 54(4) and (5) (Consideration of estimates) and Order [20 November 2000].*

ESTIMATES, 2002–03

Question put:—

That resources be reduced by £1,000 in respect of Request for Resources 2 (Promoting modern, integrated and safe transport and providing customer-focused regulation) relating to grants to London Underground.—*[Mrs. Dunwoody.]*

The House divided: Ayes 33, Noes 201.

Division No. 285] **[7 pm**

AYES

Barrett, John
Breed, Colin
Burnett, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
  (NE Fife)
Chidgey, David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gidley, Sandra
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Heath, David
Holmes, Paul
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Moore, Michael
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Pugh, Dr John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Wareing, Robert N
Webb, Steve
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
John Thurso and
Tom Brake.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald
  (Swansea E)
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barnes, Harry
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beggs, Roy
Benn, Hilary
Benton, Joe
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Borrow, David
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas
  (Newcastle E & Wallsend)
Browne, Desmond
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coffey, Ms Ann
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Cruddas, Jon
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Donaldson, Jeffrey M
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ennis, Jeff
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike (Weaver Vale)
Hall, Patrick (Bedford)
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*

Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ruth
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Lyons, John
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDougall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mole, Chris
Moran, Margaret
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Rammell, Bill
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Roy, Frank
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Watson, Tom
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Fraser Kemp and
Jim Fitzpatrick.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put and agreed to.

It being after Seven o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *proceeded to put forthwith the Question relating to Estimates which he was directed to put at that hour, pursuant to Standing Order No. 55(1) and (4) (Questions on voting of estimates, &c) and Order [20 November 2000].*

Resolved,

That further resources, not exceeding £12,839,695,000, be authorised for use during the year ending on 31st March 2003, and that a further sum, not exceeding £13,409,689,000, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund for the year ending on 31st March 2003 for expenditure by the Department for Education and Skills.—*[Angela Smith.]*

Resolved,

That further resources, not exceeding £119,712,696,000, be authorised for use for defence and civil services for the year ending on 31st March 2003, and that a further sum, not exceeding £112,473,739,000, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to meet the costs of defence and civil services for the year ending on 31st March 2003, as set out in HC 795, 796, 797 and 798.—*[Angela Smith.]*

Ordered,

That a Bill be brought in upon the foregoing resolutions: And that the Chairman of Ways and Means, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Paul Boateng, Dawn Primarolo, John Healey and Ruth Kelly do prepare and bring it in.

CONSOLIDATED FUND (APPROPRIATION) (No. 2) BILL

Ruth Kelly accordingly presented a Bill to apply certain sums out of the Consolidated Fund to the service of the year ending on 31 March 2003: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Monday next, and to be printed [Bill 156].

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr. Speaker: With permission, I shall put together the motions 3, 4 and 5 relating to delegated legislation.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE

That the Local Government Finance (England) Special Grant Report (No. 103) (HC 948), on 2002/03 Special Grant for Gypsy Sites Refurbishment, which was laid before this House on 17th June, be approved.

ROAD TRAFFIC

That the draft Road Traffic (Vehicle Emissions) (Fixed Penalty) (England) Regulations 2002, which were laid before this House on 17th June, be approved.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE

That the Local Government Finance (England) Special Grant Report (No. 94) (HC 885), on Funding for Enforcement of Vehicle Emission Standards 2002, which was laid before this House on 18th June, be approved.—*[Angela Smith.]*

Question agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Ordered,

That the Town and Country Planning (Major Infrastructure Projects Inquiries Procedure) (England) Rules 2002 (No. 1223) be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.—*[Angela Smith.]*

Trade Union Rights

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Angela Smith.]*

7.13 pm

Huw Irranca-Davies (Ogmore): I welcome the opportunity to raise this very important and timely debate in the Commons. Every year, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions publishes a weighty document detailing the record on trade union violations globally in the year. That document of nearly 250 pages examines the extent of human rights abuses and union abuses in all four corners of the globe. It is timely not only because of the advances that have been made in many areas of the world, but because of the great strides that still have to be made to allow collective free association of trade unionists better to represent the needs of workers in all four corners of the world.

Part of the purpose of this debate is to say how far we have come, but also how far we still have to go. In the context of our collective memory, it is easy to forget how far we in this country have come. In just the past 200 years, we saw the advent of the Merthyr rising, in which 20 people were killed and many were injured, and which involved the famous Dic Penderyn, to some now very much a martyr. Such collective action is within our close folk memory, yet we have made great advances since then. However, even today, some of the worst ever abuses of trade unions and of human rights are occurring in countries sufficiently close to be travelled to by jet on a short break.

Interestingly, although the average life expectancy in Sierra Leone and Bolivia is 35, as recently as some 150 years ago it was 45 and 37 in Surrey and London respectively. We have come a very long way since then in terms of how we look after our work force, and of workers' rights to associate freely, to represent each other, and to put their interests to employers and to Government. However, on the other side of the world the story is very different.

I should take this opportunity to thank the International Labour Organisation, the International Confederation of Trade Union Regulations and many other international trade union organisations for the information that they supplied.

I apologise for giving a short history lesson, but as I will show it brings us to a very pertinent point. When the ILO was founded in 1919, it was based on the simple premise that labour is not a commodity to be bought, sold and abused but an asset that must be looked after and treasured by employers and Government. Even in 1919, people talked about the right of association for all lawful purposes, the payment of a decent wage for family life, the adoption of a maximum working week, and a weekly day off of 24 hours—matters that we talk about today as we extend rights in this country. Back in 1919, they were not taken for granted and were considered important enough to raise, as were the abolition of child labour, equal pay for men and women, and so on.

We have moved on well since then. The Philadelphia declaration, made towards the end of the second world war, reiterated the principle of freedom of expression and of association. It was followed by a raft of summits and declarations, the most important of which was—as the Minister will know—the international labour conference, at which the then employment Minister expressed support for the fundamental rights declaration, which established the fundamental rights of association and to work. Some 174 member states signed up to that declaration. In doing so, they signed up to the principle of freedom of association, and to the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining—a basic right that we take for granted, but which, as we shall soon see, is denied to many. The elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour is also something that we take for granted, and there is a long way to go in terms of the effective abolition of child labour, and the elimination of discrimination in employment and occupation.

The ILO has done great work on this front, but it deals with such matters in the boardrooms of corporations and of Government. In those boardrooms, it sometimes has to face intransigence and doors that are shut in its face. However, workers in plantations and textile factories in far-flung corners of the world have to face torture, murder, abduction and rape. The ILO does a fantastic job, but as the 250 pages of the annual document show, there are individual tragedies at the chalk face.

As many people are aware, Colombia has a reputation for some of the worst abuses of trade union rights worldwide. Surprisingly, the country is a signatory to the ILO conventions, but it is described by the International Centre for Trade Union Rights as

> "the most dangerous place in the world to be a trade union leader or activist."

In 2001, 184 people were assassinated, and more than 3,000 people have been killed or abducted in the past 13 years. That is an appalling travesty in what we call a civilised world. Alexander Lopez, who was supposed to attend a recent public meeting in the House, could not do so because he had been detained by the police in Colombia.

Colombia has a brief and bloody history when it comes to trade union rights. On 20 March, Luis Castillo and Juan Bautista Cevallos, members of the electricity workers' union, were ambushed and assassinated by paramilitaries. Luis Castillo had recently moved his place of work because of death threats. On 22 March this year, Ernesto Martinez of the teachers' association was assassinated outside Rio Negro. On 23 March, Jose Garcia disappeared and his whereabouts are unknown. On 25 March, two members of the oil workers' union, Jose Perez and Hernando Silva, disappeared and their whereabouts are unknown. The list goes on and on.

I shall not bore the House with the statistics for the whole year, but only last week William Gomez, the president of the national union of food industry workers, suffered the horrendous experience of the attempted kidnap of his four-year-old daughter. The suffering in Colombia goes on and on, but that country is not alone.

In Brazil, the International Metalworkers Federation describes an unprovoked attack by military police at the Ford car factory. Mexico has seen assaults on labour lawyers Arturo Justiniani and Hernandez Calzada, because they accused an airline of hiring thugs in a dispute with the Mexican pilots' association. In Turkey, 12 teachers have been arrested for supporting Kurdish language teaching in educational establishments and Amnesty International is very concerned about the Turkish record of torture of people detained. In Costa

[Huw Irranca-Davies]

Rica, workers are systematically dismissed for signs of union activity. In Guatemala, unions in textile factories doing work for multinational corporations are systematically intimidated.

In China, South Korea and Indonesia, attacks are made on work force activists with the complicity of Governments. Anybody trying to start up a union in China that is not sanctioned faces a prison sentence of up to 20 years. Amnesty International and, I am sure, the Government, are aware of the human rights abuses in prisons in China. Trade union activity is repressed in Belarus and any democratic activity in Burma results in jail. Unions are banned in much of the middle east, including Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, which have a total ban on unions. Iraq and Syria allow only single unions, which are controlled by the ruling parties. That is an A to Z of harassment, intimidation, deaths, abductions and kidnapping that represents the complete abuse of human rights.

Over the past 10 years, the Committee of Freedom of Association of the ILO has tracked all those murders, disappearances, arrests, detentions and forced exiles, even to the extent of the declarations of states of emergency and the suspension of civil liberties that are imposed on unions. What can we do? Many people throw up their hands in despair and say that the problem is a direct result of globalisation and multinational corporations that can move easily from one place to another, and Governments that will sign away the rights of their workers in order to welcome any foreign aid investment. What can we do in the face of that situation? Well, there is much to do but it is a question of political will,

I welcome the initiatives taken by the Government, especially by the Department for International Development, and the money that has been put towards developing union activism in various countries, including many that I have already mentioned. However, during the 1980s and 1990s, the world went through a period of unfettered neoliberalism. Companies were able to go where they wanted, and do what they wanted. They faced no consequences in terms of what happened to the work force, nor in terms of what happened, implicitly or complicitly, to workers' rights. We must get away from that period, and the Government are already playing a role in achieving that. I urge them to keep on leading from the front and putting the message to our more recalcitrant partners.

The US is a signatory to the International Labour Organisation conventions, but it has not ratified conventions 87 and 98. We must put pressure on to ensure that it does so.

These are global problems, and they need global solutions. Two years ago, Anthony Giddens identified the need for Governments to collaborate with non-governmental organisations and third-sector groups worldwide, as the problem required worldwide co-operation.

International trade union representation also has a role to play. I began by referring to the Merthyr rising, but the battle has moved away from these shores and become truly transnational and international. That is how it must be fought. We must push for more ethical trading, and we must push recalcitrant Governments to change their ways.

The Government are leading the way. It is a matter of political will. I urge the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North (Malcolm Wicks), to keep on pushing hard for international agreements on the way forward. The document to which I have referred is one of despair: let us turn it into one of hope in years to come.

7.27 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Malcolm Wicks): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies) on securing this most important debate and bringing its international theme to the House's attention. I congratulate him also, and most sincerely, on his very well researched speech. It was laced with much compassion and eloquence, and I look forward to hearing other contributions from my new and hon. Friend in the months and years to come.

I was struck by the way in which my hon. Friend reminded us of our history, as no Member of this House must ever take for granted the rights that we enjoy in a democratic society. He also spoke passionately, as a true internationalist. He reminded us that our ethics, democratic values and rights do not end at the white cliffs of Dover, but that we need to spread them across the earth.

The Government strongly condemn international violation of the rights of trade unions, their members, and their members' families. We fully support the work of the International Labour Organisation, which is the UN specialist agency with specific responsibility for protecting and promoting workers' rights worldwide.

The ILO was founded in 1919, at an important point in our history. It is no coincidence that that happened at the end of the first world war, and the ILO's goal was to promote peace through social justice, and to recognise internationally human rights and labour rights. Its tripartite structure, which enables workers' and employers' organisations to participate equally with Governments, is unique in the UN system.

In 1948—shortly after another world war, and again I think that that is no coincidence—a convention on freedom of association and protection of the right to organise was launched. The UK was the first country to ratify the convention, and we are proud of that. The right to organise is fundamental to democracy, yet my hon. Friend reminded us that even in the 21st century trade union rights are being violated around the world. As my hon. Friend noted, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions 2001 survey reported a rise in the number of murdered or so-called disappeared trade unionists, and 223 is my statistic for that year.

Some 140 countries have now ratified the ILO convention on freedom of association and protection of the right to organise. In 1998, more than 50 years after adopting that convention, all 175 member states of the ILO signed up to a declaration of rights and fundamental principles at work. All those member states agreed to respect, promote and realise the ILO core labour standards, regardless of their level of economic development and—crucially—whether or not they had ratified the relevant ILO conventions.

The ILO's core labour standards cover freedom of association, promotion of collective bargaining, abolition of forced and child labour and the elimination of discrimination in employment. The United Kingdom played a leading role in securing the 1998 declaration, and we continue to support the follow-up process to the declaration.

The Government provide substantial financial support to the ILO. Equally importantly, we also work closely with the organisation to ensure that the international framework to combat abuses of workers' rights throughout the world is in place and effective. The recent annual survey of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions shows that there can be no grounds for complacency on trade union rights' violations. Indeed, some of it makes disturbing reading.

The UK has continually supported the ILO's work in defending trade union rights. We have ratified all the ILO core conventions, including those relating to freedom of association and collective bargaining, and we encourage other countries to do so. When looking at international labour rights, however, we clearly need to keep in mind the complexity of the issues involved and not underestimate the concerted effort that is needed by the whole international community to bring about change. Such change will not happen overnight. Against that background, the ILO declaration that I referred to earlier, which was adopted only four years ago, and its follow-up system of global reports are already making an extremely valuable contribution to effecting change.

The very first global report was published in 2000 and covered freedom of association and collective bargaining. The report underscored the crucial role of those rights in today's globalising world, highlighted the fact that violations still occur and set out priorities for technical co-operation aimed at reinforcing those rights. As might be expected, many of those countries criticised by the report were also highlighted by the ILO global report.

As a result of that report, an action plan to promote rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining has been agreed and is being implemented. Quite apart from the many activities that the ILO is undertaking in this area—meetings, publications, advisory services and ongoing projects—more than 20 ILO co-operative programmes have been launched. These involve many of the countries highlighted in the survey.

The ILO, more than any other body, has kept up pressure on the Burmese Government to stop their horrendous and inhumane practices of forced labour and suppression of the trade union movement. The UK has been at the forefront of the international community's efforts to bring about national reconciliation, respect for human rights and democracy in Burma. It is only through the return of the rule of law and democracy in Burma that substantive progress will be made.

In the ILO, we have worked together with the Trades Union Congress, the Confederation of British Industry and European partners in our efforts to compel Burma to comply with its obligations to end forced labour. The European Union common position on Burma is designed to bring pressure to bear for positive change. It contains an arms embargo, a visa ban, an assets freeze, a ban on high-level visits, a ban on the sale of items that could be used for torture and a ban on non-humanitarian aid. The European Commission suspended Burma's generalised system of preferences trading privileges in 1997 in response to concerns over forced labour. In addition, we do not encourage trade, investment or tourism with Burma. All these measures remain in place.

The release from house arrest of Aung San Suu Kyi on 6 May is, of course, a positive step forward. I know that all of us in this House have the highest regard for this remarkable woman who, in the most difficult circumstances, including family circumstances, has kept alight the flame of freedom in Burma. However, her release is only one of the many steps that will be required. We have called on the Burmese authorities to move ahead at an ever-faster speed to bring about substantive change in Burma.

Similarly, we remain extremely concerned about the degree of violence against all human rights defenders, including trade unionists, in Colombia. We have raised the issue with the Colombian Government and noted the concerns expressed, most recently by the TUC on a visit to Colombia in February, on the situation of trade union members in that country. We continue, bilaterally and in partnership with EU countries, to urge the Colombian Government to take effective measures to protect the lives of all human rights defenders. The Government contributed generously to the UN human rights office in Bogota, giving more than £250,000 during the past year.

Both the Burma and Colombia cases were discussed at this year's international labour conference by the ILO's committee on the application of standards—as were many other cases of trade union repression highlighted in the report to which I referred.

Rob Marris (Wolverhampton, South-West): I am sure that my hon. Friend will have noted that only Labour Members are present for this debate—a telling point. He has referred to the pressure rightly brought to bear by the EU in respect of trade union and human rights throughout the world. Turkey is an applicant member of the EU and the United Kingdom Government has a veto on such applications, so can the Minister assure the House that Turkey's record on trade union and human rights will be borne in mind by the Government when they make their assessment of Turkey's application for admission to the European Union?

Malcolm Wicks: Although I cannot discuss tonight individual applications from would-be members of the EU, I remind the House that the strength of the EU is that it is a collective of democratic states which take seriously the rights of all their citizens, including trade unionists.

It is important to realise that the ILO's approach is not sanction-based in the main, although I have mentioned Burma in that regard; it is based on awareness raising, promotion, peer pressure, consensus and technical co-operation. Such an approach is both transparent and highly effective. We should not forget that one of the first acts of the Labour Government was to honour the pledge to restore trade union rights at Government communications headquarters, Cheltenham—a more recent episode in our history. That was in conformity with our ILO obligations, following ILO criticism of previous UK Government policy.

We must realise that the ILO core labour standards are inter-related. Strong trade unions can help to combat discrimination in employment and end forced labour.

[Malcolm Wicks]

We actively support the ILO in its work to promote other core labour standards, such as the elimination of child labour which is a great stain on the world economy. We support the efforts of developing countries to strengthen their democratic institutions—for example, through the electoral process, parliaments and civil society—so that all people have effective representation and participation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore mentioned globalisation and its implications. Although there is not enough time to discuss those important issues, I certainly acknowledge them. Most of us would agree that the answer is not to call for protectionism or the tearing down of international institutions—indeed, my hon. Friend wants them to be strengthened and the Government share that view. It is not a question of being for or against globalisation, as he knows.

Perhaps the wisest words on this issue have come most recently from Kofi Annan, who said that our challenge is

> "to ensure that globalisation becomes a positive force for all the world's people, instead of leaving millions of them behind in squalor."

We need to think through the implications of that.

In summing up, I congratulate my hon. Friend again on raising a most important issue. It is difficult to think of an issue that has a more important impact on human beings in peril. I want to assure the House that the Government will continue to work actively and constructively with our partners in all international forums to promote the implementation of all ILO core labour standards and to bring an end to the violations and abuses of the rights of our fellow human beings.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty minutes to Eight o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 18 June 2002

[SYLVIA HEAL *in the Chair*]

China

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

9.30 am

Mr. Ben Chapman (Wirral, South): I am delighted to have secured this debate. It is opportune that we should have it now, because only three months ago we celebrated the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic links with China at ambassadorial level, and in a few days' time we will have reached the fifth anniversary of the return of Hong Kong to China. I asked the Library when the House had last discussed our bilateral relations with China, but it was unable to find an example of such a debate. It is vital that we air the subject thoroughly.

The debate is opportune also because many hon. Members present today have just returned from a visit to China. For propriety, I should declare that our air fares were met with commercial assistance and that our transport and hospitality costs while in China were met by our interlocutors there, the National People's Congress, the provincial people's congresses and the municipal people's congresses. Many hon. Members who went on the visit were keen to be present for this debate, but some are committed to attending other Select Committee meetings and visits, or have similar engagements. For example, the hon. Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen) has asked me to express his apologies, as he is with his Select Committee in Warsaw.

The all-party group on China, which I chair, is one of the largest such groups. We think it important that as many Members of Parliament as possible, including Members of the House of Lords, take an interest in China and are able to speak about it with authority within the Palace of Westminster and outside it. It is important also, given the rate of change in China, that regular visits take place, not least because change is a constant there, and we need to be current. It is helpful to have the opportunity to bring the House up to date on matters as I and my colleagues found them.

In my mind's eye, I see a bilateral relationship as a pie chart. The pieces of the pie relate to commercial relations, civic relations, academic and educational relations, sporting relations, governmental relations and so on. The piece that relates to parliamentary relations is relatively thin, but it is important, especially for political and democratic development. My colleagues in the China group attach some importance to maintaining the size of the slice of pie and of the group itself—and, indeed, to developing both.

We regularly receive visitors from China. As recently as yesterday, I met the deputy chairman of the standing committee of the provincial people's congress of Guangdong; and a few weeks ago I and my colleagues met Li Ruihuan, the chairman of the Chinese People's political consultative conference. We have also tried to encourage parliamentarians to learn Mandarin and to facilitate that learning, and we have been instrumental in bringing a clerk from the National People's Congress for training and experience in the Palace of Westminster. However, like other groups, we are seriously limited by an absence of resources. Funding has been difficult, and may be complicated and restricted by the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000, although we are now trying to tackle the problem.

Our debate is particularly important now, because although our bilateral relationship with China is in excellent shape, especially following the successful hand over of Hong Kong, it is still in need of widening and deepening. In a sense, it has been a truly bilateral relationship for five years only. Prior to that, for 150 years it was a trilateral relationship in some respects, and our dealings, especially in more recent historic terms, were conducted against the background of, and in relation to, Hong Kong. There is still much to be done, especially given our joint permanent membership of the Security Council. I may be over-ambitious, but I think that in the light of our historical and current relationship and our different spheres of influence there is unexploited scope for double-header initiatives with the People's Republic of China.

Given our history, remarkable progress has been made. We enjoy close collaboration on the governmental front, and that has been particularly so recently in relation to international coalition against terrorism. Government links are many and varied, and high-level exchanges are frequent, which is to be greatly welcomed. That was demonstrably true of the Deputy Prime Minister's recent visit to China, against the background of the crucial global challenges of the environment in general and the Kyoto agreement in particular. It was also true of Vice-President Hu Jintao's visit to the UK in October last year.

However, not everything in the garden is rosy. Just as the Chinese do not see all aspects of the UK as perfection, there are some aspects of China's affairs that we find imperfect. Human rights remain a serious concern, and the all-party group never fails to raise the issue on its visits to China and with Chinese visitors to the UK. We recognise, however, that the colossus that is China is on a continuum that will take it from economic reform through political reform to social and civil reform. Like much else in China, that process is probably inevitable, and the all-party group has a small role to play in encouraging China along the line of that continuum—however slowly—through constant dialogue.

It is readily acknowledged that the opening-up and reform of China have led to massive improvements in living standards and in the enjoyment of economic and social rights, but it is fair to say that they have not been matched by similar improvements in social and political rights. The continued detention and harassment of democracy activists and religious practitioners run contrary to international human rights norms, as do the excessive use of the death penalty, the continued use of detention without trial and some aspects of the situation in Tibet and Xingjiang. Religious beliefs, freedom of association and of expression and the media are routinely restricted. The crackdown on activists in the China Democracy party and the Falun Gong continues,

[Mr. Ben Chapman]

and Falun Gong leaders have been handed harsh sentences. I and, I think, the Government have no particular view on the Falun Gong, but we are concerned about human rights abuses, wherever they occur.

That said, the human rights dialogue is continuing and, I think, progressing at national and European Union level. A round of bilateral exchanges concluded just before we went to Beijing. The Chinese have ratified the international covenant on economic, social and cultural rights, and have signed the covenant on civil and political rights, but not ratified it. We continue to express our hope that they will do so, and to make clear our concerns about the treatment of Tibet and Tibetans.

We applaud the work that the British Council and the Great Britain China Centre have done within that human rights dialogue on promoting the rule of law, on strengthening civil society and on many other issues. I recognise, however, that the maintenance of social stability will be the predominant requirement as the Chinese move forward, and that both social and economic development will inevitably have Chinese characteristics.

For many years, China has been regarded as potentially the largest market in the world. The realisation of that potential has been a long time coming, but the fact remains that economic developments have been remarkable for China's 1.25 billion people—they currently make up one fifth of the world's population, and the figure is growing. Since Deng Xiaoping adopted the open-door policy in 1978, the economy has grown by almost 10 per cent. per annum. Shanghai is a new "Metropolis", and it is said that three quarters of the world's construction cranes can be found there. That is certainly apocryphal, but impressionistically it could be true. I did not count them, but there appeared to be hundreds, if not thousands, of high-rise blocks. Futuristic buildings of high quality and architectural design stand starkly and modernistically alongside the traditional architecture of the Bund. To walk down Nanjing road and see its commercial activity and feel its buzz is an energising experience. Shanghai had a gross domestic product of $60 billion in 2001, and its foreign trade expands by 20 per cent. a year. Many major projects are under way, such as the deep-water port at Yangshan island, which I think will carry as much traffic as the port of Hong Kong.

It is true, however, that in Shanghai and elsewhere too many Chinese still harbour an old-fashioned view of the United Kingdom. Believe it or not, London is still thought of as foggy. That Dickensian view is held partly I suppose because of the Chinese liking for British classics. It is thus opportune that another effort is being made to dispel that image, and to promote an innovative and technologically advanced Britain through the Leading Edge events in Shanghai in October.

Some years ago when I served in the British embassy in Beijing, I was shown plans of a new futuristic area of the city—virtually a city in itself—called Pudong, which was to have its own financial centre, international airport, high-tech zone, industrial areas and so on. I was dubious about its achievability, but it has now been built and is massively impressive. I no longer harbour any doubt about China's ability or commitment to developing the western regions. Indeed, I recognise that as another inevitability, and we saw a little of it when we visited Xi'an.

In that context, it is appropriate that the policies of and assistance from the Department for International Development should focus in China on poverty alleviation, mainly in the western provinces where the majority of the poor are located. However, the western provinces are also important commercially. Development in that region will provide massive opportunities for exporters and investors. We need to facilitate such development for UK exporters and investors.

It is commendable that in recent years our exports to China have grown massively, no doubt assisted by the China-Britain Business Council and its predecessors. In the 1990s, our exports quadrupled. It is quite coincidental that my period as commercial councillor in Beijing promoting our trade there ended in the 1980s, when our exports were sadly rather flat. After my time, they took off dramatically. If we include direct exports alongside exports via Hong Kong, the figure for 2001 was £2.4 billion.

That said, the direct visible trade deficit grew from £32 million when I was there to £4.25 billion by 2001. In other words, Chinese exports to the UK have massively outstripped our exports to China. There is obviously some ground to be made up, as there is in relation to our European competitors. For example, Germany's direct trade exports were two and half times those of the UK a couple of years ago, and French exports were 50 per cent. higher.

UK capabilities in telecommunications, technology for the supply of liquefied natural gas, transportation, chemical production, power generation, agriculture and food processing, among other things, mix well with Chinese priorities. One wonders whether, for many, China is still too far, too big and too difficult. We need to develop measured ways to attract, in particular, small and medium-sized enterprises to the market, and perhaps more closely consider piggy-backing their export efforts on to those of larger firms, not least those that deal with oil and related activities and have massive investments in China.

China's entry to the World Trade Organisation will also provide opportunities for UK firms, which colleagues from the Select Committee on Trade and Industry are examining as I speak. One understands China's reluctance to expose a fledgling financial services sector to severe competition too early, but we need to press for services such as banking, insurance and fund management, among other areas in which we have particular expertise, if we are to have a better share of and better opportunities in the Chinese market. Our relationship on the environmental front may also allow us to promote our expertise in environmental and pollution control equipment and environmental consultancy. By the same token, the market in consumer goods, health care, education and training will open up much further, not least in the western provinces.

It is also inevitable that, as with the Asian tigers, China will need to invest overseas, as it is already doing to a certain extent. In purchasing power parity terms, it is already the world's second-largest economy. It will, as night follows day and for a variety of sound economic reasons, need to move its investment overseas as well as inland. Inward investment is a long process, and it is right that Invest UK is targeting the market.

Although our cumulative figures make the UK the sixth largest investor in China and the leading EU investor, much of that is represented by industrial giants. Without wishing to encourage the export of jobs, we still need to encourage British companies to consider making their own investment in China as a basis for tackling the market in the region. The upcoming Beijing Olympic games of 2008 will provide significant commercial opportunities, and we welcome the attention that Trade Partners UK is paying to that. The Beijing municipality is investing $24 billion in urban infrastructure and facilities for the games.

We did not visit Hong Kong, so I shall restrict my remarks on that region, but we intend to visit it later this year. Suffice it to say that the Chinese seem to me and, I think, to the group to have honoured the terms of the joint declaration to the letter. The Special Administrative Region arrangements are working, as far as one can see, absolutely as intended. As a result, the interactions between China and Hong Kong are now on an even more massive scale than before.

The economy of Hong Kong has seen difficult times, as have other economies of that region and elsewhere, but it is weathering the storm and showing its perpetually remarkable ability to adapt. It remains, of course, an important market for the United Kingdom, and Britain remains its leading foreign investor.

The system of governance of Hong Kong is changing, and progress is being made towards universal suffrage. The Chief Executive has announced his intention to introduce "Ministers" from outside the civil service, who will be politically appointed and answerable to him for the duration of his political tenure. Although those Ministers will take full political responsibility for the success or failure of their policies, personally speaking, I wonder whether that measure is sufficiently radical or forward-looking to achieve what are regarded as normal forms of governance or the process towards democratisation, which is designed to benefit the people of Hong Kong, for whom we have an enduring moral and political responsibility because of our residual responsibilities. I also wonder whether the Chief Executive's measure is forward-looking enough for the economy of Hong Kong.

It is striking that there are now 20,000 Chinese students in the United Kingdom. It is equally striking that most of them are privately funded and that the Chevening scholarship programme for China is the largest in the world.

I have ranged generally, sometimes superficially, over several issues, but our bilateral relations are necessarily wide and diverse. They include, for example, important non-governmental connections through the UK-China Forum, which will meet in Beijing next year.

China is vastly important as a global player and in relation to the United Kingdom. The nation seems to recognise increasingly an external role, as it did with its leadership during the Asian economic crisis and as it has done in relation to the current India-Pakistan dispute. It showed such leadership by hosting the APEC summit for the first time last year, by establishing a peacekeeping affairs office and by indicating its willingness to play a part in UN peacekeeping operations. It will do so at a different level as more and more students and tourists travel overseas. Large numbers are already doing so.

China is a colossus of geo-political importance. It is a colossus in its commercial, economic and industrial development, and in its ability to affect the world for good or ill, be it in relation to the environment or to world stability. It is also a colossus by virtue of its scale—31 provinces or autonomous regions, each the size of a European country. It is twice the size of western Europe and stretches from the tropics to the sub-Arctic. Although there are difficult economic and political changes ahead, because of the scale and complexity of matters Chinese, China provides us with opportunities on a wide front. With major changes in the Chinese hierarchy due in autumn this year and spring next year, I hope very much that we can utilise our bilateral relations to good effect in terms of the people of both nations and global well-being.

9.50 am

Tony Baldry (Banbury): Madam Deputy Speaker, I apologise to you and to the Minister for the fact that I shall not be able to stay for the whole debate, but I am chairing a meeting of the International Development Select Committee.

The hon. Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Chapman), the excellent chairman of the all-party group on China, is to be congratulated on securing this debate. If the millennium development goals for 2015 are to be met, it will be largely because of the Herculean efforts that have been made by China to lift her people out of poverty. The past five years have probably been the most momentous for relations between China and the UK.

As the hon. Member for Wirral, South said, the hand over of Hong Kong, about five years ago, was much more successful than most people had expected. The following year, the Chinese Prime Minister visited the UK, and our Prime Minister visited China. In 1999, there was the extremely successful state visit of the President of China, the first such state visit ever. Those visits have been followed by others, such as that of the Vice-President last year, and the chairman of the People's consultative committee this year. Against that background, there has also been a substantial increase in bilateral trade. The Chinese ambassador said only yesterday that there were only about 8,000 Chinese students studying in the UK when he visited this country five years ago, whereas there are now about 40,000. Our relations with China have been strengthened considerably during that period.

As one of the vice-chairs of the all-party group on China, I want to reinforce something that the hon. Member for Wirral, South said on a parliamentary housekeeping point. The British-American parliamentary group receives public funding, and other groups in the House can secure overseas visits either through the Inter-Parliamentary Union or, for Commonwealth countries, through the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. We are often very fortunate in being welcomed by other countries, as happened recently when the National People's Congress entertained Members of the House of Commons. I did not go on that visit, but I have recently been to China on

[Tony Baldry]

my own account. However, the lack of budgetary assistance makes it difficult for us to invite representatives of other countries here. If relations between Parliaments are to be thickened, a two-way dialogue is required.

Some people in the private sector are willing to support the work of the all-party group on China, which they regard as important. An unintended consequence of the legislation on donations to political parties has been to muck that up. If a public company in the UK wishes to give money to the all-party group on China for the purpose of exchanges between parliamentarians, it has to obtain the approval of its shareholders at an annual general meeting. Companies are not unwilling to do that, nor have they anything to hide, but it is an additional imposition. The hon. Member for Wirral, South and I can talk to the chairman of the Electoral Commission, Sam Younger, about the matter, but I suspect that he is constrained by the law.

We need to consider whether the House could set up a trust fund or other mechanism to facilitate parliamentary exchanges without public companies having to go through the brouhaha of resolutions at their annual general meetings to enable them to give modest sums. Otherwise, it will be difficult to develop and thicken the relations that are necessary between this Parliament and the National People's Congress in China, which I am sure we all want to do. China is a large and increasingly important country. It is in all our interests to get to know how Chinese parliamentarians think and how they view issues.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Denis MacShane): I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way, as it is unusual to give way to the Minister. Parliament voted recently to allow all hon. Members to make three visits to European countries, not on matters to do with the Government. Speaking as a Member of Parliament and not as a Minister, I would have no problem with a resolution to allow one trip a year further abroad to enable hon. Members to make longer range visits, which are, I agree, so important.

Tony Baldry: That is a constructive comment, and I endorse it. It is difficult for us to invite parliamentarians to Westminster as our guests to discuss matters such as those mentioned by the hon. Member for Wirral, South in relation to human rights. That cannot be done in headlines; it requires a degree of subtlety and should progress over a period of time when we have established some trust and got to know people. It is important to keep dialogue going in both directions.

Bilateral trade with China has doubled over recent years. However, there is still enormous potential for small and medium-sized businesses. The China-Britain Business Council does brilliant work, and is much to be congratulated. So, too, do many British trade partners. The export of the year award was made at the lunch to celebrate the Chinese new year, and I was struck by the fact that it has often been a matter of chance that the winner has been established in China. I suspect that much more needs to be done to give small and medium-sized businesses the confidence to get to grips with the Chinese market. Those that do, and persevere, find openings for specialist niche companies, but they need help.

With regard to culture and language, China is an increasingly important player on the world stage, but practically no schools in the UK offer Mandarin as a subject. It is not an impossible subject; my daughter has just completed a GCSE in Mandarin and hopes to go to China for her gap year to teach English. So it is possible, although she was fortunate in being at a school that offered Mandarin. For her and others who study the language, it is essential to understand that a culture can have completely different values, but that it is none the less important for that. Having some understanding of those cultural values is extremely important for people in our schools if they are not to see China in terms of historic stereotypes. We should consider how we in the UK can ensure that we have a better understanding of Chinese culture, history and language, provide greater opportunities for youngsters in our schools and enable those who may like to do so to study Mandarin.

Those were my three brief points. The first concerned how we can improve relations between the UK Parliament and the National People's Congress; the second, how we can help small and medium-sized businesses to take greater advantage of the ever-growing Chinese market; and the third what we can do to ensure a better understanding in our schools of Chinese culture and greater opportunities for children to learn Mandarin.

9.59 am

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton): I should like to follow on from the comments made by the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) and my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Chapman). I, too, was a member of the all-party group that went to China, which was an enormously impressive experience.

I shall respond to the comments made by the hon. Member for Banbury about the cultural side of the visit. Although much of the business and the constant string of meetings that we conducted in China could be tiresome, to put it mildly, the highlight of our trip came when we visited the Great Wall of China. It took more than 2,000 years for the fabled wall to be built, which gave me a marvellous reference point for continuity within the Chinese polity and allowed me an insight into Chinese culture, which regards outsiders as "the other". The Chinese name for China is Zhongguo, which translates as "the middle kingdom" and suggests that the outer world continues to be regarded as something other.

During our trip, I perceived the Chinese Government as trying to break down those barriers and making conscious efforts to look outwards. There is no greater example of that than China's recent accession to the World Trade Organisation. Mr. Tong, the remarkable and erudite man who took China into that organisation, was our host for a large part of our visit. Not only did his erudition come across clearly, but it was obvious from his humour and use of demotic language that he was an internationalist in the true sense of the word. I do not suggest that he reflects the reality of the Chinese masses, however.

Let us consider what the Chinese have to deal with. Some 400 million Chinese live in great cities such as Beijing, Shanghai and Xi'an. That is challenging enough, but in addition 900 million peasants live in the countryside, in a very different world from those in the cities. The Chinese Government have to take that into account.

Like my hon. Friend, I was struck by the great strides being made internally on the economy and infrastructure. I smile to think of the M25 and all the problems associated with it, such as yesterday's breakdown, given that the Chinese have just built a fifth ring road around Beijing, which runs freely and puts the M25 to shame. When we took a 14-hour train ride from Beijing to Xi'an, I realised that it would be a good idea for such companies as Railtrack and Virgin to go and see how to run trains that arrive on time, are clean and provide excellent food. There is much to be learned from China.

I want to deal with the provisions in the United Kingdom for the Chinese language and for an understanding of Chinese culture and education. My hon. Friend referred to the stereotypical view of London as foggy. In fact, on a dank day in mid-winter, one can still be misled into thinking that that stereotype is true. However, we have our own stereotypical views of China and the Chinese. Their major cities are no different from major cities anywhere in the world: the young people wear the same style of clothes, have the same fashions, go to the same McDonalds hamburger joints and eat at Kentucky Fried Chicken. There is a great international cultural affinity at that level, although I make the distinction between the cities and the countryside.

There remains an ignorance of cultures on both sides, as the hon. Member for Banbury said. I was interested to hear that one of his daughters has been studying Mandarin, because one of my daughters is head of a language specialist school in Liverpool, which teaches Mandarin and is twinned with a school in Shanghai. Indeed, my old school in Liverpool—St. Edward's—is also a language specialist school. It teaches Mandarin and has a twinning arrangement with a school in Shanghai. Other schools in Liverpool have such an arrangement, which is not surprising as Liverpool is home to the oldest Chinese community in Europe. It dates back 300 years, and we have long-standing links with China.

I want such links to be reinforced. I want to ensure that we do whatever we can in the House and through the Government to provide additional support when that is appropriate. I note the tremendous work of the British Council in facilitating twinning arrangements and exchanges between schools. However, we have a long way to go to address the ignorance in this country and to service further exchanges between the many schools in China that are crying out for such arrangements. I hope that what happened in Japan post the Tokyo Olympic games and the Sapporo winter Olympic games, and what happened in South Korea post the Seoul Olympic games, will have a progressive effect post the Beijing games.

The Chinese Government and the Beijing municipality have gone out of their way to make sure that the games will be a great success. I have no doubt that, given the unity of purpose and the application of the Chinese people, they will be a tremendous success. There will be an influx of overseas visitors, the likes of which the Chinese have never had to contend with. The games will be a beneficial occurrence. I am positive about it. It will have a similar effect on how the Chinese view other people. That will happen post-Beijing, as it happened post-Seoul, and to a large measure post-Tokyo. The games are important to the Chinese people and to their Government. I trust that we will play our part in making sure that they are a great success.

It is easy to have a mutual admiration society, but we cannot overlook the differences between us and the Chinese Government, especially on human rights. Mr. Tong pointed out to me that Guangdong province has a population of 135 million people. That is a sizeable province. Xi'an province, for example, has between 38 million to 39 million. That is a huge number of people, and we must remember that there are tensions within China as certain provinces and municipalities move on at a rate of knots. Its extremely entrenched and conservative countryside has the infrastructure to move on. However, that lends itself to strains and to an arbitrary way in which to deal with such matters.

To return to what I said about the Great Wall, there is a tremendous fear among the Chinese that if there is not an enemy from without, atomisation is always lurking round the corner from within. We should be aware of that when considering human rights in a Chinese context. The Chinese Government have strong views on missile defence, which reflect their long culture of feeling in peril from without. Her Majesty's Government have a different view. I speak only for myself, because I take issue with the Government on missile defence. We must recognise that in our dealings with the Chinese Government and people, who are on the edge in their development, Factors that incur mistrust are not helpful to anyone, and there is mistrust on both sides, on issues such as human rights on the one hand and missile defence on the other.

We have tremendous potential for trade, educational and scientific relations with China. Mr. Deputy Speaker, you are from the part of the country from which I hail. Imagine a city stretching from Chester to Preston, and from the west of Merseyside to the east of Manchester, with 16 million people in it. That will give you some idea of the scale of what is happening in China. We would not feel uncomfortable in such a city; we would feel quite at home, as it would have many of the things that we aspire to for a civilised life.

To put it crudely, we should be getting a bit of the action. We have excellent civil servants in China who are doing an excellent job. The Leading Edge event is coming up in Shanghai in October, and is all about promoting British trade in the Shanghai autonomous area. It behoves British companies to take up those opportunities, to get out there and to sell themselves as those in other countries are doing.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Nicholas Winterton): Order. Three hon. Gentlemen wish to participate in the debate before the winding-up speeches. If they restrict themselves to, say, six minutes, we will get them all in.

10.11 am

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I shall restrict myself to six minutes. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Chapman) for initiating the debate.

[Mr. Nigel Evans]

Like many other hon. Members present, I too have visited China as a guest of the Chinese Government. The hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) spoke about the different culture in China, which was referred to as a colossus by the hon. Member for Wirral, South. It is all those things. It is amazing to compare Beijing now with how it was the first time I went there eight or nine years ago. Downtown, one could still see carts being pulled by oxen with peat-like fuel on the back. Two years later, I did not see that in Beijing, and one now has to go further out into the countryside to see it.

The hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton is right to point out that China has a huge industry, and that amazing infrastructure projects are taking place in Beijing, Shanghai and other places. However, there is huge poverty outside those major urban areas, and that is a problem that the Chinese Government will want to address.

As has been said, it would be wrong for us to debate China and not mention human rights, and to think that by not mentioning the subject we were doing the Chinese a favour. The fact is that we do them a favour every time that we mention it. It is in the spirit of friendship that we raise those issues. This and previous Governments have promoted dialogue with the Chinese Government, and they continue to do so. The hon. Member for Wirral, South mentioned several delegations that have visited from China, and those from this country that have gone to China. The friendship that exists because of those visits is vital.

China is a colossus; it is a huge market. I get a bit depressed when I read the trade figures. The trade deficit in 1988 was £32 million, and now it is more than £4 billion. I agree with the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton that we want a slice of the action. It is important that we start to focus more on that market. If the Germans and the French are doing that—I believe that we have overtaken the Italians now—then we, too, should do so. We must also focus on what we can do to improve our trade relations with China. As prosperity grows within China, it will buy goods from abroad, just as happened in this country. That is important.

As for tourism, I have been fascinated by places such as Chong Ching, which I had not even heard of before I visited it in September. It has a population of 32 million. That is amazing. I have visited other cities in China with large populations. We need to understand better the country's culture, rather than dictating to it, and learn about Chinese history. As has already been said, we should have more Mandarin lessons in our schools and universities. More people need to learn Mandarin, which will help trade in future.

It is amazing what China has to offer. Huge and growing numbers of people visit China to see, for example, the Great Wall, the terracotta army in Xi'an and the forbidden city, which is superb and unparalleled anywhere in the world. I hope that that will lead to more Chinese people visiting this country, which must be encouraged.

Education has been mentioned time and again, and it is vital. At the university of Central Lancashire, which is in my constituency, more than 500 students are Chinese. China is its largest overseas market. The university is focusing on that and wants the numbers to increase, and I congratulate it on that. On 12 July, the Chinese ambassador, His Excellency Mr. Ma, will receive an honorary degree from the university, and I hope to be present to congratulate him on the recognition of his enormous work. He has been a great friend of the all-party parliamentary group on China.

I, too, congratulate the British Council on its work on English language learning and its investment in distance learning, which will have a huge market in the future. I also congratulate organisations such as the 48 group club, which is trying to improve trading relations between China and the United Kingdom. I have attended its annual Chinese new year luncheons, at which prominent people of all political persuasions have spoken.

No differences between the parties are involved. We want relations to continue to improve. We had a successful visit from the President of China, and the Vice-President came to London last year. That was superb, and we want to encourage such visits in future. I hope that we shall hear some suggestions from the Minister about how we can re-focus our attention and ensure that Britain has more than its fair share of the action in that amazing colossus of a country.

10.17 am

Mr. Roger Godsiff (Birmingham, Sparkbrook and Small Heath): I associate myself with the comments of my hon. Friends the Members for Wirral, South (Mr. Chapman) and for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle). I was privileged to have the opportunity to be part of the delegation that recently visited China. It was hugely eye opening.

I have been very much involved in south-east Asia through my chairmanship of the all-party parliamentary group on Japan. Being in Shanghai and looking out over the city at night, I could not help but feel that Shanghai now will be the Tokyo of tomorrow. I have no doubt about that.

I entirely agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton that China is a massively key player in the world. It has an important role to play in exercising sanity in a volatile area of the world. I pay tribute to its recent work in trying to persuade India and Pakistan that conflict is not the way to resolve the problem of Kashmir, and that they must have dialogue on such issues. I envisage China playing that role much more in that part of the world, because it is undoubtedly a very stable country, even if we do not agree with the system that governs it.

I was also impressed with the concept of the socialist market economy that the Chinese say has developed—every time I look at my £2 Rolex watch, I think that there must be some merit in that new concept. China has a massive internal market of 1.2 billion people, which will grow to 1.5 billion. It has a hugely impressive growth rate of 7 or 8 per cent.

Travelling through the country, albeit only a part of it, was an exciting and interesting experience. The Chinese are adamant that their priority, above all else, is the unity of the country. Although all of us on the delegation voiced our concerns about human rights issues and about the political process itself, one can understand why unity is a priority. We must remember that, only 60 years ago, China was a continent at war with itself. It was ridden with civil war. Warlords were running riot and part of China was occupied by Japanese forces. Sixty years later, it is hardly surprising that unity is the first priority of the country and the ruling elite.

I had never been to China before, but looking out at Shanghai and seeing how that city has grown is breathtaking. As my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton said, a by-product of the political system in China is that a city such as Shanghai can develop quickly without worrying about planning applications that might involve five years of arguments—although I do not offer that as justification. The Chinese tend to decide and then do it. It might not be democratic, but it ensures speedy decisions.

I will not take up any more of the House's time. It was a great privilege to have the opportunity to take part in the delegation that visited China. I thank my colleagues on the delegation for their comradeship and enjoyable company. Above all, I thank the Chinese people for their hospitality and for the opportunity to see a country that, in the normal run of events, I would probably never have seen. What I saw leads me to believe that China will increasingly be a powerhouse in the future. In the same way that we see the balance in world sport moving east—not least in football—the balance of economic power in the world will also move east.

10.23 am

Ian Stewart (Eccles): I was also part of the recent delegation to China referred to by the chairman of the all-party group, my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Chapman). As one of the vice-chairs, it normally falls to me to deal with human rights issues whenever we meet delegations from China. I do not want to say any more about that this morning other than that I associate myself with the chairman's comments. In a sense, the way in which we deal with concerns on human rights and other issues with our friends in China is a measure of the relationship between our two countries and peoples. I am an active member of the all-party Tibet group, and that is well known to our friends in China. Relationships are important, and we must understand that, in a true partnership or a marriage, whenever the partners fall out, they are not automatically divorced, otherwise there would be a great many divorces throughout the world. We must be able to put opposing views to each other, and realise that the wider interests of our two peoples are served by continuing dialogue.

I shall comment further on the historical perspective of the development of China as a very large country throughout history, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook and Small Heath (Mr. Godsiff) alluded. He said that there have been many periods of trouble in China. Our nation must have the maturity—as must other nations, including France, Germany and America—to acknowledge that our actions in China during our imperialist and colonial period greatly angered the Chinese people over hundreds of years. That is quite understandable.

Those of us who have been lucky enough to visit China on delegations know that the Chinese people have matured a great deal during a short time in a modern technological world. They have moved from a command economy to what they call a socialist market economy—I must admit that I am attracted by that concept—with a full understanding of the difficulties that that creates. They must deal with unemployment for the first time without an established social welfare safety net. They are astute enough to realise that they should look to countries such as Britain, America and other European countries. We have made our mistakes in those areas, and perhaps the Chinese people can learn from that, and from our good practice.

That is not a one-way exercise, because we can learn from China. Hon. Members have mentioned that China must address large environmental issues owing to its great economic growth during a short time. China is examining technologies and methodologies to ensure that its people gain the benefit of economic growth while dealing with the enormous ecological problems that such growth creates. China is investigating technologies that, to be frank, companies in Great Britain have sufficient finance to try. China is trying new technologies that we are not trying, although we would like to, and we can learn from its experience.

My hon. Friend the chairman of the all-party group alluded to the fact that China's economic and political maturity has been demonstrated. When the south-east Asian financial crisis hit the world—it was a world event—the Chinese Government showed real maturity by refusing to devalue the renminbi. That might not have happened in an earlier period; China might have thought that a short-term quick fix could earn it quite a bit. However, it played a mature and sincere role in that crisis. It has also played an excellent role in world peace through the United Nations Security Council, as well as unilaterally and bilaterally.

The future is bright, if only because China is talking to the world, and the world is talking to China and recognising that it is a major player in the world, and that it will increasingly be so. We should create a genuine partnership, which should include investment and social and political relations. I am optimistic about the future, although I am not uncritical.

10.30 am

Brian Cotter (Weston-super-Mare): I congratulate the hon. Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Chapman) on securing the debate, and I associate myself with his and other hon. Members' comments about the recent trip and the declaration of interest.

I shall concentrate mainly but not exclusively on the economy. China is a large country and has many facets, but we must use this occasion to look at the reality, which represents a challenge, but an opportunity. I have been told that the Chinese word for challenge also means opportunity; that draws attention to the Chinese character—and, I hope, the British character. I want us to see that China represents a great chance for us.

The hon. Member for Eccles (Ian Stewart) referred to maturity. I endorse what he has said about the Chinese economy: it is not a mature market economy, such as ours. However, the Chinese displayed great maturity by resisting calls for devaluation during the recent Asian crisis, and subsequent utterances from the Chinese Government suggest that they will continue to take that approach.

[Brian Cotter]

We are talking about reality, and I was impressed by the way in which the Chinese Government are addressing their massive problems in respect of restructuring the job market and meeting new challenges. As has been said, Liberal Democrat Members stand back in amazement at developments in Shanghai, and at economic developments and the way in which they are being tackled.

The Chinese appear to be quick learners—and I hope that we will be too, because there is much that we can learn from China. The Chinese are setting up an economy by quickly learning things that have been done in our country and other countries. I offer one example of that: the remarkable scale of the stock exchange in Shanghai. One cannot fail to be impressed by the fact that after only 11 years the Chinese have established such a highly sophisticated operation, which can process transactions swiftly: more than 80,000 transactions per second can be handled at that single stock exchange.

The way in which the Chinese have dealt with the modernity of their computer systems so that they can deal with future needs is also impressive, as is their approach to regulation. When asked about what they will do to address future problems, they said that meetings are held almost daily to discuss what problems might arise and to find ways to solve them. Perhaps that is something that we can learn. In trading, their nationwide satellite communication network is also impressive. They are laying down lots of realistic foundations for the future.

Since its accession to the World Trade Organisation, China has had to meet change ever more quickly. That will give us and other countries greater opportunities for trade, because China's economy is likely to expand considerably. I hope that those few words on the economy will act as a backdrop to the most important element, which is that we should play our part in China's economic progress. Furthermore, a significant presence in China will mean a significant presence in the rest of Asia.

Bilaterally, China and the UK have had their problems. On the Chinese side, the blowing up of the Chinese embassy in Kosovo did not help relations; and more recently the US spy plane crash could have led to a return of the cold war. Another concern, as the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) suggested, is the United States' ballistic missile defence system, which is apparently supported by our Government. My party is strongly concerned about that development and the worries that it has caused, in particular to China.

On the other hand, we are right to raise issues such as Tibet, which remains a live and worrying problem. It is also right to refer to dissent in China. We believe that countries that are confident of their status, like China, should not feel the need to suppress dissent, but should welcome it instead. However, just as we are able to make such points about China, so the Chinese are entitled to make points about us. On the positive side, we are remarkably encouraged by the way in which the Chinese Government have come alongside us in trying to deal with terrorism throughout the world since 11 September. Those events acted as a catalyst to bring the two nations together.

We have a bilateral role to play in China because 30 years ago we became the first western country to give the country ambassadorial status. That has stood us in good stead, and in recent years it allowed us to settle the question of Hong Kong. Like many hon. Members, I feel respect and amazement when I see how China's Government have instituted the one country, two systems approach that they promised. Taiwan poses a similar problem, and I tentatively suggest that a similar one country, two systems approach could be used there—but that remains to be seen, and greater brains than mine will agree or disagree on that.

I spoke originally about the great importance of our economic relationship with China. Recent moves to create a free trade area involving China and the Association of South-East Asian Nations mean that our market will not be restricted to China, but will potentially be very much larger. Our bilateral relations will also cover those relationships increasingly being created within the wider trade area of the European Union community.

The UK is China's second largest trading partner and its biggest investor among EU countries. With China's GDP ranked sixth internationally, it has great potential, but we need to work harder to achieve our aim of increasing trade, particularly with regard to small businesses. As I have mentioned, of the EU member states, we are one of the top traders with China, but that position is not secure. We need to widen our trading base and make it more varied and diverse. I hope that the Government will continue to identify areas of current and future growth in China and focus on those areas where we lag behind.

I can speak for many when I say that we value our friendly relations with China, which are epitomised in many ways through Government, trade and other contacts. Reference was made to the many Chinese students in this country. The hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton mentioned twinning of schools, and the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry), who is no longer here, also talked about education. In my constituency, we have recently twinned four schools with schools in Beijing, and a programme is being fostered by the British Council to further such twinning. We want to engage people at an early age with a country a long way away.

The Chinese people are hard working, vibrant, enthusiastic, imaginative and innovative, and they have a long history and rich cultural background. Above all, like us, they are anxious to increase friendly relations between our two countries, and not only at Government level. As we saw when we went to China recently, the people are extremely friendly and welcoming. I thank them for their great hospitality.

10.40 am

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): I congratulate you on your knighthood, Mr. Deputy Speaker, which reflects your considerable contribution to our parliamentary life. I also want to express to the hon. Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Chapman) the gratitude of everyone who has spoken. He has great knowledge of the subject and is a distinguished chairman of the all-party group on China.

Napoleon once described China as a slumbering giant. The same could be said today, except that the giant has begun to stir. We ignore China at our peril because of its economic, political and cultural importance. Chinese civilisation and culture have made an enormously important contribution to the world. As the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) said, we have long had a Chinese community in our country. That community has been greatly enlarged, and I pay tribute to its entrepreneurial energies and commitment to family support and excellence in education—wholly admirable characteristics that are an example to us all.

The emergence of China as a major economic and political power and in other ways will bring about internal changes in the country. We can already see change taking place. That has an impact on our bilateral relationship. The successful handover of Hong Kong was in no small way the catalyst for improved and ever-improving relations between our two countries. The way in which China has since handled Hong Kong has been immensely to its credit.

We agree with the first conclusion of the 10th report of the 1999–2000 Session by the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, and with the Foreign Office view expressed in it, which was that we should view as a priority the closer integration of China in the international system

> "in all fields, as a friendly and responsible partner in dealing with global and regional issues".

The enhancement of British-Chinese relations over the past few years is extremely encouraging. Hon. Members have talked about visits by various politicians: only last year, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition had a lengthy meeting with Vice-President Hu Jintao in London, at which he affirmed the Conservative party's commitment to further its long-standing relations with China—an objective that the Government share. Our close relationship with the United States, which is appreciated and understood by China, affords us a special role in helping to act as a bridge between the two countries.

Internally, modernisation in China continues. The way in which the Chinese authorities reacted to the Asian meltdown was a source of great stability in the far east and for world economic conditions. As the economy changes in China, we see civil unrest, and we note the tough action by the Chinese Government against pro-democracy dissidents, especially Falun Gong adherents. No doubt they are seen as something of a challenge to the monopoly of power held in China.

We have heard about the large gap between the rich and poor in China, which appears to be widening, and about regional differences. That is a great challenge to China. How it addresses the needs of its people and adapts to the modern world, raising the living standard of all its people, will be one of the yardsticks by which its success in the 21st century is measured.

There is no doubt that recent economic growth in China has been absolutely unparalleled. Further economic liberalisation, utilising communications advances and the internet age, combined with China's access to immense human resources and the political will to make it work, should make such growth sustainable. Before the Asian meltdown, China used to attract about 30 per cent. of inward investment into the far east; that figure is now 70 per cent. That is one of the reasons why China is likely within eight or nine years to become the world's fourth largest economy. China's accession to the World Trade Organisation represents an important step in establishing future channels for trade and prosperity for both nations. As the WTO director general Mike Moore said,

> "With China's membership, the WTO will take a major step towards becoming a truly world organisation."

Economics is just one aspect of China's complex place in the world amidst the challenges of the 21st century. Since 11 September, we have seen new-found fluidity and changing relationships bring China into the fold of key world players. That is extremely important. We value China's support for the war on terror and its willingness to work with the west in that respect. We must all work together to face such challenges, and as China continues to emerge as an economic power, its political importance will grow.

We do not want to over-simplify the problem of the status of Tibet. We urge our friends in China to respect Tibetan culture and identity. China must recognise the rights of the Tibetan people to live in peace and security and to live their lives free from unwarranted pressure and discrimination. It would be inappropriate, as this is a matter for a longer discussion, to get into the issue of Taiwan, but it has an impact on US-China and UK-China relations in that Chinese sensitivities on Taiwan have to be recognised. All we can hope is that the two entities will work together to resolve the matter. As a third party, we should be wary of coming between the two principal players, but we should also look for ways to facilitate dialogue.

It is important to note that there are signs of US-China relations and UK-China relations improving. President Bush's visit to China in February 2002 was important, as was that of Chinese Vice-President Hu Jintao to Washington. The normalisation of relationships between those two countries, in which we can play our part, is very important.

Also, as has been noted before, China's relationship with Pakistan and its more fledgling relationship with India have been helpful in cooling passions over Kashmir during the past few weeks. We have also touched on the vexed question of human rights violations. Some progress has been made there, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) said, we would not be good friends of China if we did not point out that that was an area of concern in the UK and in other parts of the world. On a more positive note, we very much welcome the fact that the Beijing Olympic games will take place in 2008 and will undoubtedly be a great success.

In its long history, China has suffered from wars and invasions by foreign powers. It is at last effectively united and confident, and it will undoubtedly be a major global power in the 21st century. There is a lively debate in China about how to marry economic liberalisation with a monolithic political structure. The 16th party congress in September is an important event and we hope that it will be a considerable success. Ultimately, however, no country can operate a free enterprise system without political plurality. That is China's greatest challenge as it emerges as more economically successful on the world stage. We shall watch developments there, confident that overall the forces of reform and modernisation will prevail.

10.49 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Denis MacShane): Sir Nicholas, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what a pleasure it is to address you by your new title and to be a member of a Government under whom you have been properly rewarded and honoured for your long service to Parliament. This has been a remarkably good debate and I ask our friends in the Chinese Government, in Chinese business and Chinese non-governmental organisations and human rights organisations to read hon. Members' words in *Hansard*. They spoke not just for themselves and Parliament but for the British people, and there is virtually nothing that I, on behalf of the Government, would disagree with in the contributions of almost all hon. Members.

Britain has a long-standing relationship with China. As had been noted, we exchanged ambassadors 30 years ago, having maintained diplomatic recognition at the height of the cold war. In passing, I pay tribute to Sir Edward Heath for his constant work in maintaining good relations between the United Kingdom and China. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Chapman) on having obtained the debate, on his powerful and cogent speech and on his tireless work as chairman of the UK all-party group on China. The House and the Government owe him a debt of gratitude.

I first visited Canton, now known as Guangzhou, 20 years ago. At that time, there were bicycles, the odd, rather large, ugly black car and a few lorries. I was dumped back in my hotel at 5.30 for a dinner, given a vacuum flask of green tea and put in my room, where I remember watching the unfolding of the Falklands conflict via Chinese television. It seemed a lot clearer than the gentleman who was reading our news bulletins at the time.

I revisited Guangzhou recently. What a difference. Like Shanghai and Beijing, it is an extraordinarily strong, confident city of skyscrapers and apartment blocks, new cars and lots of people engaged in successful businesses. At the end of my stay, two young lady interpreters asked whether I could disco dance. I gave the first lessons at the Mao Zedong memorial agricultural institute. I may be responsible for having introduced disco dancing to a nation that has made it so much its own.

My message to business people, backpackers and gap year students is: go east young men and women, the future of the 21st century will be found in China. A two-hour flight away from Shanghai are 60 cities with more than a million people residing in them. In 10 years' time, the area stretching to Korea and Japan will produce 25 per cent. of the world's GDP.

As has been noted, China is rapidly becoming an economic power. It is also becoming a political power. Our relationship at diplomatic and political level is positive and good. The inward flow of visitors, including President Jiang Zemin and other senior officials, is strong and constant, and we regularly send top officials and Ministers to China. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary will visit later this summer and I have been three times, having visited China more often than any other country for which I have ministerial responsibility. I hope to return in September.

There has been an eightfold increase in students—some 20,000 now study in the UK—and we are witness to a new phenomenon: a remarkably successful capitalist economy controlled by a communist system. Young Chinese people are studying overseas in rising numbers, more than 3,000 British projects are being undertaken in China, and there is an increasing level of inward investment from Chinese businessmen in the United Kingdom. We need to sustain the rhythm of economic contact.

The human rights issue remains a pebble in the shoe—or perhaps a thorn in the side—of our relationship. There is no ducking the need to refer to it. We do not seek to preach or impose our norms; all we ask of the Chinese authorities is that they obey their own laws and respect their international obligations under the international covenants that they have signed or ratified. We do not attempt to impose a western or United Kingdom vision on China. We request that every country in the world obey its own laws and international laws to which it has put its name.

I am positive about China, as are the rest of the Government and the hon. Members who have spoken, but we need a little dose of corrective realism. The extraordinary economic growth that has taken place in China has happened through the classic method of rapidly developing industry. The impact on the Chinese environment from rapid industrialisation, especially the increase in desert areas, must be taken into account. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook and Small Heath (Mr. Godsiff) was gaily contemptuous of the Chinese ability to bulldoze through the planning norms that feature in this country and others. Planning laws appropriate to each society are a mechanism for containing industrial development so that it has some relationship with nature. However, we see positive signs from China in that regard, as it reduces its use of fuels emitting CO_2 and works constructively with other Governments to tackle the problem of global warming.

We must also take a reality check on the issue of corruption and the need to develop the rule of law in the commercial field. A separation is needed of business from Government. I agree with the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring), who spoke for the official Opposition, that a fully functioning open market economy is incompatible with a closed, secretive and unaccountable political system.

We need to deal with the theft of intellectual property rights. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook and Small Heath was of course joking when he referred to his £2 Rolex watch. When I am in China, I get no pleasure from seeing Burberry coats and other rip-offs from British firms on sale for £2. The lack of respect for intellectual property rights is no laughing matter, and those who return from China with their cheap Mont Blanc pens, fake Lacoste shirts or Rolex watches are doing a grave disservice to the companies and the employees of companies who make those products in Europe and elsewhere. China also needs to consider the need for trade union reform, to allow an authentic and autonomous voice in its labour market.

Mention has been made of human rights in relation to Tibet, which is an issue that I have raised with Chinese Ministers and officials. I have requested them to have a dialogue with the Dalai Lama. Mention has also been made of Taiwan. Of course, we recognise the one-country system, but increasing commercial contact between Taiwan and China seems a better way forward than mutually reinforcing military systems.

China is a huge source of culture. I cite Gao Xingjian, the Nobel prize winner, whose book "Soul Mountain" I have read and commend to hon. Members, and the highly important work being done by the British Museum and cultural institutions in China.

In the end, however, our policy must be one of engagement, engagement, engagement. For too long, China was isolated, as the west adopted a policy of isolation. The British Government's policy is one of constant engagement with a view to China entering the world, living under the rule of international law and enjoying peace and stability with its neighbours and partners everywhere.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Excellent Deabate.

Gibraltar

11 am

Mr. Andrew Rosindell (Romford): I begin by congratulating you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on your recent knighthood. Everyone present was delighted to hear of it, and no one deserves the honour more than you. I am particularly pleased that our debate is about Gibraltar, because you have spoken about it on numerous occasions and have been a steadfast defender of the rights of the people of that British overseas territory.

I raise this issue because the people of Gibraltar have a right to be heard in this place. They cannot elect a representative to the House of Commons, yet Parliament and our British Government make decisions on their behalf. Since this subject was selected for debate, several hon. Members have spoken to me of their support and of the need to keep the issue alive. There is a great fear that the Government are letting down the people of Gibraltar behind closed doors and betraying their rights and interests, so I make no apology to the Minister for once again raising the issue in Westminster Hall.

You, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will know how frustrating it is for us to keep having to debate this issue. Imagine our constituents' anger if we regularly had to debate their rights and freedoms in the Chamber. Imagine the anger in the Minister's constituency if we regularly had to debate his constituents' rights and freedoms. It is utterly wrong that the present situation continues.

I proposed this debate because the discussions on Gibraltar have gone on long enough, and the people of Gibraltar have a right to expect a speedy conclusion. I understand that the Prime Minister is meeting the Prime Minister of Spain today, and I hope that the Minister will convey to him the strength of feeling in Parliament, among the British people and among those who live on the great rock of Gibraltar. I hope that the Prime Minister conveys those sentiments to the Prime Minister of Spain and that he realises that the game is up: he has no support for his plan to betray the people of Gibraltar. He should realise that he has misjudged the mood of our people and that he should ditch the entire ill-conceived process.

I am saddened by the need yet again to debate the Government's disgraceful and irresponsible attitude to Gibraltar and its people. The Government persist in their course of selling out the 30,000 loyal British subjects of that British Crown colony to Spain. They seem increasingly desperate to pursue that policy, despite the evidence that there is no support for it, except among some Labour Members, although only a few of them are here to support it.

Before I continue, however, I should like to convey the apologies of the chairman of the all-party Gibraltar group, the hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle), who is in Hong Kong with a parliamentary delegation. He asked me to convey the feelings of the all-party group, of which I am secretary, and to say that the people of Gibraltar deserve better. The hon. Member for Chorley, a Labour Member, is not alone in holding that view, because there is much anger among Labour Back Benchers about the issue of Gibraltar. The fact that the

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hon. Member for Chorley has articulated that anger on so many occasions proves that he has a great deal more integrity than some members of the Government.

Gibraltar is British, and its people want to remain so; who can blame them for that? That is unquestionable to anyone who has ever gone anywhere near the place or read reports of visits there. That is also clear from the recent visit to the rock by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition, who, in contrast to the cries of "Judas" that greeted the Foreign Secretary, was met with cheers from well-wishers, who thanked him for standing up for their democratic right to remain British and decide their own future. Having visited Gibraltar many times, I know the strength of feeling held by everyone there, their wish never to be ceded to Spain, in any respect, and their sense of betrayal and anger at this Labour Government's refusal to accept those wishes.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): As my hon. Friend knows, I recently visited Gibraltar as a guest of the Government there. Some 30,000 people took to the streets in anger at what our Government are doing in selling out the people of Gibraltar, because they believe, as we do, that the Government should be fighting for their interests. In the Government's discussions with the Spanish Prime Minister, they should be raising the issues of access to Gibraltar, of telecommunications and telephone lines to Gibraltar, and ensuring that Spain becomes a friend of Gibraltar, instead of wanting to poach people whose only crime is wanting to remain British.

Mr. Rosindell: What my hon. Friend says is absolutely correct. It is the duty of any British Government, of whatever political persuasion, to defend the interests, rights and freedoms of British people anywhere in the world. The Minister has a duty to the people of Gibraltar, yet he ignores their concerns, fears and wishes.

I draw an analogy between the Spanish Government's attitude to Gibraltar and the attitude of the former Argentine Government to the British territories of the Falkland Islands. I had the pleasure of visiting Argentina in 1996. The Argentines have relinquished their claim over the Falkland Islands because they are mature and realise that it is better to form good relations and to befriend the Falkland islanders than to bully them, as the previous undemocratic Government did.

Only last week, we celebrated the 20th anniversary of the liberation of the Falkland Islands, and Argentina is now a democracy. One would be forgiven, however, for wondering whether Spain is a democratic country, because the Spanish Government's attitude and tactics are disgraceful. The Spanish Government should take a leaf out of the Argentine Government's book and change their attitude. They will never win friends or influence the Gibraltarian people if they continue with their approach, so I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley for making a valid point.

At this point, I would like to mention that the Minister and Foreign Secretary have said on numerous occasions that the so-called Brussels process was initiated by a Conservative Government. I have some news that I would like to convey to the Minister. Yesterday evening, I spoke to the noble Baroness Thatcher and informed her that the Foreign Secretary and the Minister had used her name in connection with the Brussels process on many occasions on the Floor of the House. She was incandescent at the suggestion that the actions of the Labour Government today are a result of a process that she initiated.

Baroness Thatcher told me that she was appalled at the prospect of the rights and freedoms of loyal British subjects in Gibraltar being sold down the river. She said, "Gibraltar must remain British." I ask the Minister, the Foreign Secretary and all Members of the Government to desist from using Baroness Thatcher's name in this context, because it is dishonest and wrong.

On 7 November 2001, the Minister commented that, on his visit to Gibraltar he had found that

> "Gibraltar is a proud place and that Gibraltarians are proud people".—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 7 November 2001; Vol. 374, c. 88WH.]

What the Minister omitted to say, and the reason why the Government are going so badly wrong, is that they lack understanding about what drives that pride. Gibraltarians are not proud to be a political football between the United Kingdom and Spanish Governments. They are proud to be British, and it is astonishing that the Minister or a member of any British Government cannot understand that.

Hon. Members should consider the demonstrations mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley that took place in Gibraltar on 18 March. Between 25,000 and 30,000 people—about 90 per cent. of the population—took to the streets to express their disgust at the Government's position. Imagine 90 per cent. of the Minister's constituents deciding to demonstrate on the streets of Neath. Would he ignore their wishes? He would not be a Member of Parliament for long if he did, and nor would any of us. That enormous display of anger and fear about their own future shows that the people of Gibraltar have spoken. It is time for the Government to acknowledge those wishes.

Furthermore, according to recent opinion polls such as that undertaken by MORI in March, 80 per cent. of people in Britain support Gibraltar's right to self-determination. A staggering 300,000 supportive messages and 45,000 e-mails reached the Government of Gibraltar office in London following press advertisements. Only the British Government continue to ignore Gibraltar's wish to remain British in its entirety and in perpetuity.

Two weeks ago, we all celebrated the magnificent occasion of Her Majesty the Queen's golden jubilee. It was an occasion for all British people, including the people of Gibraltar, to celebrate 50 years of our Queen being on the throne of our country. During the week of celebrations, a national newspaper said:

> "While Britain enthusiastically celebrates the Queen's 50-year reign, her Government is pursuing a squalid campaign to deny Gibraltarians their fervent wish to remain her loyal subjects."

It is a shameful indictment of this Government that, during the Queen's golden jubilee, they are betraying 30,000 of her most loyal subjects. The Government must realise that they have given the impression that they are betraying those people, even if they do not consider that they are doing that. They must acknowledge that, and they must end what has been described in that national newspaper as "a squalid campaign".

I turn to Spain, which is the country that would like to incorporate Gibraltar into its own kingdom. Spain is, supposedly, a modern, democratic European nation state, and I congratulate the King and the people of Spain on the enormous progress that their country has made during the past 20 years with regard to becoming a democratic country. However, it saddens me that an ally of ours—a country that is a member of the European Union and NATO—should continue to treat a small territory that is adjacent to it in such an appalling and undemocratic fashion. Although Gibraltar is historically and geographically close to the kingdom of Spain, it cannot be right that Spain—a modern, democratic country—should continue to treat Gibraltar in such a way.

I offer some quotes from a speech that the chairman of the Gibraltar Federation of Small Businesses made at a recent meeting of the Congress for Democracy. She highlights many of the areas where Spain is behaving not as a modern, democratic country that respects human rights, but as a country that one would be surprised to learn is a democracy on the evidence of its behaviour to Gibraltar. She said:

> "As part of the overall strategy of Spain to cause whatever harm it possibly can to Gibraltar, it has, with its British Government allies, managed to ensure that all airport-related measures specifically exclude Gibraltar, albeit that we are a British territory within the EU."

She went on to say:

> "One has to question the logical reason for two democratic countries with populations of 60m and 35m to try to impose their joint wishes on a country of only 30,000 people."

That is a valid point.

Her third point is as follows:

> "The persecution and aggression from Spain continues. Despite agreement when Spain joined the EU and opened the gates to Gibraltar, it continues to refuse to allow direct access by air or by ferry. When bad weather requires the closure of Gibraltar airport, the airlines are forced by Spanish air traffic control to take their passengers to Tangier in North Africa, then transfer them to Malaga, where they invariably face baggage delays and security checks. Why place passengers at risk by insisting on a visit to North Africa when the flight path to Gibraltar is directly over Malaga airport which by air is less than ten minutes away?"

I am glad that she made that point because my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley and I had that experience only four months ago. We attempted to fly to Gibraltar, but we were diverted to Tangiers, because the kingdom of Spain—which is our friend and ally—would not allow the Gibraltarian flight to land in Malaga. We had to go to Tangier, where the flight had to be designated as a Tangier-Gibraltar flight. What country would treat an ally and a friend in such a way? What democratic country can justify such actions?

Marie Lou Guerrero continues:

> "Contrary to EU law, the Spanish Government has chosen to limit international telephone links with Gibraltar. It refuses to accept . . . Gibraltar's international telephone code and has amended its telephone system to block the roaming facilities of Gibraltar mobile phones . . . The border with Spain has endless queues 24 hours a day. There is never an official reason for the delays and regardless of the British Government and EU Government claim that it has been condemned at 'high levels', the queues continue."

Those of us who have been to Gibraltar have seen those queues, and they are a disgrace. How can a fellow member of the European Union behave in such an obnoxious manner toward the kind, generous people of Gibraltar? How can it justify such actions?

Marie Lou Guerrero's final point is:

> "Spain continues to veto any international event that Gibraltar enters whether it is a dog show or a sporting event. Within the EU, it continues to veto all legislation unless Gibraltar is excluded, except, of course, when Gibraltar's inclusion will cause extra work or hardship to the population. Gibraltar has implemented more EU legislation than Spain and during a recent check it was revealed that the number of directives to be implemented in Spain was more than those pending in Gibraltar."

The evidence is very clear, but does the Minister speak up for the people of Gibraltar? Not a bit of it. He continues to compromise with the Spanish Government. He continues to pander to the Spanish Government and to those in Brussels who want to see an end to territories such as Gibraltar throughout Europe.

I make no apologies for raising my next point. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition recently planned to visit Spain and meet the Prime Minister of Spain. That meeting was cancelled at short notice. How can the Prime Minister of Spain, who is the leader of a centre-right party, deny the leader of another centre-right party the opportunity of a bilateral meeting?

What is the Spanish Government's obsession that means that they cannot see that there are greater objectives in a modern world and a modern Europe than simply arguing over Gibraltar? It is utterly wrong that Spain chooses to behave in such a manner. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition rightly continued on his visit to Gibraltar and ignored the Madrid Government's strong objection. It is time that the Prime Minister and Ministers in our British Government showed that same integrity and sense of duty on the issue.

Our Government are losing the debate on Gibraltar and resorting to the old tactic of discrediting their enemies and those who highlight how wrong they are. The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs' complaint to the Chief Minister about the lack of financial information from Gibraltar is part of that desperate and dishonourable tactic because Gibraltar is regarded as one of the best-regulated financial centres in the world.

During the past four years, Gibraltar has enacted strict new banking and financial codes. Gibraltar's financial services industry has met the standards set by many international organisations including the United States' Internal Revenue Service. Only last March, the industry received a glowing endorsement from the International Monetary Fund. The industry also follows European Union financial regulations. Yet the Foreign Secretary has even accused Gibraltar of failing to inform the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of financial information pertaining to the territory. How desperate must the Government be to make such unfounded accusations?

The facts are clear. All the Government's revenue and expenditure in Gibraltar is scrutinised by the House of Assembly at the time of the Budget, published and then passed to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. What could be simpler than that? The accounting and

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financial affairs of Gibraltarian Ministers are controlled by the Accountant-General. The accounts are scrutinised by the House of Assembly. Equally, the Government's procurement contracts are put to tender in an open and transparent manner.

Amid such despicable allegations, the Government wonder why the Chief Minister will not attend talks on sovereignty. Mr. Caruana is to be commended on taking such a position of principle. There should be nothing to discuss in the first place. If there were, it should be when Spain will drop its totally unfounded claim to Gibraltar. As secretary to the all-party group on Gibraltar, I receive letters, e-mails and messages from people throughout the country about this subject.

Yesterday, I met two constituents in Romford who are Gibraltarian and who wanted to protest about the Government's actions. One of whom was Charles King, a local artist. He has painted a magnificent portrait of the rock of Gibraltar, depicting the Barbary apes and the Union flag. Sadly, in the portrait that he has so skilfully crafted, the Union flag appears to be fading in the background. It is so disappointing that a native Gibraltarian who now lives in Britain feels the need to depict such imagery.

I hope that the Minister will consider the emotion surrounding the matter and the fear among Gibraltarian people, both living on the rock and in the United Kingdom. The brother of my other constituent, Lucy Cahill, designed many of the stamps and commemorative memorabilia of Gibraltar. I thank both of those constituents for their help in our campaign to keep Gibraltar British.

The Minister should realise that he and his Government have aroused anger and fear about their real motives in respect of Gibraltar and how such action connects with their overall strategy of taking Britain further into the European Union and the Brussels monstrosity. If the issue of Gibraltar is ever to be settled, the territory must indeed—as the Minister for Europe wrote in *Tribune*—"be decolonised". In accordance with the overwhelming wish of its people, Gibraltar must be allowed to achieve devolved integration with the United Kingdom. France, the Netherlands, Spain and Denmark have all to varying degrees incorporated their overseas territories, with the result that they are constitutionally stable and not subject to repeated debates and referendums on their future. Devolved integration would be a modern, European, lasting solution to the Gibraltar issue.

I wish now to put some specific and awkward questions to the Government about their mishandling of the Gibraltar issue. First, what precisely are the legal grounds for the Minister for Europe's claim, made in evidence to the Foreign Affairs Committee last year, that the integration of Gibraltar would contravene the treaty of Utrecht? Legal opinion suggests that integration would be compatible with that treaty. Secondly, given that Spain secured the duty-free status of its integrated territories in north Africa with the European Union, why does the Minister for Europe feel that Gibraltar's special tax status would be a barrier to integration? Thirdly, why have the Government made no move to refer the question of Gibraltar's constitutional standing to the International Court of Justice? Until that happens, the Government can continue to claim that any constitutional settlement emanating from Gibraltar contravenes the treaty of Utrecht.

Fourthly, on what legal basis does the Government hold that the treaty of Utrecht remains valid? The treaty has already been broken by Spain's repeated sieges of Gibraltar and by the presence of Jewish and Moorish populations, prohibited by the treaty. It has been superseded both by the treaty of Rome and the United Nations' declaration on the granting of independence to colonial countries and peoples. The treaty was written in an age when states signed over territories with little regard for their inhabitants, and it is totally incompatible with the democratic age.

It is the treaty that is the anachronism, not Gibraltar. I hope that the Government will finally open their eyes and see the reality of the situation. They are trampling over the people's democratic right to decide for themselves. It is not as if the people are divided on the issue; indeed, nearly everyone on the rock of Gibraltar wants to remain British. Barely anyone in Gibraltar supports a move towards unification with Spain, so why do the Government pursue that policy? There is a great danger that if the casual and flippant attitude of the Government and the feeling of betrayal continue, a much larger problem will loom on the horizon.

Gibraltar must remain British, and the Government should realise that the future of the rock must be stabilised. The only way to achieve that is for the Government to end this so-called "process", to end the discussions, to stand up for the rights of the British people of Gibraltar and to do the duty that they were elected to do. They should defend British people, instead of appeasing Spain and pursuing the wider goal of promoting British participation in everything that comes from Brussels.

11.32 am

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): I join the hon. Member for Romford (Mr. Rosindell) in congratulating you on your knighthood, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You and I have known each other for many years and the award, which brings enormous pleasure to you and your family, brings equal pleasure to your many colleagues on both sides of the House.

I welcome the debate on Gibraltar, as will many hon. Members. I warmly congratulate the hon. Member for Romford on his luck in obtaining the debate. I have taken a close interest in the affairs of Gibraltar and have taken part in debates on the subject for many years. I have visited Gibraltar on several occasions. As you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am privileged to be the chairperson of the United Kingdom Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, and I remind all hon. Members and my right hon. Friend the Minister that Gibraltar is a member of the Commonwealth. The role that I play in the UK branch brings me into regular contact with many parliamentarians from Gibraltar, and we often discuss that issue.

The remarks that I shall make today are my own, but I tell the Minister that many members of Commonwealth Parliaments feel deep concern about what they see as the actions taken by the British and Spanish Governments towards Gibraltar. All of the Government's future actions will be watched closely by fellow members of the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth is a family of nations. Whether the matter involves the richer or the poorer members, we closely support the rights of a fellow Commonwealth country when, as I believe is happening to Gibraltar, its rights and the voice of its people are being ignored.

I welcome this debate and the others that have taken place. As the hon. Member for Romford says, it is essential to ensure that the issue is never allowed to disappear. It now receives prominent coverage. It is unbelievable that the British Government are still closely involved in discussions with the Spanish Government on the future of Gibraltar.

The British Government know the views of the Chief Minister of Gibraltar, parliamentarians of all political parties and, above all, the people of Gibraltar about any attempt to give Spain any control over the day-to-day affairs of Gibraltar. They have been told that in referendums and in the many letters that the people of Gibraltar write to us—not the standard letters that we all receive to which someone merely attaches a Member's name or which are merely signed, but letters written by men and women in their own handwriting that clearly express their views on this important subject. The message is clear: "Leave us alone." That is what they are saying. They want nothing to do with the proposals of the British or Spanish Governments about their future.

No one learned that better than my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on his recent visit to Gibraltar. There were thousands of people on the streets and thousands of Union Jacks on display. However, I did not read a single poster that said, "Welcome Jack. Jack, you're our friend. Jack, we trust you with our future." I did not see one poster displaying such sentiments on the part of the people of Gibraltar. However, I did see many other posters that clearly showed the true feeling of the people of Gibraltar towards the British Government and my right hon. Friend. Have they not yet got the message,"Leave us alone"?

As the hon. Member for Romford says, vast numbers of people in the United Kingdom fully support the views now being expressed by the Chief Minister, Peter Caruana, and he is joined in his view by many Members of Parliament on both sides of the House. I fully support his action in not attending the talks between the British and Spanish Governments, as I do not believe that he is accorded equal respect. He is the Chief Minister of Gibraltar and was elected in a democratically run election. He speaks with the overwhelming and massive support of the people of Gibraltar, who completely trust him in looking after their interests and those of Gibraltar. Yet there is no evidence that his views—the true views of Gibraltar and its people—will be listened to and acted on.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister regularly says that he fully supports democracy, human rights and the voices of free people. No one could say that the people of Gibraltar are not free. No one could say that they do not have a voice in the crucial negotiations taking place, so why do the British Government not listen to that voice? I would not expect the Spanish Government to listen. Many of us know them of old and know the behaviour that they have shown to Gibraltar and its people over many years, as the hon. Member for Romford outlined. However, I would expect the British Government to listen.

I am one of the United Kingdom's representatives on the Council of Europe and the Western European Union. Two weeks ago, commencing on 3 June, the assembly of the WEU met in Paris. One of the main speakers was the Defence Minister of Spain, Mr. Trillo-Figueroa, who represented the presidency of the WEU and the European Union. He made a lengthy speech in which he repeatedly mentioned the importance of human rights, freedom and listening to public opinion. Never did he mention Gibraltar or the discussions between the British and Spanish Governments.I pointed that out and asked him, given his repeated comments on democracy, for his views on the discussions and the clear opinion expressed by the people of Gibraltar.

I have with me the full transcript of that speech and my question. We are not talking about an unknown Back Bencher of the Spanish Parliament, but the Defence Minister of Spain. In his reply to me, he did not once mention the views of the Chief Minister of Gibraltar or of the people of Gibraltar. He talked about the treaty of Utrecht and international law. In his closing comments, he said that he hoped that the Governments of the UK and Spain would have reached agreement on Gibraltar by the end of the year. What arrogance to assume that! He gave no suggestion that he would listen in any way to the views of the people of Gibraltar.

My right hon. Friend the Minister and I know, as do many other Members of the House, that the people of Gibraltar do not trust Spain. That is regrettable, but true. My right hon. Friend has a job of work to do; he must try to defend and sell the proposals. I was a Minister during the premierships of Harold Wilson and James Callaghan many years ago, and often had to defend policies that I was not very happy with. However, knowing my right hon. Friend's background in defending democracy and human rights, I cannot believe that, deep in his heart, he can feel happy in seeking to defend the negotiations.

All of us, whatever party we belong to, are deeply concerned at the lack of interest in politics, the lack of trust in politicians and the appalling low-percentage turnouts at elections. The hon. Member for Romford referred to the volume of letters and e-mails. Given our deep concerns, does my right hon. Friend really think that the electors of this country will have their opinion of and trust in politicians enhanced if they believe that the British and Spanish Governments are driving the matter through, irrespective of what the people of Gibraltar have clearly said? I want the relationship between the United Kingdom and Spain to improve. I repeatedly meet Spanish parliamentarians, and I like them; they serve on a committee that I have chaired at the Council of Europe. However, we are considering the rights of people who have loyally shown their allegiance to this country. This country should now show its allegiance to them.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Nicholas Winterton):Order. Before I call the next speaker, I remind hon. Members that we must allow the Minister time to respond. I hope that not only Back Benchers but those who will sum up from the Front Bench will use self-discipline.

11.45 am

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon): May I join in the consensus by expressing my pleasure that you have been so rightly honoured, Sir Nicholas? I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Mr. Rosindell) on securing the debate, which seems to be a regular feature in this Chamber. We have debated Gibraltar several times in the past few months and it is appropriate, given the meetings that are going on, that we should debate it again. I shall keep my comments brief.

I was interested in what the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) said about Gibraltar's relationship with the Commonwealth; that is worth remembering. Equally, it is sometimes difficult to remember, when one listens to Government speeches, that Gibraltar is also a member of the EU, which it entered, together with the UK, in 1973. It is a European territory, for whose external relations a member state, in this instance the United Kingdom, is responsible. Accordingly, article 227(4) of the EC treaty applies. That is difficult to believe when one reads articles by the Minister—the most recent in *The House Magazine*—about the impediments posed to our relationship with the EU by Gibraltar. He says that there has been the usual scaremongering about the Government's intentions by those who should know better. However, we are entitled to ask what the Government's ultimate intention is. It is far from clear.

Why do the Government always appear to be taking Spain's side, rather than championing the rights of the people of Gibraltar, for whom they are responsible? The Prime Minister is meeting Mr. Aznar. He has also had the opportunity of meeting the Chief Minister—an invitation that, to date, he has declined. It is worth remembering why the Chief Minister will not come to the talks under the present restrictions. It is all about terms, and the terms are all important. In Spain's words, the Chief Minister was invited merely to express an opinion on matters of his competence. That is extraordinary, given that the Spanish Foreign Minister, Mr. Pique, said that the opinion of the people of Gibraltar "is not relevant" to the question of sovereignty. In other words, as the Chief Minister says,

> "I am invited to take part in the talks only to express my opinion, but on the sovereignty of my homeland not even to express my opinion. To participate on those terms would be to renounce our right to self determination, which we will never do."

He is right. I ask the Minister to address the suggestion of my hon. Friend the Member for Romford that the International Court of Justice should revisit the treaty of Utrecht, and all breaches of agreements over the centuries. Does the Minister agree that if the matter were to be referred to the court, we should abide once and for all by the outcome?

I invite the Minister to comment on the suggestion made in Fiji last month by the Deputy Chief Minister, Mr. Azopardi, who proposed using more balanced language in draft seminar conclusion No. 48. He called for the replacement of the reference to the UK and Spain in the description of the process of dialogue by a reference to "interested parties", which would obviously include the Gibraltar Government on behalf of the people of Gibraltar. More important, it called also for the inclusion of a reference to the outcome having to be in accordance with the freely expressed wishes of the people of Gibraltar. The Minister will not be surprised to hear that Spain rejected that idea, but I believe that it is worthy of consideration. I invite him to address that point.

11.50 am

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): May I add, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to the congratulations on your richly deserved honour? I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Mr. Rosindell) on securing this important debate and on introducing it so ably.

We have had three debates in Westminster Hall on the subject of Gibraltar since last autumn. It is worth noting that, in previous debates, the Government have at least been able to drum up support from a handful of Back Benchers. As we have clearly seen today, they cannot get one Back Bencher from more than 400 Labour MPs to turn up.

The Minister for Europe (Peter Hain): They are on Select Committee business.

Mr. Francois: They cannot all be attending Select Committees. The Government cannot get the support of their Back Benchers, which is telling.

We know that there is no support in Gibraltar for what the Government propose. We have heard of the demonstration on 18 March, when more than 25,000 people—about 90 per cent. of the population—demonstrated vociferously against what the Government were proposing. When the Foreign Secretary visited Gibraltar, he was given the mass equivalent of what is described in the Army as an interview without coughing.

Discussions on the subject have been undertaken above the heads of the people of Gibraltar, and without their support—in their name, but without their consent. Equally, there is no support in Britain for the proposals. We have already heard that some 80 per cent. of those polled by MORI said that they supported Gibraltar's right to self determination; and 300,000 responses to a newspaper advertising campaign and 45,000 e-mails give a clear indication of popular opinion in Britain.

As in previous debates, we have not yet been given a satisfactory answer as to why the Government are continuing to push ahead when it is evident that the people of Gibraltar and of Great Britain do not want what is proposed. Why are the Government investing so much political capital in such an obviously unpopular process? Many believe that the Government have gone to all the trouble not for the welfare of those who live on the rock but to secure Spanish votes in the European Union. Ultimately, the Government are prepared to sell 30,000 people down the river so that, at certain EU meetings over the next few years, the Spanish Government representative will raise his hand when the British Government representative asks him so to do. This was always going to be a sordid deal, and the longer the process has gone on, the more sordid it has become.

I realise that Front-Bench Members wish to speak, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I agreed to keep my remarks brief. I shall conclude quickly. It has been widely reported that the talks are now stalled and that the momentum of the process, such as it was, has faltered. I very much hope that that is the case. If it is, will the Minister finally lay the issue to rest today to clarify the whole business? That would allow the people of Gibraltar and of Great Britain to celebrate Gibraltar's remaining British. After all, that is all that the people of Gibraltar have asked for. The Government's initiative has gone on for long enough and appears to have run into serious trouble. It has no support on the rock and none in this country. It is a child with no parents and this orphan should finally be laid to rest.

11.55 am

Mr. Michael Moore (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): Sir Nicholas, may I add to the burden of congratulation under which you labour? I congratulate you on your recent richly deserved honour. I am sure that it will be a difficult week for you, dodging compliments around the Palace.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Romford (Mr. Rosindell) on securing this debate on a subject that remains extremely topical—as each contributor has made clear—yet curiously unresolved. It is nearly five months since we last debated the subject in this Chamber and we have not discussed it on the Floor of the House during that period. The status of the negotiations is still unclear, as are the Government's objectives. Officially, we are given a lot of general themes, but not many specifics.

The hon. Member for Romford said that he understood that the Prime Minister was meeting with his Spanish counterpart. He was right to be wary because, compared with previous meetings between the two Prime Ministers, there has been no advance publicity, no speculation and no—dare I say it—spinning. My office checked with the Downing street press office just to make sure that the meeting was still going ahead and received confirmation that it was. I hope that something will emerge from the meeting other than the usual nice words to the effect that the talks were conducted in a friendly and constructive atmosphere. Such phrases are all very well, but we need to know whether there is a chance of anybody agreeing anything.

The Liberal Democrats take a slightly different position from those Members who have already spoken, in that we support the talks—the Brussels process—whoever started them and whether or not they remain committed to them. We firmly believe that without discussions nothing can ever change and we regret that the representatives of Gibraltar have not felt comfortable with the process and are not party to those talks, although the Minister will no doubt remind us that they have an open invitation to join in.

To be successful, the discussions will require a deal between the Governments. Based on what the Minister has said before, there will then be negotiations with the Gibraltar authorities and, after that, an endorsement of the conclusions will be sought from the people of Gibraltar. That sounds simple enough but the realities are pretty stark, never mind the apparent lack of progress between the Governments over the issue of sovereignty and the problem of the bases in particular.

Even if that problem can be overcome, the mood of the people of Gibraltar is negative to say the least. There is probably more chance of Scotland winning the World cup than of the UK Government holding sway in a referendum. In the past few months, a number of diplomatic efforts have been made to persuade Gibraltarians that the rock is safe. There have been salvos in the local newspapers and even visits by the Foreign Secretary. That process has not been particularly successful. Members have already mentioned the dramatic demonstrations on 18 March, followed by the advertising blitz in the United Kingdom in the middle of May.

Whatever one's views of the Government's tactics or actions, the message from Gibraltar is clear enough. The residents do not trust what the Government and the Spanish Government are up to. After 300 years of British sovereignty, they fear that they will not even have 300 days before they are bounced into new arrangements. However, it does not have to be like that. I have already stated that we support the Brussels process, but I repeat our previous assertions that the three parties must be encouraged to be part of that process.

The Government have set out their four objectives for resolving the dispute: to preserve the Gibraltarian way of life; to offer greater self-government; to improve the practical benefits, whether in access to telecommunications, health services or in other areas; and to achieve an agreement on sovereignty. All that would help Gibraltar by assisting the United Kingdom in pushing its wider European Union agenda.

Gibraltar clearly wants to achieve most of those objectives, even if it is nervous about sovereignty, which may be a slight understatement. Spain also needs to see the bigger picture and wants to remove what it perceives as historical difficulties. Everyone has something to gain from the process, but the process seems designed to fail.

Trust must be the key; the only way in which any settlement will succeed is by winning the trust of the population as a whole. Some may seek to disparage those who lead the campaigns in Gibraltar, but the people of the rock will not be won round if they do not know the outline terms of the discussions between Governments, what form subsequent negotiations with Gibraltarian authorities might take, what period will be allowed for deliberations and what type of question will be asked in the referendum.

Finally, on an issue that has not been focused on today, what happens to any intergovernmental settlement if the referendum is lost, as looks likely? The Government have said that, in that instance, the settlement will not apply but that we cannot uninvent the deal. Perhaps we cannot, but we can formally withdraw from it and confirm that future discussions will start afresh. The people of Gibraltar deserve reassurances on that point and many others.

No one would choose to start from here with the process, given the almost certain prospect of failure. However, with the reality that the Gibraltarian authorities are not participating, a new approach is desperately needed. If the Government are still committed to a referendum, they, too, must be pragmatic about its prospects. Others must play their part. Gibraltar should be encouraged to participate, and Spain needs to pursue genuine and wholehearted confidence-building measures.

The Government in the United Kingdom need to reframe the whole process fundamentally. They must be clear about the measures under negotiation: preserving the Gibraltarian way of life; promoting greater self-

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government; and easing restrictions on everyday life. They must be straightforward about the terms of negotiation on sovereignty and realistic about the need for a decent period to discuss the conclusions of negotiations. They must also be fair-minded—dare I suggest—about the subsequent referendum process.

It has so far taken 300 years to get us to the present stage. The impression is often given that we have only another 300, or perhaps only 30, days to sort matters out. If that remains the strategy, a huge rebuff is in the offing. The process is right in concept but wrong in execution, and it is doomed to failure.

12.3 pm

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): First, I warmly congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Mr. Rosindell) on introducing the debate and on taking such a lively interest in the subject of Gibraltar and foreign affairs in general. My hon. Friend has posed three key questions, to which I hope the Minister responds. I congratulate all other hon. Members who have participated in the debate.

The negotiations with Spain that the Government have conducted—or, rather, misconducted—may have stalled. Given the Government's efforts to bully the Gibraltarians into accepting a deal on joint sovereignty to which they are totally opposed, we would certainly welcome the stalling of the talks, which would give us an opportunity for some fresh thinking. The Government must not suggest that a deal could lie in abeyance, only to reconstitute it later. Given the reported difficulties in the negotiations, today would be an excellent time to announce the suspension of the talks. Doing so would bring great relief to the 30,000 residents of Gibraltar. As my hon. Friends have observed, hundreds of thousands of people in this country have written letters and e-mails in support of the Gibraltarians' right not to have imposed on them a future that they do not want.

Under normal circumstances, I have considerable regard for the Minister, but I must tell him that the talks are a sad reflection on the Government's competence, and show their disregard for Gibraltarians' rights. From the start, the talks have been ill thought-out, and the Government's language has been inflammatory and marked by their incorrigible habit of employing bullying spin. I am sure that the Minister recalls his Parliamentary Private Secretary talking of massive smuggling in Gibraltar, even though it was perfectly clear that there was no basis for that allegation. The Spanish Government provided no evidence to support it. I once again call on the Minister to apologise for that remark.

There are many other examples of such behaviour, including accusations of money laundering and of pensions being owed to Spanish workers. That is all part of the Government's reprehensible use of the black arts of propaganda against the people of Gibraltar. As a result of such intemperate language, people there have no confidence in the Government's ability to look after their interests. The Minister has mocked their numbers and claimed that they are stuck in the past, have been left behind and do not do what the Government want. How can such talk be at all constructive or help to resolve the problems?

From the beginning of the negotiations, the Government held out the carrot of joint sovereignty for Spain, even though they should have known that the people of Gibraltar did not want it and that it would not be enough for the Spanish. Ministers gave way and offered what they could not deliver. It took them months to accept our "two flags and three voices" formula for the talks. If they had done so earlier, we might have been in a better situation than we are now.

Ministers apparently hit on the idea of leaving a joint declaration of proposals hanging, regardless of whether the people of Gibraltar rejected them. I call on the Government to agree that any such joint declaration will be null and void if the people of Gibraltar reject it in a referendum. We had hints in Foreign Office questions in April that the Government might have accepted our argument, and today's debate would give the Minister a good opportunity to calm anxieties in Gibraltar and in the House, and to redeem the mess that the Government have created in the negotiations.

I should make it clear to the Minister that no incoming Conservative Government would feel bound by any agreement on surrendering Gibraltar's sovereignty or by any agreement that had not received the assent of the people of Gibraltar.

The Spanish have said that they will never give up their sole claim to Gibraltar and that, although an agreement on shared sovereignty might be long-lasting, it cannot be fully accepted until the issue of full Spanish sovereignty is tackled. They have said that they will not accept an agreement that does not give Spain joint use of the military base in Gibraltar. With good sense, the Secretary of State for Defence noted how unpopular the talks were and how unacceptable it would be for Britain to have anything less than full control and sovereignty over the military base in Gibraltar.

In short, the Government have bungled the negotiations and shown a bizarre dismissal of the democratic wishes of the people of Gibraltar. As we have heard, Gibraltar has been subject to harassment by Spain, and talks with Spain are needed to resolve those problems. Spain is a good friend and ally of the UK, which is what makes this all so painful. It is surely in everyone's best interests that Gibraltar and Spain should have a good and neighbourly working relationship. Both Gibraltar and Spain would profit from that, and the Brussels process was set in motion to try to achieve it.

I hope and trust that the Minister will take this opportunity to inform the House about the current state of the talks and tell us when we can expect a meeting between the respective Foreign Ministers. We know that the Prime Ministers are currently meeting. I hope that he will also say whether the Government still expect the talks to be concluded by the summer and, if not, what effect their failure will have on British-Spanish relations. We want a clear statement on what will happen if the proposals are rejected by the people of Gibraltar and what their status would then be in the eyes of the British Government.

In November, the Minister asked the people of Gibraltar to judge the Government on their actions. The Gibraltarians' view of the Government's conduct was made clear by the reception given to the Foreign Secretary on his recent visit. By contrast, my right hon.

Friends the shadow Foreign Secretary and the Leader of the Opposition were given the most warm and spontaneous welcome by the people of Gibraltar, which said it all. Support for the liberties of the people of Gibraltar extends to all parts of the House of Commons—it is not a party political issue—and that has come through loud and clear in all our debates on the matter.

The Government should respect the clear judgment already made by the people of Gibraltar, acknowledge the harm that the Government's incompetence has done to relations between Britain and Gibraltar—and, indeed, between Britain and Spain—and suspend the talks immediately. Rarely in our long history have a British Government conducted themselves with such a lack of sensitivity and succeeded in infuriating everyone concerned.

Echoing the words of the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox), the Minister has a proud record of defending people's democratic and human rights over many years. I ask him to reflect on what has happened to Gibraltar and on the pressures being placed on the people of Gibraltar by the Government. In the interests of everyone concerned, the talks should be suspended immediately.

12.12 pm

The Minister for Europe (Peter Hain): I welcome you to the Chair, Mr. Chidgey. I am sorry that I did not have the opportunity to join in congratulating your predecessor in the Chair on gaining a knighthood.

I genuinely thank the hon. Member for Romford (Mr. Rosindell) for securing the debate, because it gives me an opportunity to reply on this important subject. I am also grateful for the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox), who has a long and honourable record of working for the Commonwealth, as well as for the contributions of the hon. Members for East Devon (Mr. Swire), for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois), for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore) and for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring).

The hon. Member for Romford asked me a series of questions, one of which related to the International Court of Justice. The reason why the matter of sovereignty cannot be referred to the International Court of Justice is because both countries must agree to such a referral, and Spain does not recognise the issue as one that comes under the jurisdiction of the ICJ.

I was astonished at the hon. Gentleman's question about statistics because, as the Foreign Secretary said in a letter to the Chief Minister on 19 April 2002, there is a lack of up-to-date statistical information on Gibraltar. A statistical abstract for Gibraltar has not been produced since 1997; five years is a long time without comprehensive official statistics.

In May 1998, a Government-funded consultant reported that Gibraltar's accounts estimates were

> "weakly based and little confidence can be placed in them".

There is a question as to whether Gibraltar is complying with its obligations under European Community law on statistics. I should have thought that he would have wanted that matter dealt with, as we are seeking to do with the Government of Gibraltar.

There has been much talk about spin recently. As the House will know, I do not do spin. I shall set out the facts, clearly and simply. We made it clear from the outset of the negotiations last July that our shared objective was a future in which Gibraltar enjoys greater self-government and the opportunity to reap the full benefits of normal co-existence with the wider region, and that the guiding principle was to build a secure, stable and prosperous future for Gibraltar and, yes, for it to retain its traditional British way of life and citizenship.

When the talks come to an end, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary will make a statement in the House setting out the agreement that we have reached or explaining why we have not reached an agreement. As we have long said and as I told the Chamber on 31 January, there is nothing inevitable about such matters. A solution to the Gibraltar dispute has eluded Britain and Spain for more than 300 years. It may continue to elude us. We may have to wait a while. As we have also made clear, no agreement is better than a bad agreement.

Our objectives in the negotiation are simple. They are to preserve Gibraltar's way of life, establish greater self-government for the people of Gibraltar, deliver lasting practical benefits and a stronger economy and secure a permanent agreement on sovereignty so that Gibraltarians can enjoy security for their way of life—a security that they have not enjoyed during 300 years of dispute. I remember also saying on 31 January that we are negotiating with Spain a framework agreement, a set of principles for a settlement that we would commend to the people of Gibraltar. It would be a basis on which we would invite the Government of Gibraltar to join us in putting flesh on the bones and to work up detailed arrangements that could be put before the people of Gibraltar in a referendum to which we remain committed.

We are not selling out Gibraltar. No deal will be implemented unless the people of Gibraltar agree in a referendum. We are not doing deals over the heads of the Gibraltarians. Contrary to the assertion of the hon. Member for East Devon, we offered the Chief Minister—and, through him, the people of Gibraltar—a place at the table from the start. It was always—contrary to the assertion of the hon. Member for West Suffolk—on the basis of two flags, three voices. We made it clear that the Chief Minister could help to shape the outcome and that, if he did not like it, he would not be bound by it. He refused. We have not excluded the Gibraltarians; Peter Caruana has.

We are not hiding an already done deal. There may not be one. There will not be one unless it meets our bottom lines. We are not giving Gibraltar away to Spain. As I have made repeatedly clear in the House, there has never been any question of doing so. We are pursuing the negotiation for two reasons: for Gibraltar and for Britain itself.

We are doing it for Gibraltar because Gibraltar will not thrive while the dispute festers. It will not thrive as long as Gibraltarians have to put up with the everyday disruption that they currently endure, such as uncertainty and queues at the border, telephones that do not work and air services that do not fly, to which Opposition Members have referred.Gibraltar will not thrive as long as its economy cannot fully modernise and

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join the new global marketplace, attract new investment, remove barriers that separate it from the wider region or secure full access to the largest single market in the world—the one on its doorstep, that of Europe. Such matters all require an end to the dispute with Spain.

We are entering into such negotiations for Britain.I do not apologise for that, because the dispute is damagingour interests. Our trade with Spain is worth more than £8 billiona year. It supports thousands of British jobs in our constituencies. I am astonished at the anti-Spanish prejudice shown by Conservative Back Benchers.

Mr. Swire: Will the Minister give way?

Peter Hain: Not for the moment. I want to make progress. If I have time, I shall give way later.

Our alliance with Spain in Europe in helping us to deliver a European Union of strong nations and a European economy that creates jobs and prosperity across Britain. However, that relationship remains constrained by the Gibraltar dispute. If we are really going to get the best for Britain out of our links with Spain, we must fix the issue.

Real things are at stake in the EU, too. The dispute has blocked or delayed benefits such as the liberalisation of the European aviation market, in which British companies will do very well. We want measures to make air travel safer, flights cheaper and delays shorter for the British people and British businesses. Those are real things that real people—including our constituents—want, and they are obstructed or delayed by this dispute. The dispute affects not only 30,000 Gibraltarians—although their rights remain paramount—but 59 millionBritons.

We are not doing this for fun. Nobody who saw the treatment that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary received from some of Her Majesty's citizens during his recent visit to the rock would think that. He deserves not abuse but credit for setting out for the people of Gibraltar some difficult home truths that many of them still do not want to hear. That is the honesty and real leadership that people in Britain want from their Government Ministers.

I draw a comparison with the Leader of the Opposition, the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith), and with the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram). Their strategy has been the complete opposite: to tell the Gibraltarians only what they want to hear.

We are not doing this for the Spanish, either. Anyone present, as I was, at the tough negotiations with the Spanish, would know that it was not some cosy love-in. The truth is that this is an outdated historical dispute that has no place in modern Europe.

It is striking that the speeches from Back Benchers—especially Conservatives—and, despite my admiration for him, from the hon. Member for West Suffolk, put forward no alternative. No clear alternative policy is being put forward by the Conservatives for resolving this dispute—only shouting and screaming. We have tried and will continue to try honestly to resolve this dispute.

Mr. Spring: That is an absurd caricature of what the Conservative party has said. There is a powerful echo in this dispute with the way in which the question of Northern Ireland sovereignty was handled. The Republic of Ireland was told from the beginning that there was no question of joint sovereignty. Once the issue of sovereignty was taken away—once that thorn was removed—all other discussions became possible, including on possible relationships across border. That is the basis on which to operate, given what was guaranteed to the people in the treaty of Utrecht. It is a parody for the Minister to say that we have no considered view on how to handle the dispute.

Peter Hain: The real parallel with Northern Ireland is that negotiations took place between parties and groups that had been locked in an historic and bitter dispute. The only way to resolve the dispute is to talk to Spain, which is what we have been trying to do. The hon. Member for West Suffolk mentioned sovereignty. The Brussels-process negotiations—begun, I say to the hon. Member for Romford, under Baroness Thatcher's Government in 1984 and continued under every successive Tory Administration since then all the way through the 1990s—included the issue of sovereignty. It is part of the Brussels-process framework, launched and agreed by the Conservatives under Baroness Thatcher.

We have come a long way since we and Spain re-opened the talks last year. For the first time in history, we talked honestly and openly about Gibraltar and how to give it a secure future. We have built confidence between Spain and ourselves. The talks have been tough, but we have both reached a better understanding of each other and our respective interests. Whatever happens, I am confident that the strong relationship that the Government have already built with Spain will endure.

We have also seen efforts by Spain, which we have encouraged, to build confidence where it is most needed: between Spain and Gibraltar itself. The second channel at the border opened in March, and queues that sometimes took hours have been cut to minutes. Foreign Minister Josep Pique's personal letter to the Gibraltarians—the first ever by a Spanish Foreign Minister—in which he sought a new relationship and understanding was another example.

We never thought that this was going to be easy, and it has not been. Serious differences remain between us. With regard to the longevity of any agreement to share sovereignty, we insist that it must be certain and enduring; it cannot be a slippery slope to full Spanish sovereignty. We also insist that the military facilities in Gibraltar must remain under British control. However, the most important consideration is the role of the Gibraltarians. We insist that they—rather than Spain or the British Government or anyone else—must decide whether to accept any agreement on sovereignty. It isnow make your mind up time for Spain. It knows our bottom lines. There will be an agreement only if it meets them, and if we believe that we can commend the agreement to the people of Gibraltar.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and Spanish Foreign Minister Pique will meet in a few days at the Seville European Council, and in London on 26 June, when the details that the hon. Member for Romford asked for will be addressed. The next formal Brussels-process meeting will take place after that. We would rather have no deal than a bad deal. A good deal must advance the interests of Britain and Gibraltar. We will not sign up to anything that does not do that, and Gibraltar will have the final decision.

The Opposition do not care about British interests. They are not even interested in having a serious debate. Is that the case because Gibraltar is the only place left on earth where anyone is pleased to see the Leader of the Opposition? I offer a quote from the *Daily Mail*, which is not usually a source of support for the Government. It reported his recent visit to Gibraltar thus:

> "This is little short of political paradise for Iain Duncan Smith. Hugged and kissed at every turn. Hailed as a saviour by all he meets. Pursued across sun-swept squares by a cheering mob of Union Flag wavers. He would be lucky to get a welcome like this at his own birthday party at a Tory party conference, let alone walking down a street. There is only one slight problem: this lot can't vote."

I welcome the current policy of the Opposition, and I hope that they will carry on with it, because saloon-bar nationalism—the frothing at the mouth about sovereignty and their obsession with Europe—is what lost the Tories the last election. I hope that they will not heed the words of a former Chairman of their party, who was rather good at winning elections. On 17 May, Chris Patten said of these negotiations about Gibraltar:

> "I am amazed at the criticism ... because the concessions Labour are considering are the same as the ones John Major's government was willing to make."

Of course, Chris Patten was a member of John Major's Cabinet. He continues:

> "In politics, it is important that parties do not lose their sense of history. Some of this criticism expresses an out of date and completely obsolete vision of Spain. What Straw and Pique are trying to do is very difficult and complex, but not impossible."

Baroness Thatcher began this process in 1984. Every successive Conservative Administration continued it, and we are now trying to settle the matter. If we do not settle it now, it will not get settled for a long while. There is an historic opportunity and we have made a big investment of time and effort. If this does not work, we will turn to other matters, and Britain and Spain will be losers, but the biggest losers will be the people of Gibraltar.

Mr. Swire: I wish to offer the Minister an opportunity to withdraw his facile remarks about the Conservative Opposition being anti-Spanish. It is possible to be pro-Spanish as well as pro-British and, by definition, pro-Gibraltarian.

Peter Hain: I am a Minister in this Government and I am pro-British, pro-Gibraltarian and pro-Spanish, which is why we are trying to resolve this matter. I have made it clear that the prejudices that have been expressed did not come from the Conservative Front Bench, but they were revealing about the real views that some of the party's Back Benchers hold about Spain.

Mr. Francois: The Minister intimated that the Government are attempting to bring the process to some kind of conclusion. Is it realistic to hope that we might have a statement in the House by the Foreign Secretary before we rise for the summer recess?

Peter Hain: I do not know. It depends on how long the discussions take.

The people who really care about Gibraltar's interests are not the Conservative party. The real patriots are not the Tories; they are those who recognise that this issue is damaging British interests, as well as those of Gibraltar. The real patriots are those who honestly try to do something about the matter, despite the difficulties, and who are determined to find a solution in the interests of the people whom we represent—our constituents, the people of Britain. The true Brits are those of us who understand that British interests are being damaged by the dispute, and who remain determined to ensure that that damage ends.

Rail Services (North Kent)

12.29 pm

Jonathan Shaw (Chatham and Aylesford): I am grateful for this opportunity to discuss the serious matter of channel tunnel rail link domestic services. I have advised you, Mr. Chidgey, and my right hon. Friend the Minister that my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Medway (Mr. Marshall-Andrews) and my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Paul Clark) are also hoping to catch your eye and make a brief contribution.

Services are intended to run on the new £5.2 billion channel tunnel rail link when the Ebbsfleet terminal becomes operational in 2007. The reason for securing the debate is that we in Medway believe that the Strategic Rail Authority has failed to understand how fundamental that service is to the Thames gateway strategy. Without improved rail networks between Medway and the capital, the regeneration of north Kent will fall well short of all our expectations.

It is not my intention to present a picture of doom and gloom in respect of north Kent. It has had record levels of new investment, including new hospitals, schools and roads. Most recently, there was an announcement of the expansion of the universities on the Medway campus. There are to be some 6,000 additional students. The Government's commitment to Medway and the rest of north Kent is not in question. Their record to date is one of action. I have listed a few examples, but there are many more. We should not forget that the Government, under the Deputy Prime Minister, rescued the channel tunnel rail link from the financial regime implemented by the Tories. History tells us much about the Tories' record and their economic competence when it comes to running railways.

Medway and north Kent have been transformed since the 1980s, when unemployment rose to nearly 20 per cent. and depression hit hard. They are now areas of growth and low unemployment. However, this debate is about the future of not just my constituents and those of my hon. Friends or the region, but of London and the UK economy as a whole. In the next 20 years, 50,000 new homes will be built throughout north Kent, accommodating 100,000 more people. Some 84,000 new jobs will be created and 22 million sq ft of additional floor space for businesses will be provided.

The scale of change is considerable, so the challenge for all involved is to get it right. The responsibility of those delivering public services is to maximise co-operation and partnerships so that the necessary infrastructure is put in place. That will engender confidence in the private sector so that we can all realise the full potential that north Kent has to offer. One of the key players is and has to be the Strategic Rail Authority, because it will determine whether Medway and other parts of north Kent have a link to the terminal at Ebbsfleet, and so to London. We have serious concerns that that is not the SRA's intention.

I ask the Government and my right hon. Friend the Minister whether we are five years away from the transformation of rail infrastructure for north Kent, and from being able to realise the potential of the gateway, or whether we will fail when the first opportunity arises to lay a foundation stone for new rail infrastructure. Will the Government agree to the SRA allowing channel tunnel domestic trains to thunder through Kent and not stop at the largest conurbation in the county—Medway? Let us imagine train after train going through Kent every day and not stopping at Medway, even though all the peak trains on the existing services from Medway are packed to the gunnels. Some 12,500 people board trains in the Medway towns every day. That has gone up in the past year by 4.8 per cent. That trend and growth will continue.

It is necessary to carry out signalling and other infrastructure work to allow new trains to run along the north Kent line and on to Ebbsfleet and London, yet the SRA has only now begun to examine the cost of the work. I say only now because it will begin the tendering process in the autumn. Whoever wins the franchise will be expected to procure the rolling stock, undertake the infrastructure works and run the service. Given the potential for delay, serious anxiety has been expressed that the trains will not be ready on time. The calamity of having brand new track and links but no trains to service can be imagined.

This is not a little, local issue. Only last year, the Government confirmed that the regeneration of north Kent is a regional and national priority. The SRA has yet to advise key partners, including the Government and the Thames gateway Kent partnership, of its thinking about the franchise specification. We do not know where trains for the domestic service will stop or how frequently they will run.

Most alarmingly—this is the key motivator for the debate—all we know is that the franchise concentrates solely on channel tunnel domestic services from St. Pancras, Ebbsfleet and Ashford, with running-off services to Medway and elsewhere, such as Sittingbourne, as optional extras, or add-ons that are nice to have. That is a disastrous prospect. If the only terminal for people in Medway to access is at Ebbsfleet, one can imagine the additional traffic on the M2. The additional infrastructure will not be cheap. The proposals of the SRA in its present guise will dissuade interested commercial operators.

The first stage of the channel tunnel rail link is nearing completion. Throughout the passage of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill, we in Kent lobbied hard to ensure that there would be domestic services on the link. From our perspective in Kent, it is entirely reasonable that, if we are to bear the brunt—especially through the Medway towns—of a project that will benefit the entire country, there must be some net gain for the largest conurbation. That gain comes from the domestic services.

The issue cannot be seen simply in terms of rail infrastructure. It must be seen in the context of the entire Thames gateway programme. Medway must be connected to the channel tunnel rail link. It cannot be an optional extra in the SRA's franchise; it cannot be a nice-to-have or an add-on. I hope that in responding to me, my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham and my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Medway, my right hon. Friend the Minister will confirm that the SRA's franchise will run channel tunnel rail link domestic services through Kent and that there will be an explicit requirement to include the Medway towns and other parts of north Kent.

12.38 pm

Paul Clark (Gillingham): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Jonathan Shaw) on having secured this important debate. I thank him, you, Mr. Chidgey, and the Minister for allowing me to contribute.

I bring great news from the heart of Kent. The channel tunnel rail link is on time, on schedule and on budget. Phase 1 is a sight to behold, with the North Downs tunnel, a splendid piece of engineering. The new CTRL Medway bridge has risen from the mists of the river Medway, and the overhead gantries are now shimmering in the sun along the route—at least for this week, while we have the sun. The entire route will be complete by 2007. High-speed trains to and from Paris, Brussels and the mainland continent will never have to trundle through the Kent countryside again. All that will have taken us only 20 years since the passing of the Channel Tunnel Act 1987.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford said, the largest conurbation in Kent—the Medway towns, of which Gillingham and Rainham are part—could miss out. My constituents could be left on windswept platforms coping with leaves on the line and, of course, the wrong type of snow. That certainly was not the intention of the rail barons of the mid-1990s.

Looking back at *Hansard,* one sees that in January 1995 the then Secretary of State for Transport, the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire (Sir Brian Mawhinney), said on Second Reading of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill:

> "The Bill provides ... for a combined international and domestic passenger station at Ebbsfleet ... A connecting line to the north Kent line ... will enable trains from the Medway towns to join the link for fast running into St. Pancras."—[*Official Report,* 16 January 1995; Vol. 252, c. 465.]

A year later, the then Secretary of State for Transport, the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young), said:

> "Domestic rail travellers will also benefit from the new line ... the Government will be reserving capacity on the new line for up to eight domestic trains an hour in the peak period. The new services should start as soon as CTRL is open ... The increase in overall rail capacity will help ease congestion".—[*Official Report,* 29 February 1996; Vol. 272, c. 1000.]

I assure you, Mr. Chidgey, that there will be no fast-running services into St. Pancras from Medway, they will not start as soon as CTRL is open, and congestion will not ease for my commuters or for many thousands more in Medway towns and the surrounding area unless there is a reaffirmation of the commitment to the original intention of CTRL domestic services.

We are well aware of the processes that the Strategic Rail Authority must follow. We recognise that there are technical hurdles to overcome in order to supply the services. However, it must be recognised that some of the improvements are already required, such as a power upgrade and improved signalling, to name but two. It would be wrong if those costs were borne in entirety by the successful bidder for the CTRL domestic services franchise.

As my hon. Friend said, noises emanating from the SRA give the impression that CTRL domestic services to Medway will not be at the forefront of the tendering process in the autumn. Such a decision would on its own be a betrayal of the commuters of Medway and Gravesend—but the issue does not stop there.

Medway is at the heart of the Government's national regeneration area—the Thames gateway. The Government have supported the area investment framework from the Thames gateway Kent partnership, which is a public-private sector organisation that has a vision of transforming north Kent, creating 100,000 new jobs and 50,000 new homes, and building on new inward investment. CTRL domestic services are not only another route into London, but a major catalyst to realising the Government's regeneration dream in north Kent.

Will the Minister reaffirm the Government's commitment to proper CTRL domestic services in north Kent? Will he recognise the importance of the Thames gateway in delivering the Government's regeneration policies? Will he take the opportunity to remind the SRA of the importance of Medway to the whole regeneration project?

12.42 pm

Mr. Robert Marshall-Andrews (Medway): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Jonathan Shaw) on securing this extremely important debate. I can be brief because my task is simply to support both his detailed and careful submissions and the poetic observations made by my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Paul Clark).

I start by addressing the same theme of achievement in the Medway towns. During the past 10 years, the economic aspirations and well-being of the Medway towns have been transformed. Three of the four main priorities that my hon. Friends and I had when we all started our stewardship in 1997 have been all but secured. We have achieved in securing a university base; we used to be the largest conurbation in Europe that did not have a university. We have achieved in securing all the land that is necessary for the regeneration of the post-industrial riverside site, which has disfigured the centre and heart of the Medway towns. We have received multi-million pound investment to improve infrastructure and to release resources from the wealth of Thamesport and the Island of Grain.

Those achievements have occurred for several reasons. The first is that there was an enlightened council during the 1990s. The second, I hope, is some small contribution from the Members of Parliament who represent the Medway towns. The third is multi-million pound investment by the Government in the fortunes of the Medway towns. I say with great respect to my right hon. Friend the Minister that he, as much as anyone in the Government, has been a friend of the Medway towns, at both his present and previous Departments.

After that uncharacteristic eulogy, I shall come to the essential problem. I know that my right hon. Friend understands that I am not overstating matters when I say that if we do not get the CTRL infrastructure through to the Medway towns to provide the service into London, all the fruits of that investment will be

[Mr. Robert Marshall-Andrews]

placed in jeopardy. We simply cannot be expected to attract the extra investment in money and skills necessary to take advantage of the steps that we have already made if a third world rail service continues to run into the heart of London from the biggest conurbation in the south-east.

There are two reasons why the CTRL is important. First, there is the economic and commercial importance that we have emphasised. Secondly and almost as importantly, the link is essential to the identity and psychology of the Medway towns. The CTRL, so graphically described in its present state by my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham, represents an unhappy metaphor for everything that has happened to the Medway towns since the closure of the dockyard—in that it goes straight past and does not stop. At the moment, so far as we can understand from the Strategic Rail Authority, there are no definitive plans for that area to create real benefit from CTRL domestic services.

I know that my right hon. Friend understands our strength of feeling and the importance that we put on the development. He will do the best that he can to ensure that the Strategic Rail Authority is precisely that—an authority for the proper strategy of public service, not for the interests of rail operators.

12.47 pm

The Minister for Transport (Mr. John Spellar): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Jonathan Shaw) on securing the debate and providing an opportunity for hon. Members to discuss the channel tunnel rail link and domestic services for north Kent. I also welcome the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Paul Clark) and my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Medway (Mr. Marshall-Andrews). I am only grateful that there was no Government Whip present to witness my hon. and learned Friend's favourable comments.

Before I respond on the main issues raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford, it may be helpful if I provide a background to the CTRL project and the benefits that we can expect. The CTRL is a completely new high-speed rail line running for 68 miles between the channel tunnel and London St. Pancras. It will be Britain's first major new railway for more than a century, providing 140 mph running for Eurostar services and fast new domestic services linking Kent with St. Pancras. It will also contribute to regeneration in the Thames gateway, which was rightly identified by my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham as an important regional and national priority for growth, and has the potential to make a major contribution to the economy in the south-east around St. Pancras and Stratford, as well as in several areas in Kent.

The CTRL is being built by Union Railways on behalf of London and Continental Railways Ltd. The project was authorised by Parliament with the passage of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Act 1996, although I appreciate the much longer lineage ably described by my colleagues.

The new high-speed line is being built in two sections. Section 1 runs between the channel tunnel and Fawkham Junction, near Swanley in north-west Kent, where it connects to the existing Railtrack network, to allow Eurostar trains to serve Waterloo. It also includes connections into Ashford International station. Work on section 1 began in October 1998 and it is more than 83 per cent. complete. My hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham described its physical impressiveness. It is one of the major civil engineering projects in Europe, and is not only on schedule for completion next year but, as he rightly said, a public-private partnership delivering on time and on budget, with enormous technical expertise. It is worth mentioning that, as the media so often focus on public sector projects that fail.

Work began in July 2001 on section 2, which completes the line by extending it from the new rail link in north-west Kent, under the Thames, to London St. Pancras. Section 2 also includes new international stations at Stratford in east London, linking into docklands and Canary wharf, and at Ebbsfleet, providing fast links to Paris and Brussels from docklands and north Kent. Work on that section is due to be completed by the end of 2006. I particularly mentioned the connection of Stratford to Canary wharf because of the huge increase in employment there—some 4,000 extra jobs a month are added.

The Strategic Rail Authority may take over sponsorship of the project in due course. For the moment, that role remains with the Department for Transport. Significant sums of public sector support—totalling approximately £3 billion—are due to be paid to help construct the CTRL. That will help to provide capacity for fast domestic services, which will revolutionise rail services from Ashford, cutting journey times by 30 minutes. I will speak more about the benefits of the CTRL and domestic services in a minute, but first it might be helpful if I speak about the Thames gateway initiative.

The Thames gateway initiative is the largest regeneration initiative in north-west Europe. It has the potential to accommodate 100,000 new homes and 300,000 new jobs over the next 20 years, largely on previously used sites. Fourteen zones of change have been identified in the gateway, in which the new development will be concentrated. The new international passenger stations at Ebbsfleet and Stratford are key economic drivers in two zones—the Kent/Thameside and Stratford /Royals zones—which are together expected to accommodate up to 46,000 new homes and 100,000 jobs. Medway is another key zone in the gateway, as rightly identified by my hon. Friends. It is a free-standing urban area of around 250,000 population, with huge potential for the renaissance of its considerable brownfield land and as a city of culture, tourism, learning and hi-tech industry.

The Government have established a strategic partnership, chaired by my noble Friend Lord Rooker, the Minister for Housing and Planning. It comprises six Ministers and representatives of the three regional development agencies, regional assemblies and sub-regional partnerships, to drive forward regeneration of the Thames gateway. The partnership is providing the framework within which the area's potential as the major focus for growth and development in the south-east can be achieved. The provision of the new international and domestic services that will be provided on the CTRL from 2007 is critical to the sustainable development of the Thames gateway.

The benefits of the CTRL are enormous. The new railway will bring major transport and economic benefits, including up to eight Eurostars per hour each way from St. Pancras and, owing to the new railway's greater capacity, the possibility of running twice the number of Eurostars to Paris and Brussels at peak times from St. Pancras. Paris will be two hours 15 minutes from St. Pancras by non-stop Eurostar, compared with the current journey time of two hours 55 minutes from Waterloo. Forty minutes will be cut from the journey time to Brussels, reducing it to two hours.

We estimate that growth in the Thames gateway area will be boosted by the CTRL by fostering additional development estimated to be worth about £500 million. Connections to both the west coast main line and the east coast main line will be built near St. Pancras, thus retaining options for service provision in the long term.

My hon. Friends rightly dwelt on the implications for domestic services and future specifications. The development agreement relating to the channel tunnel rail link provides that the following shall be reserved for domestic services. In peak time, there will be four trains per hour between east Kent and London, two trains per hour between north Kent and London, and two trains per hour between Ebbsfleet and London. Off peak, there will be two trains per hour between east Kent and London and two trains per hour between north Kent and London. Travelling from St. Pancras via the channel tunnel rail link, the physical links with the Railtrack network will be at Ebbsfleet, on to the north Kent line, and at Ashford.

I take on board the remarks made by my hon. Friends on the need for access, especially if the ambitions for the Thames gateway and the surrounding area are to be achieved. We need a balanced development to take advantage of the considerable areas of previously used land—brownfield sites—available for development in the north Kent area.

The plan is to start domestic services in 2007. Domestic passengers will travel on high speed, high-quality Kent express trains that will provide a reduction in journey times and a more reliable service. The channel tunnel rail link stations at St. Pancras, Stratford, Ebbsfleet and Ashford will provide a focus for social and economic regeneration. The quality and speed of international and domestic travel for business and leisure will be transformed, offering a stimulus to many sectors of the local and regional economy.

I turn to the matter of estimated journey times. Trains from Ashford to Ebbsfleet will take 19 minutes. Trains from Ebbsfleet to London non-stop will take 15 minutes and, with a stop at Stratford, 18 minutes. Trains from Ashford to London, with stops at Ebbsfleet and Stratford, will take 38 minutes.

The Strategic Rail Authority is working with Railtrack to establish the feasibility of operating the new high-speed trains off the new channel tunnel rail link on the existing Railtrack south-east network, with a view to developing a train service specification and identifying appropriate depot and maintenance facilities for the new rolling stock fleet. This is a complex area, and will involve examination of the power-supply requirements of the new trains. Hon. Members will know that those requirements are already being dealt with through necessary remedial measures. Structural clearances and platform lengths will also be examined. All those areas may involve considerable investment to allow new trains to run on the existing network.

The Strategic Rail Authority is in the planning stage for selecting a domestic operator to run services on the route. The bidding process for the channel tunnel rail link domestic services franchise is planned to start later this year. Through the process, which should be completed by the end of next year, the SRA will seek to select an operator competent to procure the unique high-speed rolling stock that will be required for domestic services on the channel tunnel rail link. That will require synchronising with Eurostar trains, and should follow completion of the route in 2007. The trains will need to be capable of operating at 125 mph, to have fast acceleration, braking characteristics and pressure-sealed doors, and to conform to modern safety standards.

Before I conclude, it might be helpful to give an update on the Connex South Eastern franchise, which runs until 2011. Under the agreement, the company is required to replace all its mark I rolling stock. From the introduction of the new timetables at the beginning of this month, the new class 375s replaced older trains on many of the services on the Ramsgate via Chatham and Hastings lines. There are also plans to introduce metro-style trains on parts of the network. Connex South Eastern has also secured £40 million for expenditure on reliability modifications to its fleet of class 465, 466 and 508 trains. The SRA is in discussion with Connex regarding proposals for an enhanced franchise.

Work is being done, but I fully understand that more needs to be done to get the channel tunnel rail link up and running. Real progress is being made, and I fully accept my hon. Friends' comments that this is a "once in a generation" opportunity for Kent's railways. It is important to get things right before committing substantial sums of public and private money, and that will be the task of the Strategic Rail Authority. I shall keep a close watch on matters.

Disabled Ex-service Men

1 pm

Mr. Adrian Flook (Taunton): I am delighted to have secured this debate, which is particularly apt given that this month sees the celebration of the 20th anniversary of the successful campaign to regain the Falklands. We are also commemorating the loss of 255 men, and remembering the many wounded. The conflict cut short the careers of numerous soldiers, Marines and seamen, but many times that number are medically discharged every year. Sadly, the care of such veterans leaves something to be desired, and would be further reduced were it not for the tireless work of organisations such as the South Atlantic Medal Association 82.

I secured this debate to raise the iniquitous treatment of our service men, which has gone on for many years. In my first year as a Member of Parliament, several people walked wounded into my surgery. One 27-year-old former Marine from Norton Manor camp in my constituency had nine years' experience. He was given poor advice and left the corps because of an ankle problem, losing his place at the top of the Ministry of Defence medical treatment list. He now sits at the bottom of the NHS list, and will not be treated for at least a year.

Gulf war veterans who have suffered terribly from Gulf war syndrome have also come to my surgery. This country has not recognised that condition, even though the United States recognised it eight years ago. Indeed, several people are talking to a US congressional delegation elsewhere in the House today. It is perhaps apt that today's edition of *The Sun* quotes a widow as saying

> "the Government takes this seriously, but things take an awful long time".

I hope that the Minister will take note of that.

I particularly want to mention John "Jacko" Jackson and Martin Walkinshaw, who saw service in the Falklands. Through SAMA 82, they help others to rebuild their lives, and they work tirelessly for their fellow south Atlantic veterans. They brought the Benefits Agency's unfair treatment of veterans to my attention.

The common thread in all these issues is that those who serve in our forces are volunteers, who do military service because they love their country and are willing to put their lives on the line. As a result of serving our country, some pay the ultimate price, while others suffer for the rest of lives. The treatment of disabled ex-service men is unfair, given that they never questioned the fact that their country would look after them if they were injured. As one veteran put it to me, quite a few service men at Bagram airport and elsewhere in Afghanistan would have second thoughts about being there if one explained exactly how the welfare system worked against them.

There is a lot wrong with the way in which we treat those who volunteer to defend our country's interests, and I shall concentrate on one aspect in particular. This debate is about raising awareness of the need for greater liaison between Her Majesty's forces and the Benefits Agency so that the agency treats disabled ex-service men more equitably. One good suggestion would be for the agency to be represented on resettlement courses for service men who seek to leave the Army, the Marines, the Navy or the Air Force. We must educate the senior non-commissioned officers and warrant officers about the benefits system, because they have immediate responsibility and can help their charges to make the right decisions on leaving the corps, the Army, the Air Force or the Navy.

It appears unjust that service men should be disadvantaged because of the nature of their employment and their lack of contact with the outside world. At the weakest moment of their lives, when they have been medically discharged, more often than not lost their home and their career and are having to plan for their future, they do not know where to turn. Perhaps even more distressing is that many of the people in their world do not know how to get the necessary help for them either.

From an annual turnover of personnel in our services of about 20,000, roughly 1,600 service men are medically discharged. The bulk comes from the Army because it is the largest element of our forces, about a third comes from the Navy, which includes the Marines, and the balance comes from the Air Force. The Department for Work and Pensions informed me that the figure includes about 1,000 cases due to physical ailments—mainly musculo-skeletal problems involving broken bones or damaged ligaments, which make service men unfit for potential combat. Some 10 per cent. are discharged on mental grounds involving various problems that it is probably best for us only to guess at. However, less than half of the total receive incapacity benefit, and I am told that the majority do not satisfy the medical test for the personal capability assessment. Those numbers are not huge in Government terms, but each one represents an individual case where the system is failing to treat an ex-service man fairly. The following example is just one small indicator of the poor way in which we treat our service personnel.

After 28 weeks of sickness before his medical discharge, it is likely that a soldier or a Marine, once discharged, would have to claim incapacity benefit at the short-term, lower rate, whereas his civilian counterpart in, let us say, the Ministry of Defence, could claim it at the higher rate. The difference between the two rates is about £9.50 a week, which is withheld at precisely the time that that ex-soldier or ex-Marine needs support. That is despite the fact that he pays the same class A and class D national insurance contributions and the same level of income tax. As I am sure the Minister will tell us in detail, one reason for that among many is that that soldier or Marine would never have received statutory sick pay.

In recent weeks, much effort has been made to acknowledge that there is a problem. That is due to the tireless work of John "Jacko" Jackson, who works for the Benefits Agency in Bridgwater near my constituency and is an active member of SAMA 82. Recently, there has been much movement towards resolving the matter, but that has not always been the case. In response to a letter from Mr. Jackson, a civil servant at the then Department of Social Security wrote in March 1999:

> "When sick, there is not the usual need for income replacement as when in Civvy street, and the services provide for their basic needs and have their own medical services outside the NHS."

It is a common gripe among service personnel that those services outside the NHS are no longer what they were. I would say that that civil servant was harking back to former days.

In 1999, the right hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling), then Secretary of State for Social Security, wrote a letter to Tom King, the then Member of Parliament for Bridgwater, stating:

> "Whilst it is right that servicemen should have proper access to Incapacity Benefit, I am not convinced there is a compelling need to make changes in this area of provision to enable earlier access to higher rates of incapacity benefit".

Those attitudes from three years ago might go some way to explaining the initial lack of progress.

When researching for this debate, the feedback that I received from the Ministry of Defence was that there were only a dozen or so such cases every year. I am sure that that was just a flippant remark from a civil servant, but it adequately demonstrates the nature of the problem and why it has taken the indefatigable work of people such as Jacko Jackson to get the Ministry of Defence and the Department for Work and Pensions publicly to announce that they are willing to try to do something. That announcement shows that things have moved on.

I acknowledge the positive letter written by the Minister on 8 June, which stated:

> "I have asked officials from both the MOD and the DWP to try and find a suitable way for implementing the relevant legislative changes so that the anomaly might be removed with effect from April 2003"—

one year away. However, by way of caveat, he goes on to say:

> "we are by no means assured of success."

I would appreciate the Minister's views on where the pitfalls may lie in the ensuing 10 months or so.

In that letter, the Minister continues:

> "those personnel who want additional cover for injury or incapacity resulting from service in the armed forces have access to commercial schemes."

Sadly, he adds that the PAX scheme was closed to new applicants after the way in which our country responded to the events of 11 September. I regard that as scant compensation for many in SAMA 82 and for those service men who were willing to put their lives on the line for their country and now expect their country to repay that debt. They expect their country, rather than the corporation, to be there for them.

I acknowledge that the MOD has been proactive, but I would have liked to have seen a Minister from the Department for Work and Pensions here today. Every week for the past 20 or 30 weeks, I have tried to secure a debate entitled "Treatment by the Benefits Agency of Disabled Ex-service Men", so it is surprising—although I was told in advance—that a Minister from the Ministry of Defence will respond to the debate.

Why has it taken three years to highlight and bring to fruition something that should have been sorted out many years earlier, especially when the Government accept that there is a problem that needs solving? This is an example of how our service men our treated, and it demonstrates that they are treated less fairly than those who wear suits and do not, at least in the same way, lay their lives on the line for their country. I am glad that the debate has highlighted the plight of those who are medically discharged and who are unfairly treated compared with their civilian counterparts. We are a wealthy, well ordered country, and we should be able to sort things out more quickly. It is three years since John "Jacko" Jackson first wrote to the Ministry of Defence and the Department for Work and Pensions.

I acknowledge that the Veterans' Affairs Secretariat is doing its bit, but it could help further by having a dedicated armed forces liaison officer, perhaps jointly funded by the MOD, but certainly funded by some Department, who could train senior NCOs and warrant officers on what is available to those individuals who are considering leaving the forces or who are having that decision made for them. It is a pity that it has taken the Government three years to say that they are keen to resolve the issue, but too many of the Minister's words in the letters that I have seen are conditional on other Whitehall Departments getting their act together. I acknowledge that the MOD has made some great strides, but I seek cast-iron assurances from the Minister and his colleagues in the MOD that the work will be done by next April.

A broader problem remains in society, however, because we do not always adequately reflect on what these individuals do for us and for our country. The work of organisations such as the Royal British Legion, which supports the campaign, the Seamen, Soldiers, Air Force Association, BLESSMA and SAMA 82, which brought the matter to my attention, shows us that, as a society, we are not doing enough for those who are medically discharged. At a time of particular difficulty in recruiting and retaining service men in our professional Army, we are sending out the wrong message about how society will look after those who are badly injured in the service of Queen and country.

1.14 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): I thank the hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. Flook) for giving us the opportunity to consider the treatment of disabled ex-service men and women. Many people have no direct experience of military service, and it is easy to lose sight of the sacrifices made by many of those who served in our armed forces, as well as by their families. I welcome the opportunity to speak about the practical support and benefits provided to ex-service men and women who are incapacitated by illness or disability.

The issue that the hon. Gentleman has raised relates primarily to incapacity benefit as it affects armed forces personnel. I have been dealing with that in my capacity as Minister for Veterans, which is why I agreed that I should give the Government's response rather than a Minister from the Department for Work and Pensions, as would normally have been the case. To use the standard cliché, it could be described as joined-up government. In case Ministers from other Departments are listening, I should add that the presence of the word "veteran" in the title of future debates will not necessarily guarantee that the Minister for Veterans will reply. However, I take a keen interest in the matter, and it is important that I continue with it.

Before I go into detail, I would like to pay tribute to all those who have been disabled or bereaved as a result of service to the country in the armed forces. The

[Dr. Lewis Moonie]

Government fully recognise the debt of gratitude owed to all those who made such sacrifices. I pay tribute also to the valuable work carried out by the volunteer and charitable ex-service organisations to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

Incapacity benefit is a flat-rate national insurance benefit that is intended to provide a basic non-means-tested income to people who are incapacitated by illness or disability. As such, it takes no account of a person's particular financial needs. Incapacity benefit replaced sickness benefit and invalidity benefit in April 1995. The main test of entitlement to state incapacity benefits is the personal capability assessment, which sets a threshold of incapacity that must be met in order to qualify for state incapacity benefits.

The incapacity threshold looks at the effect of an illness or disability on a person's ability to perform a range of functions related to capacity for work. Until the medical test is completed, people receiving incapacity benefit must supply medical certificates from their general practitioner. As the hon. Gentleman said, incapacity benefit is paid at three rates: the short-term lower rate payable for the first 28 weeks, which is currently £53.50; the short-term higher rate payable between weeks 28 and 52, which is now £63.25; and the long-term rate payable after 52 weeks, which is now £70.95. Most employees will receive statutory sick pay from their employers for the first 28 weeks of their absence from work. At the end of the 28 weeks, employees may claim state incapacity benefit and receive the short-term higher rate if they satisfy the contribution conditions.

While in service, armed forces personnel continue to receive full pay. However, they are unable to claim incapacity benefit until they leave the service. If they qualify for incapacity benefit on discharge, they will therefore start at the short-term lower rate of incapacity benefit. That contrasts with the position of the rest of the population, whose time spent receiving statutory sick pay—up to 28 weeks—counts towards the short-term higher rates straight away.

The rationale for the current arrangements is that service personnel who are sick continue to receive full pay and allowances until they are discharged on medical grounds. Most receive generous occupational pensions following discharge. In addition, the armed forces control their own arrangements for certifying and dealing with sickness, which means that there is no direct link with the state schemes and the GP medical certification arrangements that underpin it. Therefore, if members of the armed forces leave due to ill health and make successful claims for incapacity benefit, the regulations result in them receiving incapacity benefit at the lower short-term rate, rather than the higher rate, for their first 28 weeks as civilians. That is because their time spent on sick leave for the previous 28 weeks could not be taken into account.

Given that social security legislation will continue to exempt members of the armed forces from the need to claim incapacity benefit while they are in the services, we shall be looking to put members of the armed forces on an equal footing with the civilian population by counting the first 28 weeks of sickness as if it had been a period of statutory sick pay.

Further, the numbers affected by those arrangements are small. The last full year for which we have figures is for April 2000 to April 2001, when there were 1,580 medical discharges from the armed forces. The Navy has by far the most, the Army is second and the Royal Air Force has fewer than 200. Of the total, about 1,000 cases resulted from a disease. The rest were due to trauma. Of the diseases, musculo-skeletal conditions comprised half, with about 150 mental health cases.

Medical staff from the Surgeon-General's department have estimated that less than half of all medical dischargees would claim incapacity benefit and that the majority would probably not satisfy the personal-capability assessment. Despite the fact that the changes were made in 1995, the anomaly was brought to our attention only in 1999 by the organisations and Mr. Jackson. The current policy has been in place for many years. We would be keen to hear details of cases when veterans have been affected by the differing ranges of incapacity benefit, but none has been forthcoming so far. That is why the hon. Gentleman was given what sounded like a flippant reply from a civil servant; there would be few such cases. In reality, I hope that there are a few cases in which such action would take place, although I accept that there is a theoretical risk.

Mr. Flook: Does the Minister accept none the less that, by the time people work out that they may be entitled to extra benefits, time will have passed on? It is the nature of service men that they do not tend to complain about things in the past—or else many of them would not have turned up in the first place.

Dr. Moonie: I accept that absolutely. Despite the small numbers involved, we are determined to press ahead with the change. We acknowledge that the discrepancy should be rectified to allow days of service when sick to count towards satisfying the 25 weeks' requirement. I regret to say that any changes to the system, however small, will require either an amendment to legislation or complex regulations. They require changes to forms, guidance and training for Jobcentre Plus staff, not to mention computer systems—changes to which are not made lightly. It is not realistic to introduce the change quickly.

I should like to take the opportunity to explain the Government's changes to pension income rules over the past year, as they, too, have led to some discussion. Since 6 April 2001, the amount of incapacity benefit payable to a person who has a pension income is reduced by half the value of the pension in excess of £85 a week. That reflects the fact that many people now receive a pension income before they reach state pension age. The rules for incapacity benefit were brought up to date to reflect significant changes that have occurred in society since benefits for incapacity were first introduced.

The previous rules covering incapacity benefit ignored the fact that many people retired early and had occupational and personal pensions. For example, in 1953, only 28 per cent. of people received an occupational pension. Today, 86 per cent. of men in full-time work are members of an occupational or personal pension scheme, as are 77 per cent. of women who are in full-time work and 35 per cent. of women who are in part-time work. The changes affect those with the highest incomes. The rules for taking account of pension income in incapacity benefit mirror the rules for taking account of such income in the contributions-based element of jobseeker's allowance. However, there is a much more generous disregard: £85 as against £50 in jobseeker's allowance. Additionally, the regulations provide that only 50 per cent. of pension income over that amount is taken into account.

Personal pension income includes occupational pensions paid on cessation of employment. Armed forces service pensions paid on cessation of service are occupational pensions and are treated in the same way as other occupational pensions. That applies equally to both service-invaliding pensions, which are paid after medical injury, regardless of condition or injury or whether it happened on or off duty, and to service-attributable pensions, which are paid when the condition or injuries are attributable to, or aggravated by, service. However, war pensions paid because of disablement are paid whether or not employment in the armed services is continuing. For that reason, they are not included as pension payments. I hope that that explanation is more clear than it sounded.

When considering the legislation, the Government took the view that pension income from all sources should be included, whether provided through an occupational pension scheme, additional voluntary contributions or a private pension. To introduce a disregard for the armed forces, while continuing to take account of occupational pensions for the police and fire services, would be inequitable. The regulations provide that only pension income that a person is actually receiving is taken into account. If people choose to forgo some or all of their pension until a future date, their incapacity benefit will not be affected by the amount forgone. Pension changes apply only to new claims made for a period on or after 6 April 2001.

This is probably the first time that a Minister from the Ministry of Defence has dealt with a question about the service provided by the Benefits Agency. I welcome the opportunity because it provides a powerful illustration that the veterans initiative is working. The initiative arose from one of the wider themes of the Parliament—public sector reform aimed at achieving a co-ordinated approach and an integrated policy across government. Those words are easy for Ministers to use, but are much more difficult to deliver on.

Until now, veterans' concerns have tended to be dealt with on a single-issue basis by the responsible Department or within local government. Because of the Government's determination to provide a co-ordinated Government focus for veterans' concerns, on 14 March last year the Prime Minister announced that I would also be responsible for ensuring that veterans' issues were properly understood, appropriately prioritised and effectively addressed across Government. The appointment of a Minister for Veterans demonstrates clear recognition by Government of the special status of the ex-service community and the unique contribution that they have made to the nation.

Three main priorities were identified for the initiative. First, we must pull together the Government's response to issues that cut across Departments, such as the assistance that is provided to address homelessness or ill health. Secondly, we must ensure that lessons learned are absorbed into the MOD's planning. We need to make sure that we have the right preventative measures in place to minimise later problems such as service lost to injury or illness, and to respond adequately to the challenges of operational stress and resettlement.

Thirdly, we should co-ordinate communication by publicising and demonstrating the full range of assistance offered to veterans by central and local government. That would ensure both that the Government receive credit for what they do and that veterans' organisations have the opportunity to represent their collective and individual concerns to the Government at ministerial level.

The issue of changes to the discrepancy in payments of incapacity benefits for armed forces and air personnel has been discussed in detail by the two new cross-cutting groups set up to help me in my work—the veterans forum and the veterans taskforce. At our last meeting in May, Ministers from the Department for Work and Pensions agreed in principle to make the change. Unfortunately, they have been unable to give it a higher priority in their heavy modernisation programme because of other priorities for work with much more wide-reaching results. A clarification is being sought from the Department for Work and Pensions' legal team about whether such a change will need primary legislation, or whether changes to regulations will suffice. The timing of the change can therefore not yet be estimated.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned Gulf war syndrome. I should like to correct a misapprehension that appears to have crept into the minds of those who write articles in the press about it. It will not affect the pension paid to any of our ex-service men by one penny if the illness is classified—in my opinion wrongly—as Gulf war syndrome, or if it is classified as something else. Our pensions are paid according to the degree of disability that people are suffering. The labelling of their condition has absolutely nothing to do with it. Some inflated claims have been made by journalists who really should know better, given the effort that we have put into trying to convince them in the past year or two. Pensions are paid according to disability, which is as it should be. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman accepts that; I was not suggesting that he did not.

The House will understand that whatever benefits our ex-service men and women receive, it can never be enough to repay the sacrifice of those who risked their health and well-being to defend their country. I hope that the report that this welcome debate has enabled me to present to the House gives some assurance about the progress being made by the veterans initiative to ensure that those who have given so much receive the benefits to which they are entitled. I assure the hon. Gentleman that I shall keep a very close eye on the matter, and that the changes will be brought in as soon as is practicable.

Unadopted Roads

1.29 pm

Mr. Mark Todd (South Derbyshire): I wish to return to the subject of unadopted roads—or private roads, as they are sometimes called—which was raised in the previous Parliament by my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint). I will not go into the minutiae of the legal position on adopted roads, as that is reasonably well known by people who have explored this arcane subject, and it was run through at length in the debate five years ago. Instead, I wish to draw attention to ways in which we might address a problem that is genuinely held to be significant by many people, and to give a couple of examples.

It is thought that there are about 4,000 miles of unadopted roads in this country. However, that figure might be incorrect; there has not been a survey on the subject for 50 years so. At present, we do not know enough to query it. Later in the debate, I will suggest that we should do something to address that lack of recent information.

There are 31 unadopted roads in Swadlincote, which is a small, ex-mining town of 35,000 people in my constituency. Some of those roads are of considerable significance; they play an important role in the highway network, as they often link two adopted highways, and are used as through-routes by people who do not live along them. That can cause considerable nuisance for the people who do live alongside such roads. They face several problems. They have to bear the cost of maintaining the road—until it becomes dangerous, at which point the local authority can assist. Unauthorised parking can be a problem, and they have almost no recourse to deal with that. They also have the problem of people dumping cars and rubbish. They can be subject to a claim by a person who has an accident on the road, if it can be shown that they could reasonably have done something about it. Those are regular causes of concern and expense to the people who live along such roads.

However, it must be acknowledged that most people who have bought houses in such roads are aware that they have also bought those liabilities. I shall explore ways in which we could deal with that, because they have something to gain from rectifying this situation, so the cost of the solution to it should not be wholly—or even largely—paid by the public.

How big is the problem? It would be helpful if, for the first time in 50 years, we tried to find out how many unadopted roads there are in this country, and how long they are. As I have said, the last survey was done in 1960. We now have an opportunity to collect new data, which would help us to identify the scale of the difficulty that we face.

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. David Chidgey (In the Chair): Order. Under the rules of the House, it is necessary for hon. Members who wish to intervene to give prior notice to the hon. Member who has secured the Adjournment debate and the Minister who is responding, and for both of them to give their agreement to those interventions.

Mr. Todd: My hon. Friend has spoken to me.

Mr. David Chidgey (In the Chair): If the hon. Gentleman and the Minister agree to accept the intervention, the Chair has no objection.

Ms Walley: I am most grateful. Unadopted alleyways have also long been a matter for concern. With regard to my hon. Friend's call for a survey, does he agree that it is equally important to get a sense of how many unadopted alleyways there are, and to find the funds to make them up?

Mr. Todd: With regard to unadopted roads, one of my concerns is non-vehicular access. Alma road in Newhall is a link between two adopted roads. Unadopted roads are an important part of the pedestrian network of the town, which is of equal concern to the Government. It is also important to keep those safe and free from nuisance and hazard, so I understand the point made.

Data collected could recognise the cost of contributions towards unadopted roads in the local government funding formula. Some people think that there is no public cost for unadopted roads, but the public purse bears a liability when it can be shown that there is a danger. Regularly within Swadlincote, small contributions are made towards dealing with large potholes appearing in unadopted roads. That is a cost to local government, and it would be reasonable to recognise such roads in the funding formula as a cost to the public purse.

Such recognition would also help to strengthen the identity between the local authority and the residents of unadopted roads, which is currently sadly lacking. Most local authorities take the robust view that they are not generally a matter for their concern unless someone is likely to be badly hurt.

Until the poll tax and then the council tax were introduced, living in an unadopted road was recognised in the bill paid to the local authority—it affected the rateable value of one's house and therefore the rates bill. That is no longer the case, except if one lives on the cusp of a council tax band, when the difference in valuation between a property in an undadopted road and one in a normal road would be significant in tipping the balance into a different band valuation. There is a strong argument for giving a discount to residents of unadopted roads on the part of the council tax bill relating to the highway authority. It should not be a large discount, because such residents use the rest of the road network. Nevertheless, they feel that they do not get any value for the money that they pay the council for maintaining the roads outside their houses, and that should be reflected in how much they pay towards their local authority's costs.

Obviously, highway authorities, especially in the past 10 or 15 years, have found it increasingly difficult to do anything much about unadopted roads. In my area, the last unadopted road that was improved—John street, Swadlincote in 1995—was the last one that the local council was prepared to contemplate. The Minister will surely deal with this matter in his response, but I understand that local authorities can choose to spend their money on unadopted roads should they feel that they are a high priority. At the moment, however, most find that there are many other calls on their purses besides the individual needs of relatively small numbers of citizens, however acute that need may be. Certainly, the retort from a Derbyshire county council spokesman on the local radio this morning was typical: he said that people knew what they were getting into when they bought the property, so it is tough on them. Such a robust approach would not cut much ice with many of the residents, who feel that they pay substantial amounts of council tax and expect higher levels of service. It is not, however, an untypical answer.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): In my experience, many people living on unadopted roads recognise their responsibility. Does my hon. Friend agree that residents need a solution whereby costs could be made affordable by spreading payment over a period of time, as was suggested in a letter to me last August from the Minister who formerly had responsibility for the subject, my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble)?

Mr. Todd: Indeed, I shall turn to that exact issue. As I said, local authorities have many calls on their budgets and I understand why the issue would have low priority. However, I have approached other bodies.

I mentioned with intent that Swadlincote is a former coalfield town, and I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley will agree that the problem is especially prevalent in such communities. Often, the towns and villages were built without the great care and attention to utilities and public services that we would expect these days. I have put it to the Coalfields Regeneration Trust that a perfectly good use of its resources would be the provision of a small amount towards environmental improvements based on the adoption of unadopted roads, because that would lead to a significant environmental gain. An unadopted road, through no fault of its owners, often attracts the worst possible nuisances, such as abandoned cars and rubbish. The adoption of such roads would have a wider impact than the benefit of the individuals who live along them. I would welcome the Government's support in drawing the benefit of that opportunity to the attention of the Coalfields Regeneration Trust and other bodies that provide funds for coalfields communities. A pump-priming approach would help.

I turn to funding. As my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley said, some works involve a substantial cost. The family who appeared on the radio with me this morning live on Vicarage road in Woodville. I guess that it would cost about £100,000 to adopt that road. I am afraid that most people who live on unadopted roads—the phrase "private roads" gives the impression of exclusivity and poshness—in my area are generally people without substantial means to contribute to large-scale capital schemes.

A method of dealing with the problem has been explored in correspondence that my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley shared with me. I have also received a similar letter in response to my inquiry. That method is to allow the cost of the scheme to be spread over several years and to be set against the value of the property on such a road when sold. It is undoubtedly true that the improvement of an unadopted road makes a significant difference to the value of a property, and a householder making such an investment would experience a good return. That approach should be commended to local authorities.

I have a small query about how local authorities account for a debt that is not recoverable for several years. Is there an acceptance of that funding mechanism? Will the Minister tell us whether that method of deferring a payment for up to 30 years and holding the payment against the value of the sale of the property is acceptable and commendable to local authorities?

A cash flow difficulty would be caused by the initial payment to fund the scheme. In most cases, the costs are significant, and if the money were not recovered for many years, the council would face a cash shortfall, which would take money from other services. That is why I have suggested co-operation with other agencies to blunt the edge of the cash flow problem. I want a capital fund to be established that would be available for such projects. That could be drawn down to allow projects to proceed, and as money was repaid to the fund, it could finance further qualifying projects. Such a scheme would encourage local authorities to support a solution to the problem rather than giving it a low priority because they believe that people knowingly buy into the problem by purchasing an affected property. People deserve a higher quality response that offers a way ahead. I hope that some of my suggestions will help to relieve that difficulty, and will provide a solution for hundreds of my constituents and many thousands of people throughout the country.

1.44 pm

The Minister for Transport (Mr. John Spellar): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd) for having raised the issue. It is a matter of concern not only in his constituency but elsewhere, especially in the north and midlands and in many of our traditional industrial towns. In answer to one of his queries, my advice is that 1972 is the latest year for which figures are available, when there were estimated to be about 40,000 such private streets throughout England and Wales, amounting to some 4,500 miles.

Mr. Todd: The 1972 figures are merely an extrapolation on the 1960 data collection. We have not collected the data since 1960. In 1972, someone estimated what might happen in the intervening 12 years.

Mr. Spellar: That was the advice that I received.

In 1990, it was estimated that it would cost more than £2 billion to make up all private streets for adoption. Given the slow rate of local authorities' making up private streets, it is unlikely that the figure has reduced much since, although I accept the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) about alleyways. I have encountered the problem in Smethwick, in my constituency, too.

It might help if I set out the background of private street works law. A private street is a highway that is not maintainable at public expense by a highway authority.

[Mr. Spellar]

The Highway Act 1835 introduced a provision under which, for a street to become publicly maintainable, the responsible public authority must deliberately resolve to adopt it. Nowadays, that authority will usually be the local highway authority—in the case of the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire, for example, Derbyshire county council. In general, responsibility for maintaining a private street will fall to the owners of the properties adjoining it—known as frontages—who are also legally liable to meet the expenses that the council incurs in making up the street for adoption. As a result, as he said, a significant number are likely to be in a poor state of repair.

Part XI of the Highways Act 1980 contains what is known as the private street works code, under which a street works authority can resolve to make up a private street at any time. After the works, the street is usually adopted. The authority may apportion the expenses of making up the street among the frontages by reference to the frontage lengths of individual properties. However, it may also modify the apportionments if it has resolved in advance to take account of the extent of benefit, if any, that individual properties derive from the works. In addition, the authority may, if it sees fit, contribute to the cost of the scheme itself.

Provision is made for property owners to object to their apportionments if they choose to do so. In the last resort they can appeal to the Secretary of State against the sum demanded. That is the extent of the Department's involvement in individual cases.

Caroline Flint: Will my right hon. Friend confirm the advice of the former Minister responsible, my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble), that a local authority may proceed with making up a road for adoption after consultation and that that does not require unanimity among the residents?

Mr. Spellar: I hope to come to that later.

I now turn to local authorities' discretion to contribute from their own resources. Local authorities have the power to moderate street works charges in four ways. First, as I said, they may take account of the extent of benefit received. They would use that power in order to reduce the charge payable by a householder with a long-flank frontage who may receive little or no benefit from the works. They may make up the difference themselves, rather than re-apportioning the cost among frontages.

Secondly, they may allow payments by instalments. Thirdly, in cases of hardship, the authority may waive reimbursement of the principal sum due until the property is sold and in the meantime recover from the householder the interest on the outstanding charge only, to which my hon. Friends the Members for South Derbyshire and for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) alluded. Finally, local authorities have a general discretion to bear all or part of the cost of a scheme.

In that context, it is worth noting that local authorities have the power to use proceeds from the sale of assets—generally 25 per cent. in the case of council houses and 100 per cent. in the case of most other receipts—on capital expenditure of any kind in any year. It is then for authorities themselves to determine how those usable capital receipts are spent, in the light of local priorities and circumstances.

On 12 June, we announced a draft local government Bill, which proposes to give authorities new freedoms to respond to the needs of their local communities. The Bill includes a new capital borrowing system, which means that authorities will be free to borrow without the Government's consent as long as they can afford the debt. Authorities will be able to use their revenues to finance additional borrowing and that will give them greater autonomy and responsibility for their own decisions in making capital investment. Although local authorities have the power to make payments, I accept that they might not necessarily wish to do so.

As my hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire said, there is no doubt that many who live on private streets—particularly those whose houses have long frontages that make them liable to correspondingly high charges—see their liability to pay for private street works charges as unfair. Obviously, I have sympathy for those for whom the charges create a degree of hardship, but liability for street works appear in the local land charges register and should therefore be—and in many cases has been—taken into account in the purchase price of the house. Many householders have already paid for having their own streets made up and might well feel aggrieved at a decision to make the service free to future users—especially in residential roads where the benefits will be enjoyed almost entirely by householders and their visitors rather than by the public at large.

My hon. Friend informed me in advance of the debate of several points of interest to him, several of which he raised earlier. I shall address those points now. First, he suggested that the Government's formula for calculating local authorities' highway maintenance allocations be changed to reflect the length of unadopted roads in each authority area. That option may seem attractive, but many authorities do not have legal responsibility for such roads.

My hon. Friend also suggested allowing residents of unadopted roads a discount on their council tax. However, council tax is essentially a means of contributing to the cost of providing a range of services throughout a local area rather than a specific charge for particular services used or enjoyed directly by individual households. That argument has been used in other contexts.

Council tax represents about 25 per cent. of local government revenue, with the rest provided by Government grant, non-domestic rates, parking fees and rents. At present, there are no specific reductions for residents of households where responsibility for roads and other services have not been adopted, but neither are there reductions for other groups, such as those who do not have children at school, own a car or currently require social services.

Mr. Todd: The Minister expands a familiar argument. I draw to his attention the fact that provision for schools and social services exists and it is up to citizens whether to use them, but that does not apply to the provision for a road outside someone's house.

Mr. Spellar: That argument may not appeal to the constituent who does not have children and who sees the percentage of council tax that is spent on local education. The level of a household's bill depends primarily on the valuation band to which the dwelling has been assigned. The provision of facilities is a factor that may influence the valuation band in which a property is placed.

As to extra capital funding for unadopted roads, transport capital funding is made available through local transport plans and is provided in two forms. For approved schemes—those of a gross cost exceeding £5 million—resources are provided out of specific ring-fenced funds for the scheme in question and cannot be used for other purposes. For smaller, integrated transport measures—those under the £5 million mark—and for road maintenance, resources are provided as a single, block allocation, and authorities have the discretion to spend that in line with the aims, objectives and priorities established in their plans.

The Government's commitment to improving transport provision after years of under-investment is reflected in the £8.4 billion package that we announced to implement the first five-year transport plans. The £1.3 billion allocation announced for the first year of the plans—2001–02—is more than double the previous year's funding. The Government's introduction of local government transport plans demonstrates that we believe that local government, not central Government, is best placed to address the issues faced by communities, which is why the authorities have the discretion to utilise the capital resources to reflect those local circumstances and priorities.

On making road-adoption schemes part of wider coalfield regeneration projects and obtaining funding from third parties, the Coalfields Regeneration Trust is solely funded by Government money and was not set up to provide funding for large capital infrastructure projects. It is an independent charitable trust, and its priorities are to get people back to work using education, training and community enterprise. However, my hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire may want to confirm with the trust the position in his area.

My hon. Friend also asked whether there were accounting barriers to an authority allowing a householder to defer the costs to which he or she is liable for bringing a road up to maintainable standards until the property was sold. That question was also raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley, and I am not aware of any obvious barriers. In such circumstances, the authority would in effect be making a loan to the householder, and the capital financial system does not place restrictions on such activities. The authority would simply need to show the outstanding sums on its balance sheets as amounts owing to it. I hope that that assists my hon. Friends.

As I said earlier, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire for raising this issue. That said, the existing system has enough flexibility to allow sensible decisions to be taken, and I hope that what I have said will meet some, if not all, of his concerns.

Ms Walley: In view of my right hon. Friend's comments about the possible role of the coalfields regeneration trust, does he agree that if the trust were able to assist in some way, it could play a tremendous role in local regeneration and help to achieve its three prime objectives? Will he support us and make that approach to the trust?

Mr. Spellar: Obviously, we would have to examine the resources that are available to the trust and the current demands on it. Local circumstances may make that more likely in some areas than in others, but I undertake to examine that point and see what progress can be made.

We have touched briefly on some of the issues, and if any of my hon. Friends wants to write to me on specific questions, I shall examine them and answer the points in further detail.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at two minutes to Two o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 19 June 2002

[Sɪʀ Aʟᴀɴ Hᴀsᴇʟʜᴜʀsᴛ *in the Chair*]

School Examination System

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—[*Mr. Woolas.*]

9.30 am

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): Today's cohort of sixth formers is made up of some of the most examined children in British educational history. Of course, regular testing gives teachers, parents and pupils useful information, but how many children will look back and say that their school days, far from being the happiest of their lives, were marred by over-examination?

Those of us with children in the state sector know that the process begins with standard assessment tests at the age of seven, and that children are then put on a conveyor belt of continual examination, which runs through to GCSEs, AS-levels and, finally, A-levels—and that is just within the school system.

SATs have a role to play in helping us carry out important checks on children's progress through the education system. However, the majority of teachers have serious reservations about the national system for testing young children. That may be connected with teachers' disenchantment with the increasing paperwork that the Government machinery churns out for them. Between April last year and March this year, the Government sent schools 4,500 pages of reading material. How are head teachers expected to find the time to read that amount of paperwork? I am sure that all hon. Members have heard that cry go up from teachers in their constituencies.

The national standards take little or no account of local differences, socio-economic variations or the number of children with special needs in a class, and that creates all sorts of perverse incentives. One head teacher described to me how a parent who had a child with special needs had told her, "I expect you won't want my child, because he will affect your SATs results." I am pleased to say that she was having none of that, and took the child on.

At best, SATs are a crude measure, but we all know how parents pore over the resultant league tables in a quest to find the best school for their children. However, education depends on so much else, such as the school's ethos, the head teacher's leadership and even the company that one's children keep.

I commend to the Secretary of State the performance indicators in primary schools—or PIPS—scheme, which measures the difference that a school makes to one's child. A bright seven-year-old may easily obtain level 2 in their SATs, but have they really been stretched to their full potential? One can find that out using PIPS, but not SATs. Conversely, a less bright seven-year-old might just miss out on level 2, but should they stand condemned at that stage for missing a national target, if they have made real progress since entering school at reception?

I am sure that I am not the only mother of boys who wonders what on earth happens to them around the age of seven. The terrible twos seem to make a bumpy reappearance for about 18 months until some maturity miraculously kicks in at the age of nine. However, seven is precisely the age at which children undergo their very important first test. Under a school-based PIPS evaluation scheme, one can take account of all such factors and keep a handle on how a child is learning and progressing. If there are difficulties, teachers can take a parent on one side and explain what progress the child is making. The information will be available, and it will be possible to see quite graphically what added value the school is giving the child and what the parent, the school and the child can do together to raise standards. There will not simply be a bald national statistic.

What about the Green Paper proposals to reduce the number of compulsory GCSE topics and to enable brighter pupils to take subjects early? As a language graduate, I am worried that that will be an excuse to drop some hated foreign language, which will push Britain even further behind in languages.

In my day—I loathe using that phrase, but there have been changes since I was at school, and as Members we tend to relate our experience to what is happening now—we had O-levels and CSEs. The introduction of GCSEs was designed to get over the two-tier approach to exams at 16. Taking nine or so subjects in one go was a test of one's capacity to carry a breadth of subjects and cope with sheer volume before the relative luxury of specialisation and streamlining.

In terms simply of load bearing, the O-level year was far and away the most difficult I faced in my schooling. I had to carry nine subjects, some of them not my best, all at the same time. In some ways, A-levels were easier. Allowing pupils to skip GCSEs altogether and go straight to AS-levels risks creating a two-tier effect all over again, so I would caution the Government over those proposals.

AS-levels were not around in my day and I am glad that I did not have to do them. The lower sixth was a chance to breathe after the heavy pressure of the GCSE year or its equivalent and before the seriousness of A-level exam pressures was upon us. That year saw a flowering of extra-curricular activity, including the production of a school musical, service to the community and gaining Queen's guide badges—all education, but not necessarily subject to examination. I am not surprised by the growth in popularity of the gap year, as children increasingly want time to live before they knuckle under to a university education.

One member of my family started his final exam season yesterday. He is one of a cohort of guinea pigs who have been relentlessly examined and re-examined since 1983 and his observations are worth listening to. He feels that his classmates have been tested so extensively that it almost contradicts the concept of comprehensive education. Testing stamped into kids where they stood in relation to their classmates at a very early stage. He experienced the revisions of the AS-level system and the new A2 levels, and he points out that the modular system of examining progressively throughout the two-year period does not suit all types of student, especially the last-minute merchants who need the focus of a deadline to put the work in.

[Mrs. Caroline Spelman]

The fact that AS-level students are first examined in January after a September start puts some people off pursuing those subjects, and a poor result after one term's study can deter people altogether. Some schools have had a drop-out rate of 50 per cent. between September 2000, when they embarked on the new revised sixth form scheme, and June 2002. My relation feels that some less academic pupils were casualties of being encouraged to pursue AS-levels and A2 levels rather than the more vocational courses to which they might have been better suited. He questions the need to reform the A-level system, along the lines of the famous dictum, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."

It is right to listen to the pupils' concerns. They are sitting the exams, they will have to face the consequences and they are left with the memories of what it was really like. Interestingly, at the peak of the exam season we have had a rash of hits on the Conservative party website from pupils sitting exams who want to tell us about their problems. All the hits—there were over 40—involved one of three issues: exam quality, exam overload or the exam boards. Given the age of the correspondents, I shall refer to them by Christian name only to preserve their anonymity. For example, Mark said:

> "The current exam system in primary and secondary schools is highly constricting. It seems that some primary school children are being taught how to pass their exams rather than being taught in the subjects that should matter."

Alex, a pupil from West Yorkshire, said of a history course:

> "My teacher had managed to complete the course by November, just two months into the term. Since then the lesson time has been used for exam preparation. This is typical of British Education. Low on content and high on meeting targets. British children aren't educated properly at all."

Those examples are reactions in the raw from pupils who have to deal with the system.

Paul from West Yorkshire commented on his experience of moving from GCSE to AS-level:

> "The AS levels are too big a jump from the GCSEs to have only a one year gap between the two exams. That means we have exams every year for three years. This means we have to have time out in the lower sixth form to be doing exams when we could be doing more of the A level syllabus."

Another comment on the AS-level system came from Peter from Surrey, who wrote that it promotes

> "only anxiety concerning the burden of work and the inevitable exclusion of activities such as culture and sport. The system punishes the student who engages in either . . . and the stress that results in attempting to combine academic work and extra-curricular activities can be crippling to exam success, as well as personal development."

It is also interesting that the website had a hit from a teacher, Sue from Suffolk, who wrote:

> "The new AS exams are one set of exams too many."

Bob Spink (Castle Point): Teachers are forced to focus on the exam system against their wishes. They want to teach the syllabus and improve education, but the system and league tables force them to focus too much on exams. They are shell-shocked by the environment of change in which they have lived for many years. We need stability—an innovation holiday—in education.

The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority has urged the Government to abandon their proposals to introduce the super-A-level, which it says presents substantial risks to the quality of examining in A-levels and the trustworthiness of the grading system. Does my hon. Friend agree?

Mrs. Spelman: That is a helpful and interesting observation from my hon. Friend. I never thought that I would catch myself saying that anyone would want an innovation holiday, but our sympathy goes to teachers, who have had to cope with an inordinate amount of change, much of which has involved grasping changes in exam technique.

I was tremendously struck by a distinction made by a teacher of one of my children. Commenting on an exam result—it might have been less than ideal—the teacher pointed out that exam technique could be learned, but that the education and intellect of the pupil need nurturing and time. Given that we have had robust exam systems in the past, I am deeply concerned that teachers feel that the balance has shifted towards getting their heads round specific techniques required for specific exams. My hon. Friend's intervention is well made.

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): Perhaps we do not need an innovation holiday altogether. I sympathise with the wish for less innovation imposed from central Government, but there is still room for teachers to experiment with new methods and perhaps even new subjects that they want to bring to the curriculum. Such experimentation has been driven out by so much centralisation of the education system over the past few years.

Mrs. Spelman: I thank the hon. Gentleman, and I hope that he acknowledges that the PIPS scheme provides examples of schools innovating a method. Others can use that method, but a school may develop its own initiative and measure for its own satisfaction the difference that it makes to pupils of every ability. For the schools involved, and the children and their parents, that will give a much finer feel of how individuals are developing.

Our concern is to give schools the space to make perhaps necessary interventions. That is based on the fact that every signal that we receive from teachers and our children, who deal with the syllabus, suggests that there is not much space in the system because of all the centrally-imposed requirements to deal with things precisely and in a particular way. I sympathise with the view that more flexibility in the requirements imposed on schools would allow more scope for helpful innovation from them.

Bob Spink: My hon. Friend may not be aware that the Science and Technology Committee is considering education in the sciences. Among the evidence that we have received is the strong message that teachers ought to be authorised to set their own questions, which could go towards the national examinations. That facility already exists in some subjects.

We are contemplating giving teachers flexibility in how they deliver the curriculum to make it more relevant for them and their pupils, which would be innovative. I am not against innovation, but is my hon. Friend aware that where there is innovation, as in the advanced vocational certificate of education examination, which has been forced on colleges—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. May I say to the hon. Gentleman that interventions in Westminster Hall should still be interventions rather than speeches? He might like to catch my eye later if he wishes to develop his ideas into a speech.

Bob Spink: May I finish my point?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Briefly.

Bob Spink: Thank you, I appreciate that. Where innovations are to be introduced, teachers should be properly prepared. For instance, there has not been proper preparation and it looks as though this year's AVCE engineering examinations will be a disaster.

Mrs. Spelman: I thank my hon. Friend and look forward to the result of the Science and Technology Committee's inquiry, which will make good reading. In my experience, the Committee always produces highly informative reports and I hope that the Government take full account of its recommendations.

It would show common sense to pay more attention to what teachers say are appropriate questions for testing how much of the set syllabus pupils have absorbed. In the process, the teachers would gain an increased sense that Whitehall is listening to their accounts of their experiences in trying to deliver what they have been asked to do by the centre. More can be done in that domain.

The school examination system has not been helped by adverse press coverage of the examination boards, but I have read the reports carefully—they rose to a height over the weekend. We have learned over time to read between the lines of such coverage to find the source of the problem, and I have reached the conclusion that, in a rush to implement all the changes in Curriculum 2000, the boards have struggled to cope with the changes.

The number of papers marked by the Edexcel board, which is the butt of a lot of criticism, went from 4 million to 10 million in some six months. It requires no stretch of the imagination to understand that a board might struggle with such a sudden increase in volume. It was part of a noble aim for the new examinations to be more inclusive, but they were more complicated and the board did not cope with the inquiries that came in at the staggering rate of 100,000 calls—mostly from teachers—a month. It had to admit to a shortage of marking staff in April, and that has not done a great deal for morale. However, these are symptoms of a cause: the consequences of the changes were insufficiently thought through by the Government before they had to be introduced.

It is essential to have a good examination system in which teachers, pupils and their parents are confident. I invite the Minister to set out how confidence can be restored and how we can convince the next cohort of guinea pigs that it will all be worth while.

9.49 am

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): I start with an observation that may distress some of my hon. Friends, which is that the most recent disaster to overtake the examination system was started by us when Sir Keith Joseph was Secretary of State for Education and Science. He caved in to the constant pressure of the education profession—I should say the education establishment, ably supported by departmental officials—for the amalgamation of the O-level and CSE examinations, which were highly respected, for nothing better than political reasons.

I taught in comprehensive schools to both examination boards, and I submit that those examinations were carefully tailored and designed for the benefit of the different pupils who took them. Of course, the examinations overlapped—a CSE grade 1 was widely respected, and it was appreciated as the equivalent of a GCE O-level—but that did not mean that there had to be an examination big bang at the end of the summer term, which is now creeping back right through the term.

For what seemed good reasons at the time, I fear that we started a process of Government intervention and interference that has culminated in the undermining of respect for the whole examination system, the creation of further grade inflation—or a belief that it happens; which of us can tell?—and a feeling that the Government's attempts to control the examination system are like their attempts to control everything else. I am not making a party point, but it seems that their attempts are part of a political agenda rather than part of the education agenda.

I am concerned that the Government have carried through, and worsened significantly, the steps that we took in the 1980s. Our examination system was respected at the time, because it was based on the experience of teachers and on the highly demanding requirements of the major universities, and it was argued that some examination boards were harder and more rigorous than others.

I remember that the Oxford and Cambridge Schools Examination Board, of which I am an alumnus, was regarded as one of the more demanding and that others were regarded as less demanding, but teachers could choose examinations that were appropriate for their pupils, both in terms of their breadth and their curriculum content and level. The CSE was designed for less able pupils, and the O-level for at least some more able pupils—those whom my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) called the big bang merchants.

Mrs. Spelman: The last-minute merchants.

Mr. Turner: Yes; the big bang comes later.

We may have started the process, but it has become a great deal worse because, during the past 15 years or so, Governments of both parties have put more and more pressure on schools and the examination system—on the schools to deliver, and on the schools examination system to monitor delivery. There is nothing wrong with putting pressure on schools to deliver, nor is there anything wrong in measuring the attainment of schools.

[Mr. Turner]

I welcome the fact that we introduced SATs, but it might as well be admitted that they measure the performance of schools as much as the performance of pupils. They are a crude and not wholly satisfactory measure, but at least they moved in the right direction of giving parents and schools the necessary information on performance. Some schools were shown to be excellent and brilliantly performing in both crude and value-added terms. It is a matter of regret that we have not taken the value-added route in measuring the performance of schools.

Without SATs, however, we would not have been able to measure the performance of schools at all. Parents would have been left at the mercy of rumour and playground gossip about the quality of a school, whereas we can now see when some schools are creeping up the league table and others are creeping down. We can at least tell when schools are performing better than they used to in relation to their competitors, even without having value-added measures in place.

That is not an argument for not introducing such measures. I am simply saying that we have access to information that we did not have 10 or 15 years ago and, more importantly, that parents did not have. I welcome also the publication of SATs results, because it is no good the information being available to a small group of professionals alone.

I am not criticising every examinations measure taken by the Conservative Government, but we started by caving in to a demand that was driven more by social engineering than by educational aspiration. We have done so again more recently by amalgamating a range of examinations in new exams whose names employers do not recognise. Confidence in examinations depends on the ability of parents, students, employers and university admissions tutors to recognise their quality. Some have far more time to go into the detail than others.

One would expect a university admissions tutor to understand the difference between a vocational A-level and an ordinary A-level and to be abreast of the development of the AS-level and the A2-level, but I doubt that many others are. The constant changes to the system, nomenclature and content of examinations syllabuses is undermining confidence in the system.

Another problem is our utter failure to establish whether grade inflation is taking place, and the loss of A-level scripts from the early 1980s means that it is impossible to compare their quality with those from the early 1990s. That disastrous loss makes it impossible to establish whether an A-level today is worth what it was in 1980. The fact that so many more pupils are getting A-levels is to be welcomed, but it would be a great pity if they were receiving awards in a devalued currency.

The next step must be gently to withdraw Government intervention in the examination system. A-S levels are an examination too far. Some head teachers may say that they

> "welcomed the increased choice and flexibility being signalled by Curriculum 2000",

but they also recognise several problems with implementation. Certainly, many sixth formers to whom I have spoken, in state and independent schools, would agree more with the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden. AS-levels impose too great a burden, too quickly, on pupils who have only just emerged from the GCSE system. They interfere with proper enjoyment of the lower sixth year and participation in out-of-school activities, and they produce a huge additional demand on teachers and an intolerable demand on examinations boards, which they were ill-equipped to face in the first year. If AS-levels had been only an option, they might have been introduced with more confidence. Many pupils who go through the lower sixth leave at the end of the year with nothing to show for it, which is a matter of great regret, but the greatest regret must be introducing a new system without the confidence of its participants.

We have a right to criticise the QCA and its predecessors, whose number over recent years signals the fact that there has been too much meddling, interference and intervention by the Government, and I do not blame this Government alone. The only power that Sir Keith Joseph had to drive through the introduction of the GCSE was the fact that the Secretary of State signed the examination certificates and could threaten to cease to sign the certificates of those boards that refused to introduce the GCSE.

Greatly to my regret, the Government took additional powers and prohibited the use of long-standing and highly respected examinations that are provided by examination boards in this country and which are lawful in West Africa and even in Scotland. That is an instance of wholly unnecessary interference and intervention, of a wholly un-Conservative sort, stemming from the Education Reform Act 1988.

The QCA claims to have a vital role—or at least a role that its chairman, in evidence to the Select Committee, claims is vital—in monitoring examinations and the content of the national curriculum. I am not convinced that its role is vital. When schools are not confident about the quality of an examination board, they can thankfully still shop around, although, regrettably, in a much reduced market. They have only three boards rather than the 10 or 12 that they used to have to choose from.

Schools are leaving Edexcel. Head teachers in my constituency have said that they will not use it again because they are not satisfied with the quality of service that they and their pupils receive, which is a much more effective power in holding examination boards to account than that of the Secretary of State working through an arms-length quango that seems more interested in managing than monitoring the examination system.

The QCA has also moved into setting examinations itself, which is a wholly inappropriate role for a body whose function is to monitor, referee and hold the ring between different examination boards. How can the QCA be poacher and gamekeeper and monitor quality effectively if it is setting SATs itself?

The Government are wrestling to overcome the problem of how to withdraw from an over-regulated examinations system and move to one in which schools can innovate and professional bodies can be involved in developing examinations. I am talking about a system that ceases to be nationalised and becomes once more decentralised.

In my criticism of what happened under Sir Keith Joseph, I accepted that he implemented a demand that professionals made of him, but I regret that he did so and that he did not leave them alone to introduce the examination and see whether it was a marketable proposition.

Now we have a far more centralised system that we must decentralise to allow examination boards, schools, teachers, professional bodies and universities to innovate. My hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) has left the Chamber, but we need not so much an innovation holiday as innovation in a time and of a sort that those involved in the system demand and that can be coped with by those outside it who depend on the quality of information that it provides. The latter is the most essential element in the examinations systems, but we have a long way to go before we can regain it.

10.6 am

Mr. Stephen O'Brien (Eddisbury): First, I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) for his genuinely authoritative and well understood views, which derive not least from his own experience. I have certainly seen that on a number of occasions with regard to educational matters. I shall change the emphasis of the debate slightly, however, from the effects of the current position of the schools examination system as it relates to schools and pupils to the overall context and the outcomes that it produces.

I was elected to Parliament after a fairly long career in manufacturing industry, during which I was responsible for employing a vast number of people at all levels. That meant having to rate young people according to the inevitably limited information provided during the application and interview process. I had to judge what they had displayed of their potential, and the self-confidence and inner sense of achievement that had been instilled in them by the schools that they had been fortunate—or not, as the case might have been—to attend.

An employer looks not only for aptitude and application, but for a real sense of the student's, and therefore the young person's, sense of achievement. Examinations are the one test during a student's school career that puts his academic calibre, whatever it may be, on display for public assessment, particularly for future employers.

My deep anxiety is that today many students up and down the land are living through days and weeks of extreme tension—as it happens, the debate is taking place at that very time. However, we at Westminster must recognise that a broader tension is in play. We must consider the school examinations system with a view to ensuring that everything possible is being done to give every student the chance of personal measurement and a sense of achievement. However, we must also ensure that the system is used extensively not only by the Government and local authorities, but by schools to assess their value in terms of the work that they do and wish to be measured by, in their own eyes and, above all, in the eyes of parents and local communities.

There is also a tension for young people in having to build up a passport of qualifications that will enable them, in the case of the manufacturing industry with which I was involved, to join the roof tile line, to go into brick manufacturing, quarrying or building roads or to go into the office and manage the accounts.

I talked to the four high school head teachers in my constituency. They have markedly different catchment areas, which has affected the measurement of their performance in terms of examination passes achieved. We must recognise that the AS-level in particular has added to that tension by placing an unnecessary and unfair burden on pupils over 16 who have continued their education. That is backed up by the teachers' sense that they are teaching something that they do not, for the life of them, believe is part of the value that they can offer or that the children want to carry with them as a passport to the real world of further education or work.

Those of us who are concerned about the AS-level are not going through education and sitting the examination today, nor are we teaching it. Although we recognise that it came on the back of a Dearing recommendation, hon. Members on both sides of the House must ask the Government important questions through the debate secured and so ably introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman): is the AS-level approach primarily motivated by a desire to sign up to something that gives us confidence that we are producing a school system that delivers results and is it truly of value to students, teachers and employers, and to the benefit of the country over time?

Even though it is early days, AS-levels are not showing any signs that they are of any benefit. Many employers still recruit students straight from school, however much the debate moves ever towards further and higher education, and many schemes are in place to ensure that people have the chance of vocational training before they enter the world of work.

Many employers make assessments at the very time when pupils come out of school at 16 with a view to being in work. I have much anecdotal evidence that when students are considering whether to go on to higher education or vocational training, they hear about the appalling burden of the AS-level on their fellow students in the year above them. It is becoming a marked deterrent against encouraging children to stay on at school.

Although two schools in my constituency are in relatively prosperous areas of Cheshire, they have been seriously hit by the appalling blight on the rural economy, which was exacerbated by the foot and mouth crisis last year. Schools that usually manage to produce sparkling results in the national league tables have found it difficult to maintain that rate of progress, and we cannot expect every cohort to do as well as the next in measurable terms such as examinations. It is a major problem for schools each time that they do well, as they worry about losing funds next time they go down the league table.

One of the problems emerging from the examination system is that we are doing too much for our own purposes rather than focusing on those of the students. Winsford—the town that I represent—is a real challenge. It has many bright pupils and two excellent schools, but many children do not come from a family or have peers who value high achievement in education. It has become apparent that the AS-level is seen as one

[Mr. Stephen O'Brien]

of the deterrents, simply because it denies what I, and I hope everyone in the Chamber, benefited from—staying on at school from 16.

The lower sixth year was particularly aimed at those not able to enjoy a gap year. Fortunately, I was, but many families were unable to support their children in a gap year between school and university or further education. The lower sixth was far from a gap year in that sense, but it was a gap from examinations—a chance to breathe and to move on from the healthy breadth and wealth of subjects at O-level. That is not unreplicated by the GCSE framework, but I shall not estimate whether past grades and attainments are as good, better or worse than today's. Frankly, I am not in a position to make that judgment. I do know, however, that the lower sixth year gave students an opportunity to develop breadth and depth in their subject without having to mug up on particular issues.

To a degree, modular testing has circumvented the problem of a three-hour hit at the end of the summer term that, for life, measures achievement in that subject. Modular curriculums have some downsides, however, and from conversations with lower sixth formers I know that students often feel that they cannot develop their interests sufficiently broadly to serve them well in future. That applies not least at A2-level the following year because, partly through the modular process and partly based on projects, the exams test particular aspects of a subject, rather than considering it in the round and seeking to draw innovation and imagination from the pupil.

Having trained as a lawyer, I have some authority in saying this: if one acquires an arts degree, by and large one feels that one has acquired a depth of knowledge, an ability to commit things to memory and an ability to assimilate, analyse, use and communicate information. However, I like to think that one has a chance to develop one's imagination. When I first acquired my law degree, I said to my parents, "You have a qualified lawyer, but it has been the death of imagination." Most lawyers have to drill all the imagination out of their heads to ensure that they pass the exam and leave nothing to risk. It is all about precedent and case law. I am generalising, of course: the very best lawyers are the most imaginative, so I did not last long.

The development of the AS-level was well intentioned and its problems were exacerbated by the experiences of Edexcel, but I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight that we should be determined in pursuing a strategic reduction of Government intervention. We should follow the radical, welcome and educationally beneficial step of saying that AS-levels, though relatively well intentioned, are not proving their worth and should be dropped—for the benefit of children, teachers and future employers alike. In my experience, AS-levels do not add to the reputation or employability of students. I hope that the Minister will reflect seriously on that.

10.18 am

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): I apologise for missing the opening speeches. I was attending another meeting, attempting to encourage the Government to get us out of another hole—asylum accommodation centres. I particularly apologise to my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) and promise to be present for her speech this afternoon. I declare an interest. I am anxious to contribute because my daughter has just finished her AS-levels, so I speak from bitter personal experience. I shall be brief.

AS-levels have enabled universities to make better grade predictions and to firm up the offers that they make to students. That is the one good thing that they have done. The rest is all bad, and the bad significantly outweighs the good. AS-levels are not broadening students' education in sixth form, even if that were, in itself, a good idea. Universities are asking for commitment. For example, my daughter, who wants to read English at university, was advised not to do a science, but to take drama studies as her AS-level to show commitment to the subject. She is not broadening her sixth-form education at all, but, rightly, showing commitment to it. The broadening is not working. The way to broaden education is through the old A-level curriculum by insisting that students taking, for example, English study within those subjects a broad range of other subjects to give them a fuller understanding of the texts.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Mr. O'Brien) made a powerful point about AS-levels reducing the fun of sixth form and killing extra-curricular activities in the lower sixth. For example, the lower sixth always ran the school play. Pupils at my daughter's and son's schools are opting out of the Duke of Edinburgh's award scheme and do not want to take part in Young Enterprise. Those things, which sixth form is all about, are withering on the vine and dying. The curriculum may be broader, although that is arguable, but the experience of sixth form life is much narrower.

AS-levels are squeezing the life, the breath and the fun out of sixth form education and that is their central failing, but, equally importantly, they are reducing teaching time. Sixth form is not six terms but five, because the last is spent revising and taking exams. Most schools now give students study leave in their third term before the exams, although I appreciate that that is contrary to the advice of examining boards. My daughter's sixth form education is four teaching terms, which is not nearly enough. Not only is that education not broad, but there is less of it. We are turning sixth form students into people who just cram academic subjects. There is too little teaching and students are losing the fun and joy that should be the sixth form experience.

The Government need to rethink the matter with an entirely open mind. I am sure that they had the best intentions, but many Government decisions—the poll tax, for example, which was scrapped—are taken with the best intentions and are proved wrong. *[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) says that the poll tax was not introduced with the best of intentions, which we can debate another time.

Mr. Andrew Turner: I said that it was not proved wrong.

Mr. Luff: I shall not be drawn on that subject, after your indulgence in letting me contribute, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I genuinely believe that the Government thought AS-levels to be a good thing and that pupils' experience of the two years of the system proves that introducing them was not the right thing to do. My daughter's friends at other schools in the area have pleaded with me to do what I can to get the Government to change their mind. I am aware of no pupil taking those exams who thinks them a good idea; all the students think that the exams are a bad thing. The Minister shakes his head, but he is welcome to come to Worcestershire with his parliamentary private secretary, the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Foster), and I shall introduce him to my daughter's friends, male and female, all of whom damn those exams. They say that they are a dreadful experiment, and they hate having to take part in it. The time has come to end AS-levels.

I urge the Minister by all means to consider ways to broaden the old A-level curriculum, but please scrap those exams now. Education policy, as my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury said, should be pupil centred and focused on the children's needs, not ours. That is why those exams must go, and go quickly.

10.23 am

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): I am glad to have the chance to speak in the debate as, like other Members, I have personal, family experience of the matter.

This is the first time that I have attended a debate with the new Minister and I welcome him to his place. I look forward to his tenure of office in the Department for Education and Skills, however short it may be.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) on securing the debate, as many of us have an interest in the subject for personal reasons or because it is important to the country. I very much agree with a large part of what she said. Much of what I shall say may mirror her remarks, but I hope that I shall not bore the Chamber by repeating them.

Like me, the hon. Lady has sons, one of whom is starting to take A-levels, so we have a shared experience in that respect. Anyone whose children have gone through exams knows that they are not only for children, but for the family. The whole family is inevitably involved. Indeed, it will probably be divorce for me if I do not get home tonight so that I can take my son to his exam tomorrow morning. No one else will, I am sure.

I am somewhat less in agreement with the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) about league tables, and the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Mr. O'Brien) is rather more in line with my views. He pointed out the difficulties that schools face when they do well one year, but drop down the tables the next. The hon. Member for Isle of Wight said that at least we have information that we did not have before, but league tables provide us with misinformation that we did not have before. As the hon. Member for Eddisbury pointed out, they mislead parents about which schools are good and which are not.

It is surely a basic requirement of any top-class education system that it should provide for the needs of every pupil, but that is where the examination is going wrong. Individual children count for little and they are treated as examination fodder—units from which we can calculate statistics and draw up league tables. However, tests and league tables do not take account of the needs and problems faced by individual schools, nor are they interested in human detail. Despite that, they are the criteria by which the Government have decided that schools should be judged.

The Government have set an astonishing 4,500 targets for education, requiring no fewer than 306 million separate measures to be monitored. That is a staggering statistic. The Labour party's education policy seems to be examine, examine, examine—three years running, as others have said. Of course, tests can be a vital tool in the learning process, as they measure the retention of knowledge and skills and help teachers to chart the development of individual children, but we must not confuse a tool in the learning process with the learning process itself. That is what has happened.

The individual pupil taking eight GCSEs, perhaps five AS-levels and three A2 levels during his or her 17th, 18th and 19th years of life, will sit 68 exams. The more able pupils taking the advanced papers at the various key stages, world-class tests and the new advanced extension awards will sit a staggering 87. As the *New Statesman* rightly observes in its editorial this week:

> "This is the most tested generation in history, its progress through childhood and adolescence punctuated by targets, key stages, attainment levels, qualifications."

Inevitably, teaching has become more tailored towards the requirements of passing tests as demanded by the league table culture. Meanwhile, education in the broader sense is suffering.

The testing regime has three damaging consequences. First, it places far too much pressure on the children. Instead of learning being an enjoyable experience tailored to the needs of individuals, pupils and teachers are expected to dance to the tune of the Secretary of State and her national targets. Secondly, it places far too much pressure on the teachers. The testing and targets regime sucks the life out of our education system, leaving too little room for teachers to exercise their professional judgment and creativity. That is in line with my intervention on the hon. Member for Meriden.

It is no surprise that a significant proportion of those who leave the teaching profession cite as their reason the lack of opportunities for exercising their professional judgment and creativity. It is no surprise either that, as a result, we face a teacher recruitment and retention crisis in our schools. In recent years, the maintained system has lost about 10 per cent. of its teachers each year. Over one in five newly qualified teachers leave the profession during their first three years of teaching, and the problem is particularly acute in key subjects such as mathematics and science.

A recent Ofsted report says that

> "there are insufficient teachers to match the demands of the mathematics curriculum in one school in eight".

Because of those shortages, large numbers of children are taught by teachers who have no qualification in the subject that they are teaching. Ofsted found that only 77 per cent. of teachers who teach some mathematics in secondary school have a post-A-level qualification in the subject.

The third damaging consequence is the narrowing of the curriculum, which was taken up by the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff). When so much school time is taken up with preparation for tests and

[Mr. David Rendel]

exams, there is less time in the school day for other non-examination subjects such as current affairs and citizenship, or, sadly, for pastoral care, which is an important loss to our schools. Extra-curricular activities such as sports, school plays, visits to outdoor activity centres and community service, which are all part of the school learning experience, also suffer. My son's school play was cancelled last year—the first year of AS-levels—because the teachers simply did not have the time to put it on.

The problem has been exacerbated by the introduction of AS-levels, which are often taken at the start of the third lower sixth term. As other hon. Members have said, the lower sixth used to be a year of broadening into adult life by taking on new experiences and responsibilities. It is often the year in which a pupil becomes a prefect and perhaps starts to look after younger pupils, but first year sixth formers are now pressed into academic work for the whole time and not given the chance to take on and learn how to handle responsibilities. The lower sixth has become merely a year of cramming for exams.

We want a broadening of the subjects on offer to older secondary and sixth form pupils. That has always been our wish for society, and one of the troubles of the old A-level system was that it was so narrowing at such an early age, but with that broadening must go a simplification of the qualifications framework for the 14 to 19 age group, perhaps along the lines of the European baccalaureate. Our colleagues in the Welsh Assembly persuaded our Labour partners in the Administration to do that, and I hope that the Government take some of those lessons on board.

The Liberal Democrats are committed to scrapping all national targets and replacing them with a statutory requirement for all schools to develop an individual learning plan for each child. Plans should be set by the school while being accountable to parents, the local education authority and Ofsted. Responsibility for children's learning would be put back where it belongs—in schools and the home, not the Department for Education and Skills in London.

Mr. Andrew Turner: I am interested in the hon. Gentleman's comments on the international baccalaureate. Would it be right for the Government to make such a shift?

Mr. Rendel: No, I said not that it would be right for the Government to make such a shift, but that it would be right for schools to be able to take the responsibility to decide which examination system to use. There is much to be said for the European baccalaureate, but it should be for schools to decide whether to use it.

Recent experiences have underlined the need for reform of schools examination boards. Not much has been said about that, but it is important. I do not agree entirely with the hon. Member for Meriden, who seemed to excuse the boards for their failures because of the pressure that they have been put under. Although there is no question but that that is a large part of the problem, they have questions to answer. There has been a series of blunders, particularly with Edexcel, but with others too.

Stephen Carey, the Liberal Democrat leader on Hillingdon council, told me about one such blunder that has only recently hit the national media. Some 13 pupils at Haydon school in Pinner did not receive any results for their vocational A-level in information technology, which they sat in January this year. Edexcel has admitted that the papers were lost, but the first that the pupils knew about that was when they failed to receive results in March.

The solution suggested by Edexcel involves the pupils either accepting an average grade or resitting the exam with their main AS-levels. Needless to say, neither the pupils nor their parents are happy with that, and I imagine that organisations that take on such school leavers would not be happy if they were asked to recruit on the basis of grades that were awarded not following a marked exam, but merely as the average of the other grades achieved by other examinees that year. The quinquennial review of the QCA whitewashes the appalling debacle of examination board failures that have betrayed so many pupils and schools, and the QCA's failure to ensure adequate monitoring has made a mockery of Britain's examination system.

I hope that the Government come round to understanding that testing is not the same as educating. Our education system's objectives must be broader than a focus on whether pupils can pass 68 exams during their school career. Testing has its place, but only as one tool among many in building a broad-based curriculum. We should not narrow our young people's horizons to the walls of the examination hall. We should instead expand their horizons, widen their vision, broaden their minds and open up their opportunities. That is what education really means.

10.34 am

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): First, I welcome the Minister to his new brief. We were expecting a different Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Bury, South (Mr. Lewis), but he seems to have been substituted at the last minute. However, we look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say.

I heartily congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) on introducing a debate on an issue of such pressing concern to the public, especially as this is the first of two for which she is responsible today. She deserves congratulations on her work rate, as well as on her dedication to these important issues. The matter comes before the House when the whole school examination system is highly topical. Given its topicality and importance, it is disappointing that no interest has been shown by Government Members.

My hon. Friend spoke of the damaging effect of having a conveyor belt of testing and examinations, which is caused by the burden that it places on students and the burden of paperwork and bureaucracy that it places on teachers. She also spoke of the dangerous possibility that modern languages will be downgraded in the curriculum, as proposed in the 14 to 19 Green Paper, and added that modular examinations do not necessarily suit last-minute merchants. At that point, a ripple of recognition passed around the Chamber, I suspect because many hon. Members fall into that category.

My hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink), who had to leave to attend a constituency meeting, spoke about the need for a period of stability in education to allow schools, pupils and parents to see the recent changes bed down. He also referred to an innovations holiday in the education system, which will strike a chord with many pupils who feel that they have been part of a guinea pig generation that has experienced all the new examinations and tests in recent years.

My hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) has deep knowledge of the subject. Acknowledging that he would not be popular with his Conservative colleagues for saying so, he correctly pointed out that the process was started by a Conservative Government. That is absolutely true, and over-testing is an unintended consequence of it, but that scale of examination and testing was introduced for good reasons, such as the need to obtain proper information about pupil and school performance. Most people in education recognise that the process has gone too far, although, unfortunately, there seem to be signs that the Government are continuing to increase complexity and to create new burdens.

My hon. Friend mentioned his concern about grade inflation, or at least the perception that there might be grade inflation. He is right to draw attention to the findings of the international panel that considered the rigour and standing of A-level exams, and he said that it is impossible to be scientifically sure about what happened in past years. He also emphasised that we need to focus on maintaining what rigour we have in the A-level system, which must not be debased.

Concern extends to the rigour and independence of SATs, as my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden suggested. More questions are being asked in the press about whether the SATs test are properly implemented and whether there is undue flexibility as to the testing system in some schools. In that context, she is right to ask whether the QCA should be poacher and gamekeeper in the SATs process.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Mr. O'Brien) spoke eloquently, drawing on his long experience as an employer. He and others raised one of the most important concerns about AS-levels: the effect of the examination process and Curriculum 2000 on the lower sixth. My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) referred rather tellingly to moves to broaden the curriculum, which had the unwanted consequence of reducing the amount of sixth form teaching time from five to four terms. He also noted the irony that his daughter has been encouraged to take a drama AS-level as part of an effort to broaden the curriculum, but that such moves have been made at the expense of the school play, which lower sixth pupils would ordinarily organise. The hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) picked up on that, saying with feeling that examinations affect not only children, but their families.

The hon. Member for Newbury also attacked league tables in their current form. I trust that he endorsed last year's Conservative general election manifesto, which called for the introduction of value-added league tables. We are grateful for his support, even if it has come a little later than might have been appropriate.

Mr. Rendel: My understanding is that league tables were introduced a long time ago. Even before that, however, the Liberal Democrats were talking about measuring schools in value-added terms. I can therefore assure the hon. Gentleman that our call for such measures is not new.

Mr. Brady: None the less, we are grateful for the hon. Gentleman's support.

Mr. Rendel: We are grateful for the hon. Gentleman's.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Stephen Twigg): It is a love-in.

Mr. Brady: The Minister need not worry about that.

I wonder why the Minister is replying to the debate, when the hon. Member for Bury, South, who is the Minister for young people and learning, was scheduled to do so. Perhaps it would have been embarrassing for him, given his response in the House a year ago to concerns about the introduction of the AS-level system and the crisis in schools at that time. Showing a wonderful talent for euphemism, he described the crisis in the introduction of Curriculum 2000 as

"some teething problems in the implementation of the new reforms."—[*Official Report*, 5 July 2001; Vol. 371, c. 394.]

That is embarrassing, given that those teething problems appear largely to be with us a year later. I am interested to hear what the Minister has to say about that and whether he takes any more seriously the scale of the problem affecting our schools and pupils.

The introduction of Curriculum 2000 was a shambles and the system is settling down into a state of more constant chaos, with problems not having truly been resolved. That chaos and confusion may be compounded by the Government's 14 to 19 proposals. The AS-level was intended to broaden the curriculum, so the suggestion that the Government want to slash the number of secondary pupils who study modern foreign languages is remarkable.

The Government say that they want to achieve parity of esteem for vocational subjects by offering GCSEs in them, but that brighter pupils should take AS-levels a year early and perhaps not take GCSEs. The Minister is nodding, but I hope that he understands that there is a clear contradiction between those two objectives. He cannot raise the esteem of vocational subjects that are examined at GCSE level while saying that GCSEs may not be appropriate for brighter pupils. He is moving towards enshrining, rather than removing, the difference in esteem between academic and vocational subjects.

That will be made still more damaging if, under the proposals, the brightest, most academically inclined children take AS-level a year early, as they will be the ones to retain the benefit of a sixth form year with a gap in the exam programme. The most academically gifted, who are probably most able to cope with the new pressures that are being piled on to young people, will get some relief from those pressures, whereas the less

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able and academic will still face GCSEs, then AS-level and then A2 in quick succession. That is a serious concern.

Schools and pupils all over the country are still experiencing exam overload, and that is being felt in the examination boards, as my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden pointed out. It is also being felt in schools, where there are insufficient teachers available to mark exams, and such problems are becoming endemic throughout the education system. Curriculum 2000 was introduced too quickly—it was rushed by the Government—and at great expense, but the experience of all too many schools and sixth forms is that the funding that was notionally made available for it was not passed on to them.

We have heard a story of chaos and confusion, doubt over the integrity of exams and measures to broaden the curriculum that narrow pupils' experience. Last year, in response to the shambles of Curriculum 2000, Ministers held a review, but few think that this year shows that they have got it right. The Minister must consider ways to reduce the exam burden on pupils and on schools. He should also consider whether the number of exams in year 12 should be reduced or the timing changed and whether schools would do better by taking AS-levels alongside A2 in year 13.

The introduction of AS-levels has broadened the academic curriculum slightly, but it has done so at the expense of teaching time and of extra-curricular activities such as music and sport. It is clear that a full inquiry is needed into the school examination system to establish how we can restore balance and credibility to a public examinations system that has never faced so much criticism. Our schools, our children, those in universities and the employers who depend on the outcome of the exam system all deserve better.

10.47 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Stephen Twigg): I thank the two Front Benchers for their kind words in welcoming me to my new post. This is my first opportunity to take part in an education debate in the House and, to clear up the confusion, I should say that I am now the Minister for young people and learning, which is why I am making the winding-up speech. I am sorry if that was not made clear.

Last week, a party of 10 and 11-year-olds from my old primary school, Grange Park, which is in my constituency, visited the House. We were talking about school days and one asked me about SATs. I had to say, "Well, when I was at school, we did not have SATs." The little boy's eyes lit up at the idea that we did not have to go through what they were going through. I cannot pretend that, had I polled the 10 and 11-year-olds in year 6 at Grange Park school, there would have been an overwhelming vote of confidence in having to sit SATs.

It is a great pleasure to respond to this important debate, and I join Members of all parties in paying tribute to the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) for securing it. As several Members have said, it is timely, as the school examination period is going full steam ahead.

The hon. Lady focused on the nature of education and what we value in it, and she is right to say that a focus on league tables, testing and examinations is not sufficient. Members in all parts of the House should take a broader view of the value of education. We have all made mistakes—that has been acknowledged in today's speeches—and we all need constantly to review the best policy responses to the many challenges that we face.

Among those challenges is that of providing more young people with the opportunity to stay on in education. I sat my O-levels in 1983, when the majority of my age group left school—only 47.8 per cent. stayed on. Last year, that figure was 71.6 per cent., but we are still near the bottom of the league of industrialised countries for the number of people who have the opportunity to continue in education and training beyond 16. The drop-out rate at 17 and 18 is even higher. I am passionate about education, which is why I am so delighted to have been given this portfolio. Education is important in itself and as a way to facilitate greater mobility in a country in which people's life chances are still, too often, determined by birth. Of course, it is also vital for our future economic success.

We must achieve the right balance between the extent to which we prescribe, set national targets and provide a national framework and that to which we allow innovation at local and school level. We have not always got that right. In the Labour Government's first term, we were centralist in setting targets, particularly in our strategy for the primary sector, although that has delivered literacy and numeracy improvements, which have been acknowledged even by those who were wary of the strategies. However, as we move on, we should address the concerns about the lack of opportunity for innovation at local and school level.

The hon. Member for Meriden said that the new AS system may be challenging for those who leave things until the last minute. As a terrible last-minute merchant, I realised that the old A-level system was great for people like me, who could mug up in the month before the examination and still get good grades. However, it did not provide an entirely fair or accurate assessment of how good I was at my subjects, compared with others who worked much more consistently through the two years of A-level study. The hon. Lady's example demonstrates the challenge that we face in progressing the curriculum for those aged 16 to 18 while covering all those between 14 and 19.

At the end of last month, we completed the consultation on the Green Paper proposals for the 14 to 19 curriculum. We are considering the responses. The consultation was extensive and it included substantial input from teachers, schools, governors and local education authorities. It also included an important innovation—a real input from young people.

We have been listening to young people, such as those whom hon. Members have mentioned today, who have been sitting the AS-levels. We want to get these things right—we shall not rush into changes in the 14 to 19 curriculum. We want maximum debate and maximum consultation, but the contributions to the debate show the challenge that we face. We have been criticised for being prescriptive, but when we suggested that we could loosen the modern foreign languages curriculum, we were criticised for it.

There is no question of our downgrading modern foreign languages. As one who gave up French aged 16 and greatly regrets having done so, I do not want to see such downgrading. The Green Paper says that we want more opportunities for young people to study modern foreign languages in primary school. That would be a welcome development.

Mr. Brady: Will the Minister clarify that? If the modern foreign languages curriculum is loosened, will more or fewer people study foreign languages at secondary school?

Mr. Twigg: Obviously, I cannot answer that question, as it depends on the choices that are made by young people. One could argue that making 14 or 15-year-olds study a foreign language when they do not want to do so might not be in their interests, nor in those of others in their classes. We shall consider the responses that we received, which are mixed. I see some Opposition Members nodding at that.

I move on to the AS-level, which is the major focus of today's debate, although points have been raised about GCSEs and the SATs system. I fear that I may have to disappoint the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Mr. O'Brien), as I do not feel that my first speech as an Education Minister will be one in which I can announce that the AS-level is to be dropped, but we shall consider all the evidence. The debate has provided an important opportunity for hon. Members to express views on behalf of their constituents.

Mr. Luff: And families.

Mr. Twigg: Yes, and families. We have heard distressing tales in the media of young people being overloaded, but concerns are inevitable when we move to a new system. Year 12 students may have needed to attend classes on only three days a week under the old system, and there may have been far more opportunities for other extra-curricular activities. It is understandable that many year 12 students feel hard done by, given the significant change.

Some institutions, however, have told us that augmented programmes have improved retention rates, although we have heard another point of view in the debate. It is too early to identify the result. If the rates have improved, the programmes must have enabled students to be powerfully motivated while broadening their areas of study and giving them opportunities to try subjects that they would not otherwise encounter. We have seen a broadening of the number of subjects that young people study, and 60 per cent. of lower sixth students, who are aged 16 and 17, now study four or even more AS-levels. Under the previous system, two or three was typical.

Mr. Luff: There will be a broadening only if the subjects are different. In my daughter's case, there is no broadening at all, and she is doing four subjects.

Mr. Twigg: I take the point. Clearly there will be different instances in different cases. It is inevitable in such debates that we all think back to our own school days. I recall people who did two A-levels, but these days such people would do three or four. There may be broadening in some cases and not in others, but there is broadening overall.

Several students who are studying have been quoted, and I concur that many say that they are not happy with the new set-up. For example, one student responded to us by asking

> "how can students be expected to partake in extra curricular activities when they have to cover material that overworked teachers do not have sufficient time to teach?"

Another said:

> "I can no longer pursue my out of school interests as fully as I should like to. I play the flute and piano and am a Young leader and ranger within Guiding. In fact, my commitment to both has had to drop considerably".

That bears out what has been said.

Other young people who have responded to our consultation or been in the media have made different comments. Sarah Tresman, the head girl at Guildford high school, sat the new exams last summer, and she told *The Times* in April that spreading the exam stress over two years was much better than leaving everything to the end of the upper sixth:

> "They were hard work but I am reaping the benefits now".

Ee Lin Chiam, who calls herself

> "a very annoyed 17-year-old A2 student in Croydon",

contacted BBC News Online last week to say:

> "I'm completing my A2s in biology"—

and various other subjects—

> "and I am not having any difficulty coping with the papers . . . It's not like I don't have extra-curricular activities either; this year, I was in Young Enterprise, was editor of the college newsletter and am still doing my Duke of Edinburgh award.
>
> My results have not suffered because of those activities".

Perhaps she is an extraordinary young person, but she demonstrates that some young voices are not joining the general criticism of the new exams.

Clearly, we need to consider the issue, but there will be no headlong rush to change the system and we shall review it in the way that we did last year. Many legitimate concerns were raised by schools, pupils and hon. Members following last year's experience, and significant changes were made in response. We shall examine the experience of this year.

There is great danger of doom and gloom. Phrases such as "disastrous exam season" have been used, but we should be careful about using them. Large numbers of young people are getting the opportunity to study and to sit the exams. There is great benefit in the broadening of opportunities that is taking place, although it may not be on the scale that we expected. The more modular approach and greater emphasis on assessment benefit those young people who are not last-minute merchants.

I strongly disagree with the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) on GCSEs. The positives of the GCSE greatly outweigh the negatives, and that will feed through to the new curriculum.

I see that time is drawing to a close, and I want to finish with what I hope is a unifying point. We are in the middle of the exam season and I think that Members on

[Mr. Twigg]

both sides of the House—the Chamber is rapidly filling up—will want to wish those young people who are sitting exams all the best. We hope that their results are again good, but we shall take the opportunity to review the system to achieve the best high-quality qualifications and curriculum arrangements for our young people.

Fair Trade

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Frank Cook): Order. Right hon. and hon. Members will see that the debate is extraordinarily well attended, but it is limited to 90 minutes. I therefore appeal to all hon. Members to bear that in mind when making their contributions, and ask them to limit their interventions. I shall try to call as many hon. Members as possible.

11 am

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge and Chryston): I warmly welcome today's debate on trade justice. I am delighted at the response, which is an indication that the subject will dominate today's parliamentary agenda—and that is no bad thing. About 10,000 people are on their way to the Palace of Westminster; they expect to lobby the House, and it will be the biggest lobby on international development since the Brandt report more than 20 years ago. Those people, who have travelled from every part of the United Kingdom to ensure that their Members of Parliament are made aware of their views, will welcome the debate that we are about to undertake.

Not everyone can be in London today, and several hundreds of my constituents have written to me to express their full support for the objective of trade justice. I shall quote from one of those letters:

> "Dear Mr. Clarke ... The mass lobby is calling for fairer international trade rules. Current trade rules are limiting poor people's access to food, water and jobs. I am asking that the new rules be designed to reduce poverty and protect the environment. Please support this important issue. Yours sincerely, Mary and Joe Cosgrove."

Hon. Members will have seen from the Order Paper that after only two days, 32 of our colleagues have signed early-day motion 1457 on trade justice. I am pretty sure that by the end of the day that number will have increased substantially. I certainly urge that. We underestimate those deeply held feelings at our peril. I, for one, take those representations seriously, and I am sure that right hon. and hon. Members share my view. Indeed, just before I entered the Chamber I met some constituents who told me that Government action on fair trade does influence whether people vote at elections.

It is with modest relish that I place on record my gratitude for the Government's achievements in international development. In particular, I warmly congratulate my right hon. Friends the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of State for International Development, both of whom have been at the forefront of Government initiatives to help developing countries; we all acknowledge the outstanding role of the Department for International Development in dealing with the debt problem.

In that spirit, it is appropriate to welcome to the Department the new Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble). I am sure that she will forge ahead with the high standards set by her Department and this Government.

Today's events, including this debate, the lobby and the debate in the Chamber this afternoon, were inspired by the success of Jubilee 2000, as was the Trade Justice Movement, which is growing fast and already includes

50 organisations that have a combined support of 4 million people. Trade Justice includes aid agencies, such as the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development, Christian Aid, Action Aid, the World Development Movement, Oxfam, the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund, the Women's Environmental Network and others, including students and consumers.

Those groups campaign on behalf of the developing world and their analyses of the problems should be taken more seriously, because they have first hand and day-by-day experience of them. Each of the non-governmental organisations has its own views, but today they are all united in agreeing that trade plays a vital part in reducing poverty and improving the quality of millions of lives.

Everyone in this field agrees that there are opportunities for fundamental change. A new set of international trade negotiations was launched in Doha in November 2001. Although that provided an opportunity to change the rules, it also posed the threat of the existing rules being extended to cover new areas of economic activity.

The lobby and the events in the House today could not be more timely because, this summer, trade rules will be high on the agenda for three international summits: the European Union heads of state summit in Spain on Friday and Saturday, the G8 summit in Canada on 26 and 27 June and the world summit on sustainable development, to be held in South Africa from 26 August to 4 September. South Africa is an appropriate location for that summit.

Fair trade is about the fight against poverty and sustaining the environment. There are many issues on which we can focus our attention. First, there should be a new approach to protect poor farmers' livelihoods and the environment. Secondly, vital concern has been expressed about the plans to liberalise essential services, including water. I have great reservations about those plans, and I do not believe that I am alone in that view. Thirdly, international corporations have had every opportunity to introduce meaningful self-regulation. As they have failed to do so, we should consider new global action to regulate activities.

Brian Cotter (Weston-super-Mare): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that, as part of the discussions on the common agricultural policy reforms, a timetable needs to be agreed by the EU leaders when they consider phasing out subsidies of agricultural products?

Mr. Clarke: Yes, I agree entirely. I hope to touch on that point later.

This is not an anti-trade debate, but one that asserts that our trading affairs can be organised so that the benefits go to the many and not the few, that social justice and enlightened self-interest could go hand in hand and that it is not beyond the wit of modern society to protect and even improve the environment that we inherited. As CAFOD said:

> "Trade touches all our lives. It determines what we eat, earn and wear. It is the most direct link between the British people and the world's poor. For that reason trade has a huge potential for good or ill. The campaign for trade justice is the new Jubilee 2000."

It continued:

> "Without trade that works for the poor, without an end to the grotesque subsidies and trade barriers that protect producers in the richest countries of the world, all that we have worked for in Jubilee 2000 will be put at risk. Developing countries are not asking for a handout. They want and deserve justice."

I agree entirely.

One of the most debilitating factors in the developing world is commodity prices. What are the problems of sub-Saharan Africa? Africa has 12 per cent. of the world's population, but only 1 per cent. of its exports—a quarter of the share that it enjoyed in the 1970s. In the 1990s, world trade in primary commodities was growing at less than a third of the rate for manufacturing goods. Worse still, the gap is widening.

The decline in the value of many commodities has caused large increases in poverty in many developing countries whose economies may depend on just a few commodities for the majority of their export earnings. For example, Ethiopia depends on coffee for nearly 60 per cent. of its export earnings and Burkina Faso depends on cotton for about half. The problem with declining commodity prices is that production can trap countries into a cycle of dwindling returns, further increasing the debt burden. Real prices of commodities have been on a steady downward trend for decades. Among the reasons for the decline are new technologies, barriers to entry and consumers' relative reluctance to buy more as prices fall. Cyclical periods of over-supply often result.

Over the past few years, the steady decline has turned into an absolute rout for several commodities whose prices have plunged. Coffee prices collapsed by 45 per cent. from 1999 to 2001—a mere couple of years—and are now well below the costs of production for an overwhelming majority of producers. Price falls at these levels have serious consequences. The livelihood of millions of farmers is compromised, children are pulled out of school and families can no longer afford basic medicines or enough food. Oxfam research in 2000 showed that the falling price of coffee in Kenya forced parents to take their children out of school because they could no longer afford the fees. The price fall meant parents' income more than halved in the space of two years.

It is not surprising that in South Africa—the subject of some criticism—European exports of chocolate confectionery at below production prices led to a 21 per cent. decline in the consumption of domestically produced sugar and chocolate confectionery. Meanwhile, rich country producers support market-distorting subsidies that exacerbate the problem of over-supply. The EU is the world's largest exporter of white sugar, but export prices are only a quarter of their production costs. Britain grinds more cocoa than Ghana, yet Ghana relies on cocoa exports for almost a quarter of its total export earnings.

For many years, adding value to a product that has attracted swingeing tariffs at the point of import into rich countries simply acts as a disincentive to developing countries. For example, fully processed food products are still subject in the EU and Japan to tariffs twice as high as food products in the first stage of processing. That is why people here today are calling for change. Today's events are a democratic challenge to this Parliament, the EU, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organisation.

[Mr. Clarke]

Above all, today's events are a challenge to the conscience of the international community. It cannot be right that over half the world's extremely poor people depend on farming for their livelihoods, but that our trading arrangements should be so blatantly distorted. Nor can it be right that developing countries are being prevented from protecting their poor producers against unfairly subsidised food from rich countries with whom they can never hope to compete. How can we justify the fact that international trade rules are limiting the ability of poor countries to protect their farmers from unfairly subsidised cheap imports?

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): Does the right hon. Gentleman share the many concerns expressed about the Commonwealth Development Corporation and its changes of policy since the establishment of the public-private partnership?

Mr. Clarke: I would love to go into the issues of the Commonwealth Development Corporation, but that might reduce the time that others have to speak. There may be other opportunities to consider them later, if not today.

During the 1980s and 1990s, the World Bank and the IMF imposed reforms that required many developing countries drastically to cut duties on imported food. Poor farmers lost their markets even at home. The same farmers who try to export their crops face prohibitive trade barriers imposed by the world's richest countries. That cannot be right. Developing countries are also denied the flexibility to support their farmers, as foreign programmes imposed by the World Bank and the IMF cut their subsidies. The World Trade Organisation now also cuts them.

Mr. Stephen McCabe (Birmingham, Hall Green): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on securing the debate. He referred twice to the WTO, which many people regard as a problem in this area, rather than as part of the solution. I do not share that view, but does he agree that the richer countries could ensure that the workings of the WTO are much more open and transparent, which would remove much of the suspicion that surrounds it? Does he also agree that the richer countries could ensure that the poorer countries have proper access through legal representation and a proper secretariat?

Mr. Clarke: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend, and support his calls for such transparency from the WTO and others. The way in which developing countries have been treated is very much in contrast to the reductions in subsidies that rich countries should have made for their farmers under WTO rules. Because of the lack of transparency to which he refers, it is perhaps not widely known that those WTO decisions have been ignored. That is another entirely unacceptable situation.

My hon. Friend's intervention is timely. His views are confirmed this morning in press reports of a United Nations report that makes similar observations. Worse, it says that, if we continue as we are, 100 million more people will be having to survive on $1 dollar a day by 2015. That has a lot to do with my hon. Friend's point about the lack of transparency in debates on these matters, and the responsibilities of international bodies to respond to the problems.

When Harold Macmillan said that a "wind of change" was blowing throughout Africa, some said that he was ahead of his time. I think not. Forty years on, what is the vision for trade justice in developing countries? I hope that I speak for the thousands of people on today's lobby, those who cannot be here and the aid agencies when I call for people to have the vision to see that it is wholly repugnant that millions of smallholder farmers in the developing world struggle to survive on less than £260 a year in total income while, in contrast, American and European farmers receive on average £15,000 and £11,500 a year respectively in subsidies alone.

We need the vision to see that, whereas international trade rules are essential, they must allow sustainable trading, fairness and intervention where necessary, and to see that such rules can be based on the needs of poor people and environmental sustainability. We need the vision to see that employment need not be based on the exploitation of women or child labour, and to put in place a framework that promotes internationally the acceptance of national development objectives, such as food security, poverty reduction and higher environmental standards. Above all, we need the vision to acknowledge that, in the modern world, a level playing field is no guarantee of a fair game when players are not equally equipped to compete.

The last word should go to the campaign document from the Trade Justice Movement, which says:

> "Trade should be the means by which poor people can lift themselves out of poverty—not the prison that steals their future."

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I re-emphasise the comments I made at the beginning of the debate. Perhaps I omitted to say then that the winding-up speeches from the three Front-Bench spokesmen will commence 30 minutes before the debate's conclusion. We now have 38 minutes until that time, and 11 hon. Members are seeking to catch my eye. That will make my job difficult, and the jobs of some others impossible.

11.23 am

Mr. Francis Maude (Horsham): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke) on securing the debate, which is timely. He rightly introduced the debate in a temperate and measured way, and I suspect that as it continues we shall find that there is broad agreement on this subject across the House, which is desirable. This is a hugely important matter, and it is good that the House, in two debates today—one in this Chamber and one on the Floor of the House—is taking it seriously and devoting time to it.

In deference to your strictures, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall make only a few points. First, there has been widespread suspicion for the best part of a century that when people use the phrase "fair trade", they mean restricted trade. In the past, that phrase has been code for protection, but the movement that we have heard from today has not referred to it in that way. I exonerate it from that criticism. It is important that the Trade Justice Movement does not seem to be, and is not, a cover for protectionism.

I am a passionate believer in free trade. The enlargement of trade enriches everybody but the reality is that free trade is never unregulated or completely free, in the same way that a free market economy is never completely free, nor should it be. Free trade and free markets depend absolutely on a framework of law and rules. To anyone who doubts that, I highly recommend the lecture, which I was privileged to attend last night, given by Hernando de Soto, who made the most powerful case that the biggest friend to poor countries is the establishment of a rule of law, specifically property law. Once there is a system of property law and entitlement to property in the poorest countries, there is the ability for assets to be turned into capital to enable wealth to be created. That is fundamental and without it there will not be sufficient quantity of the right kind of development. The enlargement of good, free trade depends on rules that command respect and consensus, but they must have a fair framework.

It is incumbent on the developed world and rich countries to set an example. With the best will in the world, that is not happening at the moment. I am a strong supporter of the Bush Administration in the United States, but recent developments in trade have caused widespread concern and dismay. The United States should be a role model for the benefits of free trade, and the response to isolated domestic pressure—for example, the steel tariffs and the recent farm Bill—is profoundly disturbing. It has damaged US leadership in the trade negotiations, which is crucial. It is not particularly helpful that the European Union has reacted like an outraged maiden aunt, as if the idea of protectionism had never occurred to anyone in the EU. The European Union's record on the promotion of free trade has not been perfect, by a long way.

My main point is that the developed world, rich countries and the collections of rich countries such as the European Union must set an example and not wait for negotiations to open their markets. We should not be waiting for the pressure of world trade negotiations to make grudging concessions but looking for opportunities unilaterally to open markets and to be confident about it. We must understand that the point about open markets and free trade is that they benefit everybody, even if it is done unilaterally. Hong Kong, for example, was founded on the principle of being a free port and having the most open possible approach to trade. Hong Kong did not wait until there were multilateral negotiations, play its cards close to its chest and refuse to give anything up until there were reciprocal arrangements with others. It simply said, "This is what is going to be the key point about Hong Kong," with the result that it has become one of the most prosperous places in the world. The rich, developed world should have the confidence to believe that that is what free trade does. We should not think of it as giving up things in advance, but as a benefit to ourselves and others, because open economies prosper.

The European Union, like the United States, must get a grip on the matter and start to set a better example. There is a huge danger that US action on steel and the farm Bill will provoke retaliation from the EU and counter-retaliation by the United States, which has horrible echoes of the 1930s, when a series of beggar-thy-neighbour action and reaction turned a downturn into a sustained global depression. We must be careful about that, and we hope that the Government and others can persuade President Bush and his Administration to change their ways, but we should not just wait for that. The European Union should change the way that it approaches the issue.

It is impossible to tackle the problem without addressing the common agricultural policy, because it is the most flagrant, offensive and damaging example of protectionism anywhere in the world. If the EU remains resolutely opposed to making not only tinkering reforms, but radical changes and devising a wholly different conception of today's needs, the EU's ability to lead globally in such matters will continue to be seriously impaired. There is a price to be paid, not just by the developing world that suffers through the CAP's distortions, but by us. We all suffer and live in a poorer country because of the CAP's deprivations. The European Union is poorer than it needs to be because of the CAP.

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk): I agree with the right hon. Gentleman's comments about the need for reform of the common agricultural policy, but does not the need for unanimity in changing that policy make reform impossible? As long as that remains, the policy will not change.

Mr. Maude: The hon. Gentleman has made a very tempting point, but if we go down that path, we will take up the rest of the debate and I do not think that we should do that.

My central point remains that rich countries must set an example and start acting unilaterally. There undoubtedly exists a sense of rich countries neurotically hanging on to their cherished protections, and it fuels the idea in developing countries that the World Trade Organisation's multilateral trade negotiations are basically a rich man's racket. They are not and must not be, and we must be careful not to allow them to be seen as such.

To counter that sense, developed countries must start to take the initiative to open markets, eradicate subsidies and remove protections. We must not wait for the pressure of negotiations. The central truth is that the enlargement of trade and open interchange of goods, services, information and people—which form the curious but not new phenomenon called globalisation—will benefit everyone. It will benefit the environment. The director of the WTO powerfully made the case that poverty is the enemy of the environment. Rich cities are cleaner than poor cities, and economic growth is the friend, not the enemy, of the environment.

The Trade Justice Movement lobby made a point about the regulation of multinationals. We sometimes have the illusion that multinationals roam the world, completely unfettered, to lay waste and loot along the way. That is not true. Multinational companies do not exist in the ether above national jurisdictions. Every time a multinational company wants to do something, it does so within a national jurisdiction. The fact is that a multinational works in many different national jurisdictions, operating subject to laws and regulations.

[Mr. Maude]

The idea that we should have a supranational structure of law to regulate multinationals is simply absurd. National Governments all set a framework of rules to balance their interests as they see fit and encourage multinationals to do business there.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Maude: If hon. Members will forgive me, I am almost at the end.

Individual Governments will judge the balance between being liberal enough to encourage multinationals to invest and do business there, which they rightly think enriches them, and having proper protections according to the standards and demands of their people. That applies much more strongly in a democracy, where Governments are subject to popular pressure, and less strongly where democracy is less powerful. Alongside that I make the point that multinational companies need to understand their responsibilities. We are in the fortunate position today in the developed world that there is an establishment consensus in favour of free trade, enterprise and capitalism; but it is a fragile consensus. It depends on multinational companies understanding their responsibilities to the environment and to future generations. They must reinforce that consensus and do nothing to undermine it.

I support most of what the right hon. Member for Coatbridge and Chryston said in opening the debate. There will be a wide degree of agreement, but I urge the Government to use their undoubted influence within the European Union to continue to make the case for theEU to start to open markets unilaterally, rather than waiting for the pressure of negotiations to do it.

11.15 am

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): I am grateful for the chance to speak, especially as I indicated that I have to leave the debate in about 10 minutes to attend some other House business. I apologise to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and to other hon. Members. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke) on obtaining the debate and on his opening speech. I should also like to congratulate the Under-Secretary of State for International Development, my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble), on her appointment to one of the best jobs in Government.

I shall be extremely brief. First, Garstang in my constituency is the world's first fair trade town. Since it took that successful initiative it has twinned with New Koforida, a town in the cocoa-producing area of Ghana. Many other towns and cities have followed its example and I hope that Lancaster will do so soon. It is part of the inspirational example that our constituents set us, such as with the campaigns over debt and the campaign today for trade justice.

The right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) made a powerful case for the merits of international trade. Whatever one's perspective on that, no country has ever developed successfully by turning its back on the benefits of international trade. However, if we are to address the 2015 international development targets of, for instance, halving international poverty, we must make trade work really well for the people of the poorest countries of the world, particularly Africa. We must strengthen the good intentions and progress that the Government have made to ensure that intentions are translated into international actions to address these issues.

The progress that was made at Doha was vital. I support all the concerns of the Trade Justice Movement campaign. I would like to see a development box within the WTO agreement on agriculture. I would like to see the Government supporting a ban on patents on plant genetic resources to protect farmers in developing countries. I would like to see an independent impact assessment of the general agreement on trade in services. I would especially like to see some legally binding regulation of international companies to ensure that they comply with internationally agreed standards on corporate responsibility.

I have an example of that. Other hon. Members will have witnessed, as I have, the grotesque poverty and despair of the people of Angola. It is a potentially wealthy country with enormous resources in oil and diamonds. It has a population of 12 million and is the size of western Europe. It is officially listed as the worst place in the world for children to grow up: a third of Angolan children die before the age of five. With the honourable exception of BP, international oil companies will not publish what they pay to the Angolan Government for that vital resource. We know from a recent global witness report that the year before last no less that $1 billion unaccountably disappeared from Angola. It was salted away and not used to the benefit of the people of Angola.

Ann McKechin (Glasgow, Maryhill): My hon. Friend has raised a crucial point, which was also made, in part, by the right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude). It concerns the way in which the poorest countries in the world regulate foreign trade and investment in their countries. Many of those countries have no competition laws, some have introduced them only recently, and few have the capacity and the resources to sufficiently enforce them against huge multinationals. Does he agree that it is implicit that future WTO negotiations should incorporate agreements about multinationals and how they conduct their business?

Mr. Dawson: I agree absolutely with my hon. Friend. I hope that at the G8 and in other forums in which the Government are to have a strong presence in coming weeks, that point and the one about the transparency of the involvement of multinationals—from whatever country—will be powerfully made.

11.41 am

Sue Doughty (Guildford): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke) on having secured this important debate. I am pleased to have an opportunity to speak, because a large number of my constituents will be coming here, and because so many people in the country—not only in the run up to today's mass lobby, but over the years—have taken the trouble to keep Members of Parliament informed. For example, St. Peter's school in my constituency regularly books time in my surgery to ensure that I am on message on the issue and organises peer group events at the school in order to spread the word. Poverty and inequality on the scale that we see today are unacceptable. Even more unacceptable is the fact that many of the trade problems could be solved: people and countries could be moved out of debt if the major Western economies were to take bold steps to end not only debt but the scandalous use of trade tariffs, about which we have heard so much today. We have to test every policy to ensure that, rather than continuing the flow of resources from developing to developed countries—a rather shameful legacy from colonial days—we start to reverse it. Instead of the top countries gaining the most, they should be lending assistance to the poorest countries. The present situation cannot be right.

Consider these things: it takes one month for a woman working in the textile industry to earn enough money to buy one of the shirts that she produces to be sold at Marks & Spencer. Of the 50 shirts that she produces, she can keep one. Five billion people live on incomes of less than $1 a day, while trade barriers cost the poorest countries $480 billion annually—that is 14 times what they receive in overseas development assistance. The major argument, especially in troubled times, concerns not only social justice, to which everybody in the Chamber subscribes, but also the need to recognise, in everything that we do, that trade does not cross borders, but armies will. That was a 19th century saying, but it has never been truer than it is today.

The NGOs have done a wonderful job, not only in drawing our attention to injustices but in doing their best in the field to set some of them right. We must go a lot further. Quakers have been working in central America. They run long-term rather than short-term projects in some of the neediest parts of the world. They have studied the agricultural sector, which is shrinking all the time. People working in what would be the natural agricultural economy are being driven into urban areas. They are facing a wall of tariffs from the United States and the European Union, which makes it difficult for small farmers to compete and make a living from agriculture.

The G7 Governments need to reduce tariffs and then eliminate them in the EU and the USA so that farmers in countries such as Honduras and Nicaragua have the chance to sell in the real world at competitive prices. In central America, too great a reliance is placed on a small number of vulnerable commodities. Problems with production or difficulties with market access result in poverty on a grand scale. We must therefore look at opening up new markets for those countries, in order to remove those risks.

We recently saw the Greenpeace demonstration on sustainable timber at the Cabinet Office. Another piece of good news in the run up to the world summit in Johannesburg is the fact that environmental bodies and aid organisations are working on a much more common agenda. We no longer need to think of rain forests as interesting museums with many plant species and biodiversity—full stop. We should be talking about them as places where people live—that is so much better.

Last week, the Environmental Audit Committee heard that DEFRA officials have still not got their act together on sustainability. The question that will keep arising is how much longer it will take the Government to put in place rules of the sort that firms such as B & Q were following 10 years ago. We should not need Greenpeace to audit our sustainability; the Government should have good policies and good practice in place. We want to do something, but we lack joined-up government.

I will be as brief as I can, but I have considerable concerns about the arms trade. In 2000, the Chancellor announced the end of export credit guarantees for arms sales to 63 of the poorest countries, yet the Government are still sending bodies to a defence exhibition in 2002 entitled, "Africa, Aerospace and Defence". We know that arms are still being sold to the poorest countries in Africa. Trade Partners UK will be at the exhibition, as will the Defence Manufacturers Association, which will be sponsoring the United Kingdom's arms companies.

When considering the problems of fair trade, we must look at the wider issues—about how the Government are backing today's aspirations, whether Government Departments are working cohesively, and whether we have joined-up government delivering on those aspirations.

11.48 am

Andy Burnham (Leigh): I will be extremely brief. Lots of figures are cited in such debates, but one figure says it all. Yesterday's edition of *The Guardian* published a letter from Professor Keith Popple of Southampton institute, who said that the combined wealth of the world's three richest men is more than the combined wealth of the world's 48 poorest nations. That chilling fact alone is graphic evidence that free trade has failed to produce a more equal world, and that changes to world trade rules are needed if we want to see the world's wealth spread more fairly. We need to be clear that trade alone will never solve those differences, but will exacerbate them. It is natural for a market to punish the weak, not to help them.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke) said, 10,000 people are en route to Westminster to lobby us on those issues. We see many lobbies at Westminster, but today's is different. People are taking the trouble to come here today not out of self-interest but because they want a fairer world, and for that reason alone it behoves us to listen carefully to their arguments. One such person was my constituent John Humphrey. He came to see me a few months ago to say that he was organising a lobby of Parliament. John was passionately committed to overseas development, and worked for much of his life giving practical assistance to developing countries and raising awareness of those important issues. He was the founder of the CAFOD group at St Catherine's Church in Lowton in my constituency. Sadly, John died a few weeks ago and will not be at the lobby today, but the fact that so many people are making the trip from my constituency will serve as a lasting tribute to him and his tireless work.

I hope that Ministers will give careful consideration to the calls that are being made. People are right to challenge policy in this area and to ask constantly for

[Andy Burnham]

Governments to do more. The Doha declaration makes progress in calling for special and differential treatment for developing countries. We need tangible evidence of what that means and special exemptions for the agricultural industries of developing countries so that they can begin to make progress and compete only when they feel able to do so.

We are discussing issues today that affect the future of mankind and the world, but I am not sure how many column inches we or the lobby of Parliament will get in tomorrow's newspapers. When that is set against the frenzy of coverage about who in No.10 said what to whom in Black Rod's Office, it shows that, sometimes, the cut and thrust of domestic politics gives a false impression of what is really important. Perhaps the most useful purpose of today's debate and lobby will be to help to put things into a proper perspective.

11.50 am

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): I, too, will keep my remarks brief. This is an extremely important occasion. As hon. Members have said, we ignore our constituencies at our peril and there is no doubt about the strength of feeling about this issue in our constituencies. I have received petitions from St Giles' and St George's churches in Ashtead, from Ruxley Lane church, St Mary's in Cuddington, St John's in Stoneleigh and from constituents across my area. They are all adamant that they want the issue to be addressed properly at an international level.

I shall pick two points from the petitions on which politicians from all sides can agree. First, poverty eradication must be a key objective for all of us. Secondly, trade can be a powerful driver for improvement around the world, but trade rules have to be enforced to ensure that rich as well as poor countries abide by them.

With that as a background, I should like to make four brief points. First, following on from the comments of my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude), it is simply not acceptable for Europe and north America to pursue protectionist policies in key areas, particularly in agriculture, and then to expect other countries to adopt free trade practices without considering the implications for themselves. We have to set the example. The common agricultural policy is not sustainable in its current form. US policy to protect north American farmers is not sustainable in its current form. That practice will have to change. Free trade must mean free trade.

Ms Julia Drown (South Swindon): The hon. Gentleman says that free trade must mean free trade. However, does he appreciate the experience of the east Asian countries, which reduced poverty massively over a generation but did so partly through protectionism and closed markets? Would he support that sort of arrangement if it would relieve poverty in the poorest parts of the world?

Chris Grayling: I thank the hon. Lady for those comments. It is important to recognise that in some cases, WTO rules make illegal local practices, legislation and support for economies in the developing world. To that extent I have some differences with those who advocate big international policies. National Governments know what is best for their own people. We risk centralising international trade issues to too great a degree.

My second point is about the Commonwealth Development Corporation, reflecting concerns raised with me by constituents who believe that the corporation no longer plays the role that it once did. I know that my hon. Friends on the Conservative Front Bench have made this point to the Government on several occasions. It is not right and proper for a development organisation in the third world to be seeking a specific return as a prime objective. Its job is to alleviate poverty and to encourage development in those countries, and that goal should not be lost.

Thirdly, we need to think small as well as big. If one lesson has been learned from generations of aid and encouragement to developing countries, it is that big projects that involve mass lending to Governments are not those that make the biggest difference. Policy should be as strongly focused on small projects, small-scale support and the encouragement of individual businesses, developments and producers as it is on big international issues.

My final point is about action. One of the most consistent messages that I have been receiving is that of dissatisfaction with high-sounding words about international trade and aspirations to engender free trade and remove barriers. There have been lots of summits and expensive meetings around the world, but there has there has been precious little action. If the Government take away one message from this debate, it must be that talking is not enough and that action is needed. I hope that our Government and other Governments around the world will ensure that action is taken to sort out a proper future for international trade in the developing world.

11.55 am

Ann McKechin (Glasgow, Maryhill): I will try to be brief. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke) on securing this debate. I also congratulate the members of this afternoon's mass lobby, which I hope will persuade the Government of the need to ensure that the forthcoming WTO negotiations are debated in Parliament so that the voice of civil society is properly heard.

The world's poor countries believed that the implementation of the agreements that they signed at the Uruguay round of talks—the precursor to the WTO—would bring them the benefits of increased access to the markets of the north, but, to date, those benefits have failed to materialise. The failure to tackle the needs of the south and, by implication, of the world's poorest citizens has led to a growing suspicion that the forthcoming negotiations will further fudge the issue of reforming the tariffs imposed by the north, particularly US agricultural subsidies and the EU's common agricultural policy. The effect of such policies has been exacerbated by the continued problem of the subsidised dumping of products on the markets of the south.

There is also a fear that the north, encouraged by the powerful and influential multinational corporation lobby, will use all its muscle to push the south into binding agreements to liberalise many of its markets, including services, with little or no opportunity adequately to regulate foreign investment in a way that would benefit its citizens.

Given the history of manipulation, developing countries are understandably losing faith in the apparent good intentions of their wealthier WTO colleagues. The WTO's credibility in terms of achieving a fair balance between the south and the north is at stake. We must approach the talks in a spirit of openness and transparency, and with a strong and permanent commitment to new measures that will eradicate poverty.

Let us not forget that the WTO is a negotiating forum for legally binding commitments, and all members, not just the privileged few, must be able to participate effectively if they are to take advantage of it. By putting services on the negotiating table, however, the new Doha round has considerably increased the work load on all delegations. The WTO must immediately give the greatest priority to ensuring that appropriate resources are provided for the full and effective participation of developing countries. The funds that our Government provide for capacity building are welcome, but they should be made available as a matter of right, not of charity.

Urgent progress must be made on eliminating tariffs and escalators, and on substantially reducing subsidies in the north. However, the new negotiations must not take a one-size-fits-all approach. Speaking to the all-party group on overseas development, the Chancellor rightly said that a managed, staged approach was required to open up trade in the south. It is not simply a question of increasing foreign direct investment to less-developed countries, but, crucially, of putting in place national and transnational regulatory systems to encourage investment and provide sustainable and widely distributed benefits.

If we are truly committed to a negotiation round based on development and on poverty eradication, we must accept proper scrutiny of our proposals, and put in place adequate mechanisms to assess their impact. Such independent impact assessment has been promised, but the WTO is still to deliver it.

It is not enough to indulge in rhetoric about the benefits of trade liberalisation; we must demonstrate its benefits. If our agreements are shown not to provide real progress towards development, we in the north must show flexibility and the courage to act in the interests of those who need our help most. Millions of people still live in absolute poverty.

11.59 am

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke) on securing this debate and, in particular, on bringing a moral dimension to it. I also welcome the Minister to her role. I hope that in six or 12 months' time, when she is in the midst of all the technical detail and jargon, she will remember that this is a fundamentally moral issue. It cannot be right for the rich west to subsidise food, sell it below local market prices and undermine local producers.

Free trade has a role, but there must be two fundamental limitations on it. First, we must protect those who face unfair competition, such as small local farmers. I hope that the Minister will tell us the Government's thinking on the idea of a development box for agriculture in the current negotiations.

The second limitation on free trade is purely that many of the trading nations are not democracies. Therefore, although the benefits of trade may go to the nation, it finds itself in a small number of pockets. As part of the free trade agenda, I hope that the Government will pursue democracy in many such nations. Without it, free trade does not benefit the poor people about whom we are most concerned.

12 noon

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke) on securing the debate. It is important that the issues be discussed, especially when Parliament is being lobbied. I also want to pay tribute to the work of the charities and non-governmental organisations. They have done much to raise the profile of the issue, which is one of great urgency.

I want to refer to Oxfam's analysis of trade rules, especially in the report "Rigged Rules and Double Standards". In that report, Oxfam produces a double-standards index to test the performance of the developed world against the rhetoric that it often uses to talk about free trade. That test clearly shows that the European Union and America are the worst offenders when it comes to the gap between the rhetoric and reality of policies.

The case for freeing trade and for making fairer trade rules for the developing world within a clear legal framework is strong, as the right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) rightly said. Ultimately, fair trade can be much more effective than aid alone, but there should not be only one or the other; the two should work in tandem. Aid especially should be directed at improving the competence of developing countries to trade effectively and fairly with the developed world.

Hand-in-hand with that, improvements in governance are needed in much of the developing world. My hon. Friend the Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) pointed that out, and I endorse his point. In our recent Oxfam-funded visit to India, we saw how important such improvements are. Corruption needs to be cut out, and the market within India needs to be freed up. The country has no single market, but 35 states with massive tariff barriers between them.

I especially want to pursue the importance of consistency between Government policy on trade in all its forms and the provision of development assistance to the developing world by the Department for International Development. The Department has a new test. Under the International Development Act 2002, development assistance must be designed to alleviate poverty and pursue the concept of sustainable development. However, it is no good the rich west salving its conscience by paying out aid if, at the same time, such work is undermined by our policies on trade and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Sue Doughty) said, on arms sales to the developing world.

In stressing that point, I want to refer to the sale of the air traffic control system to Tanzania. That was a clear example of an unfair, unjust, unacceptable and almost certainly corrupt trade with one of the world's poorest

[Norman Lamb]

countries. I shall give some of the facts of the case. In 1997, the Ministry of Defence gave preliminary clearance under its F680 procedure to the export by BAE Systems of an air traffic control system to Tanzania. It was a military system; the Government knew that in 1997. They knew that because the application was made to the Ministry of Defence for the export of a military system.

On the basis of that preliminary clearance, BAE Systems entered a binding contract with the benefit of a soft loan from Barclays bank—it had to be given on concessional terms in order to meet IMF rules. The equipment was built and $15 million was paid to BAE Systems before the export licence was considered. Essentially, the MOD's preliminary clearance presented the Department of Trade and Industry with a fait accompli when it came to consider the application for an export licence. In considering export licence applications, it is supposed to apply what are called consolidated criteria. Those criteria take into account the need to look at the country's development needs. Those were totally ignored in that case.

Dr. Nick Palmer (Broxtowe): How does the hon. Gentleman address the fact that we might have a qualified view of an arms deal or some other deal and that the Government in the developing country might have a different view? We give Governments the right to defend themselves. In what circumstances does he believe that we have the right to override the judgment of a developing country about its self-defence needs?

Norman Lamb: My point is that our Government's policy must be consistent. It is no use giving development assistance money to one of the poorest countries in the world if, at the same time, we give an export licence for a system that is of no use to that country. I shall expand on that in a moment.

The result of the contract is that one of the world's poorest countries has increased its debt, just after receiving debt relief from this country and others, to the tune of £28 million. It has purchased a system that, as we now know from the International Civil Aviation Organisation, is totally inappropriate to its needs. Tanzania does not have an air force, yet it has bought a scandalously expensive military air traffic control system. I am told that a civilian system would have cost about $5 million. Why was that deal completed? It does not make any sense for Tanzania and I understand that the President of Tanzania has now written to the Prime Minister making that point and asking for the Government's help in extricating itself from the deal. Why did Barclays subsidise the deal? Its involvement does not make sense and should be investigated. Why would a commercial organisation subsidise an inappropriate arms deal to a very poor country? The loan had to be on concessional terms to get past IMF rules, because the country had been in receipt of debt relief. I have been told that bungs were paid to facilitate the deal. There should be a full investigation into that scandal.

This country wastes masses of public money.

Mr. Maude: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Norman Lamb: I have little time, so I shall not.

We spend millions of pounds in development assistance and in debt relief for one of the poorest countries in the world, yet Tanzania has been left with a massive debt and the only one to profit from the deal is a British arms company. We are talking about fairer trade. The MOD cannot be allowed in future to effectively bind the DTI without the knowledge of DFID. DFID did not even know that the application had been made in 1997—contrary to the principles of sustainable development—to foist a military system on one of the world's poorest countries.

We are all calling today for fairer rules for international trade, in particular for the developing world. I am also calling for consistent Government policy so that one Government Department cannot totally undermine the work of another.

12.9 pm

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke) on having secured the debate, and I welcome the Minister to her new responsibilities. The right hon. Gentleman is aware that, in addition to this debate, Conservative Members have chosen to allocate one of our Opposition days for a debate on this very important subject, especially to mark the fact that such a significant lobby of Parliament is taking place today. Such a debate seemed appropriate to my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman), the shadow Secretary of State for International Development. I am sure that many hon. Members who were unable to catch your eye in this debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will want to participate in the debate in the House.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) and my hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) have said, we believe passionately in free trade. It is the greatest engine for poverty reduction. It is more effective than aid alone ever could be, and as the hon. Members for Northavon (Mr. Webb) and for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) said, aid and trade need to work in tandem.

We congratulate all those who have written to their Members of Parliament and those who are attending Parliament today on bringing the issue, once again, to the attention of Parliament and the public at large. Happily, more people have been lifted out of poverty around the world in the previous 50 years than in the 100 years before that. It is good to know that, in spite of all the problems that remain in many parts of the world, since 1960, child death rates and malnutrition rates have halved in developing countries.

Much of the credit for that must go to the wealth that has been created by increased international trade. We should be aware, however, that many countries have not reaped the benefits. As several speakers have already said, corruption is one of the major problems. I think it was the hon. Member for Northavon who said that the lack of democracy in many countries is the problem. It is important for all those who care about these issues to focus on corruption and lack of democracy as much as on the obligations of the developed world and the importance of negotiations in organisations such as the World Trade Organisation. We can do a great deal to promote democracy and good governance around the world, and to try to reduce the extent to which the corruption of the rulers of so many developing countries is harming their citizens.

We recognise that, partly because of corruption, exports in many poor countries do not expand, so those countries do not reap the benefits of globalisation. Again, partly because of corruption, farming becomes unsustainable in many countries, for example, in Zimbabwe, where there is a deliberate attempt to hand over huge amounts of land to the leader's cronies, with the result that there is likely to be a substantial failure in the staple maize crop there. We were briefed recently by someone who has worked in Africa for the Commonwealth Development Corporation and Oxfam during the past 10 years, and who said that corruption and cronyism may well lead to famine.

We are aware that life expectancy throughout the world is increasing, but in many African countries, it is falling, not least because of the tragic spread of HIV. We are very much aware that Africa will not meet the international development target of halving the number of people living in poverty by 2015. There will be a need to reform trade rules to ensure that globalisation becomes a truly effective force worldwide. The reform should focus on ensuring truly free trade.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell pointed out, the common agricultural policy is unsustainable in its current form. Trade barriers in the form of tariffs are wrong. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham said, although we support President Bush on many issues, we do not want the United States to resort to protectionism, as it could only do damage. Tariff barriers deter foreign investment and raise prices. Lower trade barriers encourage trade and inward investment, and allow other poor countries to expand their exports and to benefit from their comparative advantages. That is shown by the number of poor countries that have already been able to expand their range of exports away from primary commodities to manufactured goods and services.

There are continuing concerns about the way in which high tariffs, even in the EU, Japan and Canada, block out poor countries. It is of particular concern that the imports on which poor countries want to focus are the very commodities that are blocked by high tariff barriers.

Hugh Bayley (City of York): I am delighted to hear the hon. Gentleman repudiating so many of the policies that his party pursued when it was in government when the proportion of GDP spent on aid was halved from 0.5 per cent. to 0.25 per cent. Does he recognise that, if we reduce agricultural subsidies by reforming the CAP and make it more possible for African farmers to import their beef and cereals into Britain, there will be a consequence for British farmers as there will be less demand for British beef and cereals?

Mr. Hawkins: The hon. Gentleman is right that we need to ensure that all our national interests are taken into account. However, I regretted giving way to him when I heard him reducing what had been a helpful and constructive debate to cheap party-political point scoring.

Trade liberalisation has many dimensions. It must involve the reform of agricultural subsidies. We must bear in mind that total OECD subsidies represent two thirds of Africa's total GDP. Rich countries must keep their side of the bargain. Trade liberalisation also means increasing the use of the private sector in the provision of services in poor countries, which the Government and the Conservatives support. We recognise that some members of the Trade Justice Movement oppose it, but we point out to those who lobby us on this matter that trade liberalisation has historically encouraged economic growth and investment. In a large number of developing countries, the provision of essential public services, especially clean water, has not been given a high enough priority by those who govern them. It must be welcome if private companies can provide such services, greater capital investment and expertise.

Studies show consistently that poor citizens suffer the most from corruption. Trade liberalisation is a good way to tackle corruption and encourage good governance and is therefore in the best interests of the poor. We do not agree that it would be sensible to concentrate first on greater regulation of multinational companies, as that would deter the vital foreign investment that poor countries urgently require. Evidence suggests that the involvement of multinational companies brings higher wages, higher safety and environmental standards, and more rights for workers. The idea that globalisation is a race to the bottom in poor employment practices is wrong. On the Conservative Benches, we believe that poor countries need more trade and investment and that we should not put barriers in the way of greater investment.

These issues must be tackled by the Government in the forthcoming EU Heads of Government meeting in Seville later this week, in the G8 meeting in Canada later this month and in the world summit on sustainable development in Johannesburg later this year. Conservatives are calling on the Government—in this debate and again later today—to show leadership. Rhetoric should be followed up with action.

12.20 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Ms Sally Keeble): I welcome this important debate. The high attendance in Westminster Hall this morning shows the high level of support among hon. Members and the public for tackling this issue. I thank hon. Members for their good wishes, and I agree with those who said that I have the best job in the Government. I also sincerely congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke) on securing the debate today. He has demonstrated a keen interest in this subject for a long time. As a former shadow Secretary of State for International Development, he should take much credit for the development of thinking about this important issue.

In the short time available, I shall set out some of the Government's basic principles, but I also want to respond to hon. Members' specific points. Several hon. Members will have another opportunity to explore the issues again this afternoon. I want to pay tribute to the work done by the Trade Justice Movement lobby. The existence of the campaign and the lobby has undoubtedly raised the profile and importance of the trade and development movement at a particularly important time for international discussions. Trade justice issues will be at the top of the agenda. The Government have been given a clear mandate on that by the public.

[Ms Sally Keeble]

The Government are committed to ensuring that poverty reduction is at the centre of their work in international aid. The hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) was right to point out that it is a moral imperative as much as a political problem. He was also right to draw a distinction between the simplicity of the moral position and the complexity of the rules that have to be negotiated. The Government have grasped that particular nettle. The hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) should realise that the Government have shown great leadership, not just at home, but abroad, in setting out clear markers about the goals themselves and how best to realise them.

We recognise that trade has an important role in helping to achieve the millennium development goals. In recent decades, countries that have taken the opportunity offered by more open world markets have taken the greatest strides in reducing poverty. The World Bank estimates that continuing to open markets to trade could lift an additional 300 million people—about a quarter of our target for the year 2015—out of poverty. By expanding access to ideas, technology, goods, services and capital, trade openness can create the conditions for faster economic growth and help to reduce poverty.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Chryston and the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) spoke about the impact of the reduction of commodity prices on levels of poverty in the least developed countries. The Government are examining several issues in that respect, one being value change. It is important that countries that produce the commodities are also able to manufacture and process them. That comes back to the issue of the trade barriers and tariffs. It is one of the reasons why it is so important to dismantle them if we are not just to deal with poverty in the developing world, but to provide sustainable economic growth in those countries.

There is also the issue of the dependence, especially of rural communities, on a small number of basic commodities. Commodity prices have a completely disproportionate impact on rural poverty. Diversification is therefore important. The Government, and my Department in particular, have provided support for the Fair Trade movement and there is growing awareness of the need to ensure that the products that are procured by our major retailers come from sources that comply with fair trade requirements.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. McCabe) made an intervention about transparency. That was important because it is one of the issues that will be raised by today's lobby. Indeed, my colleagues and I had discussions about that this morning with some of the NGOs. We are sympathetic to the representations of the developing nations and are working with them and the NGOs. We are also financing support for the pursuit of cases in trades disputes so that the developing nations have access to some of the levers of justice.

The right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) made an interesting and thoughtful speech about the relationship between free trade and regulation and about the contradictions in the position of the US, which, while espousing free trade, protects its own industries in certain areas. The Government recognise that. We are pressing internationally and in Europe to ensure that we can end some of the protectionism that has so damaged the developing countries. We are also working on governance issues in the developing countries to ensure that they have the framework to provide the regulation for trade within their countries. Quite a number of hon. Members raised issues about corruption and the importance of ensuring that the benefits of trade reach the populations and do not remain with small numbers of the elite.

My hon. Friends the Members for Leigh (Andy Burnham) and for Glasgow, Maryhill (Ann McKechin) made some important points about the suspicion that exists in many areas about the role of tariffs and trade barriers. One of the reasons why it is so important that we dismantle them and encourage trade is the enormous amount of finance that that can produce, including for the least developed countries. For example, the World Bank estimates that if we reduced by about half the current level of tariffs and barriers, we would produce around US $150 billion a year for the developing countries. That is roughly three times the international aid budget worldwide. It gives an idea of the scope of what can be achieved through trade, as compared with what will be available, even with the best will in the world, through aid.

The hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) raised issues about the Commonwealth Development Corporation. Because of time constraints I will not deal with those points now, but I will ensure that he receives a written reply. Investment in developing countries is critical and being able to source financing for a whole range of projects has created pressure. My Department has been looking at ways to ensure that there is an opportunity for further investment in those countries. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill raised issues about the development box. We welcome the way that the discussion of that has focused attention on the need to address the special circumstances of developing countries.

In conclusion, this has been a brief dress rehearsal for the debate this afternoon. I reiterate that the Government have shown real leadership in ensuring that there is justice for developing countries, in trade as in other issues, and they will continue to do so.

Nepal

12.39 pm

Sir John Stanley (Tonbridge and Malling): Although I am chairman of the Britain-Nepal parliamentary group, I would not presume to speak on behalf of the group. I initiated the debate in my individual capacity.

As the House knows, the relationship between Britain and Nepal is unique: no other country in the world has citizens who have served in the British armed forces and under the Crown for more than 150 years, with conspicuous gallantry. They have made conspicuous sacrifices in two world wars and since.

Britain's relationship with Nepal goes far beyond the Gurkha connection. Large numbers of British people travel to Nepal to enjoy the unrivalled mountains of that country, the richness and variety of Nepalese culture and the charm and resilience of the Nepalese people, with their remarkable gift of friendship. The links between our two countries also extend into the constitutional and parliamentary field. When the late King Birendra made his wise move in 1990 towards constitutional monarchy and genuinely free multiparty parliamentary democracy, it was supported by the Government of this country. Members of the British Parliament have been present among the international observer team in all the general elections by universal suffrage in Nepal, beginning with the election in 1991. Those of us who were fortunate enough to be part of the last Inter-Parliamentary Union delegation to Nepal in 1996, went to the Nepalese Parliament and saw the Speaker's Chair in each House, carved in British oak—gifts from the Parliament of the United Kingdom to the Parliament of the kingdom of Nepal.

That parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy is under the gravest threat from Maoist terrorists, whose clearly stated objectives are the overthrow of the constitutional monarchy in Nepal and the imposition of a one-party communist state.

The Maoist campaign has been going for some six years; thousands of people have already lost their lives and the campaign is both spreading and intensifying. The trademark, and principal weapon, of the Maoists is extreme brutality. At a briefing recently, senior Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials told the parliamentary group that the latest Maoist tactics before attacking a security forces post are to go to the surrounding villages and make house-to-house calls demanding that each family gives up one member of the household as a so-called civilian volunteer. If they do not do so, the Maoists will be back to murder at random one member of the household, which is a threat that they carry out. Those civilian so-called volunteers are then used as first-wave cannon-fodder in attacking the security forces post, to expend the maximum amount of the security forces' inevitably limited supplies of ammunition. When the first wave has gone in and most of the ammunition is expended, the hardened, seasoned Maoist terrorists finish off the job. Inevitably, the casualty rate among those press-ganged civilian so-called volunteers is fearfully high.

Those who have been unfortunate enough to be captured alive by the Maoists have been treated unspeakably. Prisoners have had their throats slit, have been dismembered, disembowelled, burnt alive and tied to trees in order to have their limbs smashed so that they die in agony slowly. The Maoists understand totally the power of fear, as they have always done, and exploit it ruthlessly.

Not surprisingly, in a country with only limited road communications and where the ability to reinforce is extremely restricted, the Maoists have managed to take a greater or lesser degree of political control over approximately half of Nepal. They are cementing their control by isolating areas ever more completely from help from the elected Government. They destroy telephone links, electricity supplies, bridges and the remaining Government presence in villages, which principally consists of the offices of village development and forestry committees. They have extended their operations beyond the rural areas and into the capital, Kathmandu, where the terrorists have detonated bombs in buses and taxis and against Government buildings.

As we all know, the world has been engaged in a war against terrorism since 11 September, and the world's media have given massive attention to terrorist attacks and threats of further terrorism against the United States of America and its allies, and in Afghanistan, Kashmir and the middle east. However, comparatively speaking, precious little attention has been paid to the country that is facing the single greatest threat to its parliamentary democracy from internal terrorism—Nepal. If there is to be a truly worldwide campaign against terrorism, it is high time that the world community gave more attention and support to the needs of Nepal in its war against terrorism.

I want to raise three specific points. The first is the issue of military assistance to Nepal. As the Minister will know, during the past year a succession of senior members of the Royal Nepalese security forces and the Government, including most recently the Prime Minister, have visited this country and requested military assistance. Prime Minister Deuba was able to see the Britain-Nepal parliamentary group following his meeting with our Prime Minister during his recent visit.

The press have reported that the Nepalese have requested helicopters, so that they are better able to reinforce their security forces than they have been so far; night vision equipment, so that they can mount their own attacks to try to nullify the terrorists' ability to operate more or less with impunity at night; and military training and expertise in counter-terrorism, which this country has in plenty.

I hope that the Minister will set out in the fullest and most specific detail possible in this public forum how the British Government have responded to those requests from the Nepalese Government for military assistance. I am concerned about the apparent lack of speed and resolve in the British Government's response so far.

There seems to be a striking contrast with the way in which the Government responded—rightly—to the requests from President Kabbah of Sierra Leone for military help against the brutal and serious internal terrorism that he faced and the threat to parliamentary democracy in that country. I welcomed the British Government's response to Sierra Leone, but I want to record the fact that, although Nepal is not a member of the Commonwealth, Britain's ties with Nepal are of infinitely longer duration and our obligation to Nepal is greater.

[Sir John Stanley]

My second point relates to development assistance. The war against terrorism in Nepal will not be won by military means alone, any more that it will elsewhere in the world. The people of Nepal, particularly in rural areas, must be persuaded that their prospects for prosperity are substantially better under the existing democratic Government than they would be in a Marxist one-party state. Unless the people of Nepal can be persuaded of that, there is a real risk that the Maoists might win, so development assistance results are urgently needed on the ground.

The Secretary of State for International Development wrote to me on 9 June. She said:

> "Last year my Department spent over £20 million on development assistance to Nepal. This included a number of short-term initiatives to deliver development benefits to people in conflict affected areas. Increases in the programme are planned this year, and if there is progress with reform we are ready to further increase financial support."

I very much welcome the right hon. Lady's focus on providing development assistance to give short-term benefits to people in conflict-affected areas. That is crucial, but at the same time I am concerned by what she says about making increases in financial support dependent on progress with reform.

I completely understand the need for reform in Nepal, as do the Nepalese Government. I understand the need to root out corruption and remove what remains of the caste system, but it is an inescapable fact that those reforms will take time, and time is the one thing that Nepal does not have. The sands of time are running out in Nepal, and perhaps running out fast in terms of its parliamentary democracy, so I urge the British Government to increase development assistance now, to focus it on conflict-affected areas, and to increase development assistance without conditions.

Finally, I turn to the role that Britain can play in the international development community worldwide on behalf of Nepal. I do not begin to suggest that the British Government could or should single-handedly shoulder the burden of getting development assistance to Nepal on the scale and with the critical immediacy required. The entire international development community must be mobilised, including the United Nations development agencies, the European Union, individual donor countries with serious development programmes and the development organisations and agencies in Asia.

In the aftermath of 11 September, Britain played a crucial role in building the international military coalition against terrorism, not least through the Prime Minister. What is called for now is for Britain to take a similar lead, headed I hope by the Prime Minister, to build a similar international development assistance coalition for Nepal while there is still time. I cannot stress the urgent need for that too strongly.

I said at the outset that Britain had a unique relationship with Nepal. In my view, Britain also has unique obligations to that country. Twice in the past century, thousands of Nepalese citizens came to our country's aid as Gurkha soldiers in our hour of need. In Nepal's hour of need, it is incumbent on Britain to come to Nepal's aid with substance, determination and immediacy.

12.46 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mike O'Brien): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir John Stanley) on raising the issue of Maoist terrorism in Nepal. He is right to say that the debate is timely. The crisis in India and Pakistan has taken parliamentary and media attention from other countries in the region, especially Nepal, that also need international attention and support.

This morning, I spoke to a friend from Nepal who runs a business here. He had spoken to members of his family who were subject to direct intimidation by Maoist terrorists in Nepal. He told me of the fear that pervades many communities in the areas controlled by the terrorists, and the extent to which the need for a Government response presents itself. The terrorism must be cracked down on, and it must be ensured that the terrorists negotiate a proper settlement on the issues.

Much of the conduct employed by the Maoists in their efforts to secure power has been nothing short of barbaric, in their acts against Nepalese security forces and against civilians. Threats such as those that the right hon. Gentleman outlined are an everyday occurrence in many parts of Nepal.

The United Kingdom fully supports the Nepalese Government's efforts to combat the Maoist terrorists. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister reiterated our support during a meeting with Prime Minister Deuba of Nepal only last month. He came to this country and asked for support, and was assured that he would be given it.

As the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling suggested, the UK has strong ties with Nepal that stretch back over 200 years. One obvious link is our Gurkha relationship. The Gurkhas are an integrated part of our Army, and are held in deep affection throughout the United Kingdom. They have distinguished themselves in areas as diverse as Bosnia, East Timor and Sierra Leone. I place on the record the Government's thanks to them for all their efforts. Until the escalation of the conflict over the past few months, Nepal has been a popular destination for British tourists, who have travelled in large numbers to holiday and trek in a country of outstanding natural beauty. The tourists need to be aware of the circumstances and take account of the escalating terrorist campaign in Nepal if they plan to travel there. They should certainly not travel in areas controlled by the Maoists, and they should also be careful in other areas.

The Maoist military campaign remains focused on three targets. The first is the continuing destruction of the civilian infrastructure. The second is the monthly pattern of major assaults on district headquarters and security force garrisons. The third is the campaign of attacks against police posts, Government offices and public transport in Kathmandu. The pattern of violence has been accompanied by repeated Maoist-inspired national shutdowns and strikes. Those have exacerbated the impact on an economy already debilitated by the conflict.

It has been estimated that there are about 5,000 core Maoist members. The Maoists have used force to bolster their numbers in operations against the Nepalese security forces. The right hon. Gentleman described some of the methods that they used. The Maoists currently control areas in the mid-west of Nepal through fear and intimidation, and there is evidence that they are present in all Nepal's 75 districts.

The security situation in Nepal has deteriorated alarmingly over the past few months. The Maoist threat continues to dominate life in the country. The scandal of destruction is enormous. Districts in the far west are now without piped water, telephones and electricity. Some districts have been losing contact with Kathmandu as the Maoists destroy repeater stations and radio masts throughout the country. Bridges have fallen to Maoist bombs, and postal services have been severely disrupted. Food stocks have been looted and local government officials are fleeing to Kathmandu as their offices are bombed and burnt.

The Maoists recently offered a unilateral ceasefire for one month. However, that proposal was rejected by Nepalese Prime Minister Deuba, who argued that the Maoists could not be trusted, especially in light of their previous ceasefire break in November 2001, when they abandoned the last round of negotiations. At the moment, the Maoists are not genuinely interested in a peaceful resolution of the situation but want to resolve it by a terrorist campaign. A ceasefire would merely provide them with the opportunity to regroup, retrain, rearm, and recruit new members to their cause.

The abandonment of peace talks by the Maoists and their return to violence last year forced the Nepalese Government to create a state of national emergency. One consequence of that was the introduction of the Royal Nepalese Army into the conflict. Previously, the role of combating the Maoists had been left to the police. The addition of the RNA to the conflict has contributed to some military successes against the Maoists. However, those achievements have been tempered by undeniable reports of human rights abuses by the police, the armed police and the RNA. Although a valued contributor to peacekeeping forces overseas, Nepal has no experience of fighting wars on its own territory. We have strongly urged the Nepalese Government to take action on human rights abuses, stressing the need properly to investigate the reports and punish the perpetrators.

The current political uncertainty in Nepal, culminating in the dissolution of the Nepalese Parliament and the expulsion of the Nepalese Prime Minister from his own party, comes at a time when the country is already undergoing a security and fiscal crisis. Prime Minister Deuba last month extended the state of emergency for a further three months. To do so, he required parliamentary support. A stand-off over the extension between Prime Minister Deuba and his party president, Mr. Koirala, resulted in the Prime Minister's dissolving Parliament in order to push ahead with the extension of the state of emergency. That was conducted within the Nepalese constitution and by the order of the Nepalese King. However, Mr. Koirala then ordered the expulsion of Prime Minister Deuba from the Nepali Congress party.

The internal conflict will not assist in reaching a solution and ending the conflict. We strongly urge Nepalese politicians to put aside their differences and to work together in the interests of the country at this difficult time. The dissolution of Parliament has resulted in new elections being called in November. We stand ready to do what we can to support the Nepalese Government in the holding of free and fair elections so that the democratic process may prevail.

Our close relations with Nepal amplify our concern for the instability there. We support the democratically elected Government of Nepal, and recognise their right and obligation to provide security to their people. We have offered our full support to the Government of Nepal in their attempt to find a resolution to the insurgency. That message was reiterated recently by the Prime Minister to the Nepalese Prime Minister. The European Union has also condemned the Maoist attacks.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): The Minister heard a compelling plea for immediate action—a plea for sufficient military assistance from the United Kingdom to support the Nepalese Government. Will he address that point?

Mr. O'Brien: I am certainly hoping to be able to deal with that. It is of course an important request. We are considering those requests and we hope that in the very short term—I am thinking of days rather than months—we will be able to give a response on some aspects. I do not wish to go into some of the detail of the military requests that have been made but I would be happy to brief hon. Members privately about that after the debate.

We are also working closely with our US colleagues and others in identifying ways to stop the insurgency. We consider our involvement to be part of the wider war against terrorism, whatever form it takes. We are committed to continuing our developmental, political and military assistance to the Nepalese Government and the United Kingdom is taking the leading role in co-ordinating support to Nepal in this time of significant crisis.

In that context the United Kingdom decided to host an international meeting in London, which started this morning and will conclude tomorrow. The right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling marred his otherwise excellent speech by claiming that we lacked resolve. The calling of that international meeting suggests otherwise. The situation is much too serious for that sort of party political knockabout and must be taken seriously. It concerns an international situation in which we have a deep vested interest and the Government intend to take it very seriously indeed.

We developed the initiative for the international conference in close consultation with our international colleagues and with the Nepalese Government. We have invited representatives from other countries who share our concerns over the worsening security situation there, those with substantial donor programmes, and, of course, representatives of the Nepalese Government. We have also invited multilateral organisations with interests in Nepal, including the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme, together with the United States, India and other countries.

The international meeting is an important initiative to bring together representatives from the international community to discuss how that community can best co-ordinate its efforts in supporting the people of Nepal.

[Mr. O'Brien]

The international meeting also provides an opportunity to reinforce the need for strategic action by the Nepalese Government and the international community to address the situation in Nepal.

But that is only the beginning. We believe that this meeting should become a process—one that will involve greater co-ordination between Nepal and other countries. The UK is helping Nepal bilaterally. Our already substantial £27 million bilateral development programme to Nepal will be increased in the short term to assist the Nepalese people. It focuses on short-term programmes to deliver development benefits to communities affected by conflict, sector reforms in health and infrastructure, governance reforms and targeted programmes to assist the poorest and most vulnerable in society.

It has to be acknowledged that the development record in Nepal is mixed. There have been some gains in reducing poverty and improving the human development of the people. However, much more must be done to reduce inequalities and corruption. That is why the Department for International Development has also worked with other agencies and the Government to improve the latter's implementation of poverty reduction programmes.

We have also approved a package of measures for Nepal totalling £6.7 million as part of our strategy concerning south Asia for this financial year. That is an increase of approximately 1,000 per cent. in Nepal's allocation from the last financial year under the global conflict prevention pool. The projects will be aimed at short-term development and at reinforcing Nepal's development, military and police capacity. They are, therefore, directly related to the current crisis.

A substantial amount has been allocated for training and equipment support for the Royal Nepalese Army. Training support will include assisting the RNA in human rights awareness, while approximately £500,000 from the fund will be spent on providing equipment, including bomb disposal protection goods.

We are committed to helping Nepal, and we are determined to do so. We are providing military and financial support, and we are determined to continue our efforts on human rights.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. John McWilliam): Order. Time is up.

Health Inequalities (Easington)

1 pm

Mr. John Cummings (Easington): First, I want to put the health of the local population in context. In socio-economic terms, Easington is classed as one of the most deprived communities outside London, and it is sixth from bottom in the multiple index of deprivation. One in four deaths is due to coronary heart disease, which is 40 per cent. above the national average. Deaths from the complications of diabetes are 73 per cent. higher than the national average for men, and 62 per cent higher for women. There has been a 62 per cent. increase in deaths among men from cirrhosis of the liver. Life expectancy figures are among the worst in the country, at 72.42 years for males and 77.4 years for females.

Despite those appalling statistics, health care in the Easington district remains chronically underfunded. Easington currently receives only 89 per cent. of its target allocation, while Darlington receives 105 per cent. It is one of the most deprived and disadvantaged communities in the country in health terms, but primary health care is underfunded to the tune of almost £10.5 million, according to Department of Health and County Durham health authority figures. The Easington district includes part of the Prime Minister's Sedgefield constituency, and its population suffers some of the worst health in the country. It is ironic that it is one of the areas that are furthest from receiving their target allocation.

One might ask what happened to Government initiatives on areas with the worst health records. Easington has a population of almost 98,600, but it was not successful in securing health action zone status in the last round of bids.

Additional assistance to reduce death and illness due to smoking is also not available to residents in the Easington district, even though it is available to communities in neighbouring Sunderland and in Tees Valley; yet 28 per cent. of men and 24 per cent. of women in the district are smokers.

The problem is compounded by the fact that there is considerable pressure in the district on local authority budgets for disabled facilities grants to adapt people's homes, for disabled people in local authority accommodation and for elderly people who live independently in their own homes.

Mr. Denis Murphy (Wansbeck): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Cummings: I am always pleased to give way to a good comrade.

Mr. Murphy: The picture that my hon. Friend paints is almost identical to that in my constituency. He mentioned the disabled facilities grant, and there are major problems in our constituencies because the level of disability is well above average. Does he agree that it would be sensible for central Government to recognise that fact and to increase grants to enable local authorities in our constituencies to catch up with the huge backlog of work that needs to be done in that respect?

Mr. Cummings: My hon. Friend makes valuable points, and he speaks from first-hand experience. He represents an area much like mine, which relied on coal mining, with all the consequences that that hazardous occupation had.

Easington district's total financial commitment for adaptations and medical aids, including access ramps, showers and heating, is almost £1 million for the current year, and there is an estimated backlog of more than £500,000 of work for local authority properties alone. Without additional resources, that backlog is likely to increase further, as occupational therapists and social services make more referrals.

National policies for modernising services for older people place much greater emphasis on giving older people the support that they need to live independently in their own home. That is likely to have significant cost implications in terms of disabled adaptations, medical equipment, domiciliary care, personal medical and community care, home helps and meals on wheels. It is apparent that there are insufficient resources in the existing organisations and agencies to cope with the considerable growing demand for those services.

There needs to be an understanding of the resource implications of any change in the pattern of service delivery for older people, for all agencies involved in health and social care, including the primary health care sector, especially in Easington where resources are already stretched to the limit. Despite a record settlement for the national health service, with an increase of 9 per cent. in revenue budgets and a 9.9 per cent. increase in the allocation to the County Durham health authority, in this financial year Easington is moving further away from its target resource allocation.

A significant problem from Easington' s perspective is that the substantial additional resources allocated to it in recent years have been for badged projects, such as modernising accident and emergency facilities and improvements in hospital-based cancer services. Without a dedicated hospital serving east Durham, the allocations that would otherwise have gone to Easington have been directed to the major population centres. It is the view of many Members of Parliament representing disadvantaged areas like my own that the index of multiple deprivation should be included as a basis for the allocation of resources for health.

The ill health of the local population can be addressed only by means of a protected increase in baseline resources with a bias in future allocations to areas in greatest need, such as Easington, where health inequalities are greatest. Although I welcome initiatives such as the national primary care collaborative, community healthworks, the warmer homes initiative, sure start, on track and the healthy schools award scheme, they need to be refined and streamlined so that there is better co-ordination between health, education, social care and community economic regeneration, which are vital to improve the life chances of the local population.

There is an argument that Easington and other similarly deprived areas identified by the multiple index of deprivation should receive an allocation above capitation target due to exceptional need. For 2002–03, Easington primary care trust receives £84.7 million as against a target allocation of £95.176 million, a shortfall of £10.47 million. In other words, Easington is funded in the current year at 89 per cent. of target. Nevertheless, in spite of the funding gap, Easington can take pride in some excellent examples of partnership working in overcoming health inequalities in the district of Easington.

Easington primary care group was chosen as one of the twenty PCGs in England to take part in the first wave of the national primary care collaborative, which is now a part of the NHS Modernisation Agency. In the first year, 2000–01, five local GP practices concentrated on reducing the time that patients wait to see a doctor or nurse and establishing effective planned care for people with heart disease. In only the second year of operation, 17 of the total of 18 GP practices are working together on these targets. In January, every patient in the participating practices was able to see their family doctor within 48 hours of their request. In most practices, 90 per cent. of patients could see their doctor on the day of their choice. At the same time, all patients who needed aspirin as a protective measure were identified and receiving that treatment, which is known to reduce the risk of heart attacks by 50 per cent. One hundred percent of people who needed treatment with beta-blockers after heart attacks were receiving them. The number of people benefiting from statin therapy to reduce high cholesterol had reached at least 70 per cent. of the eligible group in all practices and as much as 90 per cent. in some.

A handyman scheme has been supported, an example of partnership working between the local NHS, Easington council and Age Concern. It provides two handymen to undertake odd jobs for older people in the community, helping them to live independently by reducing the risk of accidents in the home. Where time allows, the handymen also deliver small aids to independent living and help to maintain gardens, improving the environment and reducing the hiding places for thieves.

A home safety scheme—a partnership between the local NHS specialist health promotion service, Easington district council and the fire service—provides new home safety equipment for families with special needs or those who have children aged under five, such as a fireguard, two safety gates, two smoke alarms and socket covers. Every ward in Easington is in the bottom 10 per cent. of communities in England for investment in home safety. There is a clear correlation between lack of local investment and every parameter of poor health—including accidents.

The project has been possible only because funding has been provided by a charitable source. A community healthworks partnership—a training programme—has promoted joint working between the local NHS specialist health promotion service and people from the local community. It aims to raise awareness of the many factors that affect health. Local trainers are used to support participants in developing locally relevant health-related research projects. Participants, through their interest in health issues, often become interested in the local community health forum. Unexpected benefits of the scheme have included participants gaining the confidence to return to full-time working.

A smoking cessation partnership has been established between local GP practices, the specialist health promotion service and local people. The primary care trust has invested heavily from its baseline allocation to support local services for people who want to give up

[Mr. Cummings]

smoking. A network of 35 intermediate smoking cessation advisers work in GP practices throughout the district. The specialist health promotion service provides them with training and support. It has a success rate of 66 per cent. of people quitting at four weeks, compared with the national average of 45 per cent. Preliminary data suggest that the percentage of people still not smoking after one year is 35 per cent.

Funding for that work went to health action zone areas in the first year of national support. In the second and third years, Easington primary care group received £25,000 to set up and run the smoking cessation service—a share of the £192,000 received by County Durham and Darlington health authority. As I said earlier, that was much less than the funding for health action zone areas.

The currant bun project is a partnership between the specialist health promotion service and the local community. It is a healthy eating programme that targets groups such as older people, people with mental health problems and single parents and covers healthy eating messages, food hygiene, budget meals and basic cookery skills. Links are made with local community workers to facilitate community involvement in other local projects. The significance of that work is that many people who suffer disadvantage find it difficult to link what they know about good nutrition with the need to manage both their time and their financial resources.

An important area of work, given the levels of deprivation in Easington, is the warmer homes partnership between the local NHS and Easington district council. The primary care trust has worked closely with Easington district council to improve local resident access to fuel conservation initiatives. Primary care staff working in GP practices refer patients who are at high risk because of health problems to the local medical officer. After assessment, adaptations are undertaken to improve the heating systems and insulation measures.

Sure start is an important area of work for primary care, which will pay dividends in improved health and lifestyle in future generations. There are three sure start areas in the Easington district. The primary care trust is the lead partner and is doing superb work.

A successful bid to the New Opportunities Fund under the healthy living centre initiative has provided funding for four interlocking community health promotion programmes: healthy food, healthy exercise, StressBusters and information for health and well-being. Since the primary care group was formed in 1999—it is now a trust—there has been a modest increase in the amount of consultant psychiatric services. A counselling service now works hand in hand with every GP practice in Easington, and funding has now been secured to strengthen the clinical psychology service. Bases for two community mental health teams and an out-of-hours helpline have been established.

As I have said, it is a matter of public record that levels of health need in Easington are the highest of any community outside London. National imperatives are also local priorities. Proportionately, local people have more heart disease, more mental health problems and more cancer than people in the rest of the country. In tackling those issues, the primary care trust must work closely with other agencies and organisations in the community, as well as with agencies in Sunderland, Durham, Hartlepool and North Tees. Easington primary care group is addressing the problem on two levels; first, by providing services for those people who are affected by disease and, secondly, by providing information and support for people at risk of serious disease to enable them to make informed choices about their lives. The NHS needs to make as much effort to prevent ill health and disease as it makes in treating disease. That is a real challenge when there is a funding shortfall, in excess of £10 million.

The real deficit in the district is evidenced by a lack of community service infrastructure. We can identify the levels of demand and the lack of resources in Easington. The area requires another 10 GPs to reach the national average. In some practices in Easington, there is one GP for every 2,600 patients, and the district average is one GP for 2,100 patients. Although it would be useful to establish specialist GP clinics and extended-role nursing provision to support people with chronic disorders, in reality Easington needs to increase its staffing establishment as well as develop leading-edge services.

There are, of course, physical limits to how much change a system under pressure can cope with, but the primary care trust's response has been to support and work with the practices to find a way through the uncertainty. What, practically, does Easington need? I have already said that we need more GPs and more community nurses. More palliative care beds and intermediate care beds are also needed. There is a clear remit for the PCT to work even more closely with the local authority to ensure that local people are not disadvantaged when funds are distributed throughout the county. We need more specialist diabetes nurses, dieticians and podiatrists. The national service framework will set out a requirement to build integrated services for people with diabetes. Complications of diabetes account for a 73 per cent. increase in deaths in men and a 62 per cent. increase in deaths in women in Easington. That situation cannot be allowed to continue.

Children and young people require access to a robust child and adolescent mental health service. Adult mental health services are poorly developed in the district and need more resources to enable them to carry out their most useful function.

There are good services for people with heart disease, which causes one in four deaths in adults in Easington. Lack of access to echocardiography means that effective care for people with congestive heart failure is not available. New funding would allow that deficiency to be tackled immediately. The development of community-based rehabilitation services could significantly reduce pressure on hospital out-patients and doctors' surgeries. Those matters could be tackled immediately if the resources were made available.

It would be extremely useful if, when he responds, the Minister would identify possible funding initiatives that the PCT could tap into in order to address those problems. There is considerable pressure from members of the public and local health care professionals to redress the historic and recurrent £10.5 million annual shortfall. That shortfall is based on population alone, and does not take need and deprivation into account. I urge the Minister to take the opportunity to make an unequivocal commitment to address that anomaly through a needs-based funding allocation at the start of next year's financial settlement.

More than six generations of miners and their families in the Easington district have produced the coal to fuel the engines of industry that powered the industrial revolution, made the steel and fired the ships that made the nation great. Unfortunately, the coal mines are no longer with us. Many miners suffer from chronic ill health as a result of their long service in terrible conditions underground. The nation owes a debt of honour to those miners, their families and descendents, and to areas such as Easington.

In the grand order of things, we are talking about a modest commitment in each district of about £100 per resident. That modest sum could make a significant difference to the health of the local population. My colleagues and I look to the Government to address inequalities and injustice, and to repay a debt owed to mining communities, such as Easington, that are struggling to overcome disadvantage and deprivation, and want to look forward to a healthier, happier future under this Labour Government.

1.20 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): I pay warm tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Mr. Cummings) for raising such important issues in this Chamber. I share many of his concerns and I hope that, in the time that I have left, I can at least reassure him about the future direction of policy and resources as they will affect his constituency. I also pay tribute to him for the balanced way in which he presented his arguments. He carefully and effectively raised the issue of the lack of resources for the national health service in his constituency. He also drew attention to those areas where progress is undoubtedly being made, thanks to the efforts of the Labour party to tackle some of the deep-rooted problems of health inequality that have scarred our society in the past 500, not five, years. As a fair-minded man, he will understand that what is important is that the Government recognise the priorities and commit the resources to tackle them. Dealing with those deep-rooted health inequalities is a long-term project. However, I can at least reassure my hon. Friend that the Government are determined to bear down on the problems that he vividly and candidly described, which are still of concern in his constituency.

My hon. Friend was right to make prevention, not treatment, the focus of his remarks. We all know that that is the right way to tackle some of those inequalities. He also rightly referred to the progress that has been made, and to the widely available anti-cholesterol treatments that are now available, thanks to the coronary heart disease national service framework that we published two years ago. The treatments are now widely available throughout the NHS, and will undoubtedly yield a long-term dividend in all our constituencies. My hon. Friend also mentioned the programmes to support people who want to give up smoking—that terrible habit, which we know is the cause of unnecessary deaths through cancer and coronary heart disease. He rightly paid tribute to the effective smoking cessation service in his constituency.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wansbeck (Mr. Murphy) made an important point in an intervention about the role of social services. Although the NHS undoubtedly has a special contribution to make as the expert provider of health care, the Government recognise clearly that we must look beyond it to tackle health inequalities. We must consider the contribution that social services and other vital public services can make. We must also look critically at the economy, wages, jobs, housing and education, which are all fundamental to tackling health inequalities, to give people some of the life chances that many others have taken for granted for many years.

The Easington constituency is not unlike mine in many key respects. If my hon. Friend the Member for Easington came to Barrow-in-Furness he would see many similarities and parallels. I know that the same would be true of Wansbeck. In all those areas—on the economy, jobs, housing and social services—the Government are trying to get in the extra investment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wansbeck referred to the need to support additional investment in grants for disabled facilities. Thanks to the prudent way that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer is running the economy, we announced in the Budget that we are doubling the trend rate of growth going into social services spending. It is important that we do that as we are increasing spending in the NHS. If those two vital pillars of the welfare state get out of kilter, we shall not make the progress that we want. Investing in social services must be done in parallel with investment in the NHS.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Easington will allow me in the remaining five minutes to say a few words about the national picture. I will then address the issues in Easington. I know that part of the world very well and I have a great deal of affection for it. I hope that I also have some affinity with it. From the very beginning, when we took office, we recognised the importance of tackling health inequalities. It is one of the issues that characterises the difference between us and our predecessors, who would not even mention the term "health inequalities". We accept that it is a problem and we are trying to put the measures in place to deal with it.

A stark challenge faces us. At the beginning of the 21st century the opportunity for a healthy life is linked to social circumstances and childhood poverty, just as it was in the 19th and 20th centuries. To all of us who are privileged to serve in this House as Labour Members and who describe ourselves as socialist, that is unacceptable. We are determined to challenge that state of affairs. There have been considerable overall improvements over the past 50 years, but there is still a great deal more to do.

My hon. Friend referred to some of those changes. He rightly mentioned sure start, which is making an investment in the early years of a child's life. That will bear dividends. We have a range of other policies. We are improving home insulation and energy efficiency schemes as well as tackling some of the deep-rooted economic problems that are still apparent in County Durham. I am glad to see that unemployment rates in my hon. Friend's constituency have fallen dramatically since Labour came to power. That will bear dividends too.

[Mr. John Hutton]

My hon. Friend was particularly concerned about dealing with the underfunding, as he saw it, of the health service in his constituency. I do not take issue with him about that. We want to close that gap. We are currently reviewing the basis on which funds are allocated to primary care trusts. The purpose of the review is to develop a solution that will link health needs and service provision much more closely. That new allocation funding mechanism is due to come on stream next year. I hope that in the course of that review we can make further progress in dealing with the current inequality of funding.

For the moment, and over the past two years, we have included an interim health inequalities adjustment as part of the resource allocation system. It is worth £148 million this year and it will help to compensate those parts of the NHS whose residents suffer the worst health in the country. That is certainly true in Easington. It is a scandal that a young boy born today in Easington has a life expectancy several years shorter than that of a similar boy born in Kensington, Chelsea or Westminster. The extra resources that we are trying to put in, of which County Durham received an extra £2.5m this year, will help us start to redraw that balance.

On general finance, Easington has edged closer to its target funding allocation over the past four years. It was 13.3 per cent. below target; it is now 11.4 per cent. below target. It has benefited from £4.3 million in additional funds between 2000–01 and 2002–03. Overall, County Durham has benefited from new hospital facilities and substantial additional investment in its mental health services, which will benefit my hon. Friend's constituents. He is right that the centres that provide that care are not based in Easington, but they are services for his constituents.

I hope that building health inequalities into the NHS performance assessment framework will also help focus the attention of NHS managers on these issues. We are reworking the NHS funding formula, specifically with a view to tackling some of the problems raised by my hon. Friend.

My hon. Friend rightly mentioned the importance of primary care and the shortage of general practitioners in his constituency. He will be aware that in April, two new GPs were appointed to cover the Easington area; we are hoping that a further two will be appointed in August. I hope that that will make a significant contribution to solving the problem that my hon. Friend identified.

There is much more that I would like to say about the problems of health inequalities, and about how much more the Labour Government still have to do. However, I hope that I can reassure my hon. Friend that Ministers share his view about the importance of the issues that he raised in the debate. Ministers in the Department of Health and in other Departments look forward to working with him and my hon. Friend the Member for Wansbeck to find new solutions to the problems—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. John McWilliam): Order. Time is up.

Hospices

1.30 pm

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): May I express my appreciation for the opportunity to raise an issue of great importance and sensitivity?

The Minister knows from Question Time yesterday that the issue of hospices in general and children's hospices in particular concerns people on both sides of the House; it is not a partisan issue. The Government are rapidly developing policy on the matter but I want to pursue certain aspects of it.

Before I turn to some of the more general policy matters, I want to place the subject in a personal and local context. As a society, we have become more honest about issues of life and death and there is now an open debate about a problem that families face: there comes a point at which medicine can no longer deal with disease, when people wish to live out the last few weeks or months of their life in dignity, surrounded by people who care for them and love them. In many cases, that will take place at home. I went through that experience a year ago, when my wife died of cancer at home. However, for many people that is not possible as work arrangements cannot be made and caring support is not available, so a hospice is the best solution. There is a growing acknowledgment of the crucial role that hospices play within the health service.

At a local level, certainly within the last few years, there has been an upsurge in my part of London of the Shooting Star Trust, an enormously successful and popular charity, which has won people's hearts. It is a children's hospice charity, which was started by a person in my constituency called Kate Turner. The charity has been brilliantly successful in raising about £3 million so far. It has obtained land from the local council and the hope is to embark on building the hospice towards the end of the year. With the dedication of its supporters and the head of steam that has built up, I have no doubt that the project will happen and that it will be successful. However, it would happen more quickly, on a bigger scale, and on a more sustainable basis if the hospice could be sure that there was some financial back-up from the national health service because, as with many hospices, most of the children who go there will be on referral from the NHS.

I acknowledge from the outset that we are faced with a change in the policy environment. The NHS cancer plan is explicit. It states that

> "all patients should have access to the specialist palliative care advice and services that they need."

It worries some charitable hospices that at a time when the Government formally acknowledge that they are an important part of the NHS, the Charity Commissioners say that if that is the case, the traditional basis of charitable funding comes into question. The Charity Commission advises charities—I am sure that the Minister is familiar with this—that trustees cannot normally use a charity's funds to pay for services that a public body is legally required to provide at public expense. However, trustees may use a charity's resources to supplement what the public body provides. That seems to me to change slightly the balance within which hospices have normally arranged their funding.

Therefore we are moving to an environment in which the NHS does accept responsibility for hospices, but we start from a position where it is overwhelmingly a private charitable activity. I shall rehearse some of the figures to place them on the record, although the Minister will be familiar with them.

In January this year, 3,029 hospice beds were available in England and Wales, of which 595 were based in the NHS and the rest were all charitable—mainly local charities rather than the big national ones. Currently, 28 per cent. of funding for adult hospices comes from the state—the NHS—a figure that has unfortunately declined in recent years. Back in 1997 it was 33 per cent.

At Question Time yesterday, the hon. Member for Loughborough (Mr. Reed) highlighted the particular problem of children's hospices. They are a relatively new development in the hospice movement, but public funding in that sector is significantly less—only about 5 per cent., an extremely low figure—than in adult hospices.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): Helen house is a children's hospice in Oxford, in my constituency. It has led the way in the development of children's hospices, yet it receives no statutory funding whatever and finds it hard to maintain existing services, let alone set up new ones. It has just started the development of Douglas house, a hospice for young adults who do not fit into either the adult or children categories. Given the Charity Commission's advice and the fact that public funding for children's hospices is already at a low level and falling, there is concern about how Douglas house will meet its running costs.

Dr. Cable: That helpful intervention reinforces my point. If the average is 5 per cent., in several cases public funding might well be at or close to 0 per cent. I certainly hope that the hospice that I am looking forward to seeing in my constituency will avoid that problem. As my hon. Friend suggests, it is not just that the funding of hospices, particularly children's hospices, is making no advance; it is a struggle to avoid going backwards. The last financial year saw an increase of about £14.5 million, much originating with staff costs, which are linked to NHS salaries. Only about 22 per cent. of that amount was covered by NHS funding. Additionally, many hospices quite properly have regulatory obligations: care standards inspections, checks for criminal records, and national insurance surcharges costing about £2 million, all of which have to be catered for. Many hospices are now fund-raising not in order to develop, but to stand still.

That is the context in which I want to pursue Government funding—directly or indirectly through the lottery—with the Minister. First, it would be helpful to establish what sums of money we are talking about. In yesterday's answer the Minister referred to about £50 million a year of additional Government funding and it would be useful to have that figure confirmed. I understand that that figure comprises the ring-fenced £50 million over three years as part of the cancer plan; £70 million from the lottery—is that covered in the Government total?—and various other bits and pieces such as the welcome £3.5 million a year for drug costs, imaging and ambulance services and the recent announcement that specialised consultants, registrars, will also be funded. Is that right or have I misunderstood how the extra £50 million was arrived at?

The Government funding is welcome, but people at the sharp end have various questions about how it works, so I shall put specific points to the Minister. The £50 million ring-fenced money does not appear, at least so far, to be getting through to many hospices. The Minister will be familiar with the survey by the National Council for Hospice and Specialist Palliative Care. It covered each of the 34 cancer regions and found that few have identified money that has come through to the hospice movement. In the area covered by the Shooting Star Trust, which contains approximately three cancer regions, I could identify only £60,000 that had been located in the first financial year of the programme. The money is clearly not getting through, and it would be helpful to discuss that problem.

In the Minister's reply yesterday, she helpfully said that access to funding may be gained under the programme with the quality protects exercise and carers' grants. Will she explain how hospices such as the one that I represent can access that stream? On primary care trusts, the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) made the point yesterday, with which most of us would identify, that people do not often get far when they go to their local primary care trust. That is simply because PCTs view such work as an optional extra. They receive no Government funding for it, so they are not very co-operative.

What plans do the Government have to create a framework for hospices and palliative care, through perhaps the formal structure of the national service framework, to determine a minimum standard of provision from PCTs with funding streams attached so that they can respond in the same way as they would to other aspects of NHS funding? On Government funding, are there any plans to enlarge the categories of items for which the NHS takes responsibility? In the past few months, the Minister has said that there will be funding for drugs and specialist registrars. Will that be extended to other staff? That is what the hospice movement is primarily concerned about.

In my last few minutes, I should like to pose some specific questions on lottery funding. For my local hospice, it has become the key topic as well as the most difficult and impenetrable one. The £70 million is a lot of money, and I understand that £48 million of that is available for children's hospices through the New Opportunities Fund. That gave rise to considerable expectations, but when the hospices approached the New Opportunities Fund, they found out that only a small part of that total is available for hospices as opposed to more general palliative care. Palliative care is valuable but, given the demands of the hospice movement, it means that the sum available to hospices—about £15 million—is not large enough.

A more serious aspect for my local hospice is that none of the money appears to be available for capital spending. It is all for revenue. If one is trying to get a new hospice off the ground to meet local demand—about 1,000 families are completely uncovered in my constituency—from where does the capital come? Will it all have to come from charity, or is there some way in which hospices can access a combination of lottery and Government funding?

[Dr. Cable]

One lottery stream is the New Opportunities Fund, which has those problems; the other is the community foundation. When hospices have approached the community foundation, they have found it even harder to penetrate. It does not give priority to hospices or children, but operates on a crude Robin Hood principle that only the most deprived areas of the country can get access to it. That means that my part of London cannot. The foundation deals with averages, but there are many pockets of poverty in my constituency and south-west London generally. Rich people with a terminally ill child will go to the private sector, but for people on middle or low incomes, the needs are acute, and the community foundation's redistributive approach to funding is not helpful.

Will the Minister say something about the discussions that she and her colleague at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport are having with the lottery about how the funding can be used effectively? I should also like a response to the broader question of how Government funding can be used, particularly in the case that I have mentioned of a new children's hospice.

1.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): I congratulate the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) on securing the debate. The subject is topical and of concern to all hon. Members, as was evidenced at Question Time yesterday.

First, I want to place on the record the tremendous contribution made by the hospice movement in caring for people at the most vulnerable time of their life. Both the adult and children's hospice movements do a fantastic job wherever they operate, and they have made the United Kingdom a world leader in that field. When the hospice movement was founded, there was a great deal of scepticism that it might not be an appropriate way to care for people, but in the 1960s tireless lobbying, a lot of research and excellent clinical practice ensured that that type of specialist palliative care was recognised internationally.

As the hon. Gentleman said, hospice care for children is an even newer development than that for adults. In fact, it is only over the past 20 years that establishments providing such care have begun to spring up, which is probably why the funding base for children's hospices in particular is not well embedded in our normal funding structures. It is right to say that both movements have been based largely on public contributions and charitable fund-raising. Only in recent times has the proportion of statutory funding begun to rise.

The hon. Gentleman made the point that the proportion of statutory funding has in fact decreased over the past couple of years from 33 to 28 per cent., but the actual funding from the statutory sector has increased by 14 per cent. over the past two years. The reason for the apparent discrepancy is that charitable fund-raising has been even more successful, increasing by 22 per cent. In the past couple of years, the proportion of money funded from the statutory sector has decreased, but the actual money has increased quite considerably, and we should view the situation in that context. I am delighted that charitable fund-raising activities have been so successful, because it means that more services can be provided, but we are keen to ensure that the statutory contribution continues to rise, too.

Provision has been made for children's hospices to be supported within the national health service. It is for primary care trusts to negotiate locally what kind of services are needed in their communities and to have a genuine relationship with the voluntary sector to see how those services can be provided. That is why there must be a proper discussion through the health improvement programme, which is the main mechanism at local level in relation to funding decisions.

The way in which the hospice movement has evolved means that the bricks and mortar are quite often in place before discussions are held about how the services will be supported. Sometimes the capital expenditure is the easiest part to find, through public subscriptions and the many excellent and laudable ideas that many of us have seen in our own communities, such as buy-a-brick schemes. The building and the fabric are sometimes created before the revenue support is obtained and put in place, which can cause particular difficulties for local health services when they find that demands have not been anticipated or planned for through their processes.

Therefore it is important that the hospice movement as a whole has an ongoing relationship with the primary care trusts, which in future will have 75 per cent. of the NHS budget devolved to them and will be able to take the funding decisions. I say that not to undermine the fund-raising that hospices do, but to show that we must ensure that there is some synergy between capital funding and revenue funding. Otherwise the capital provision could be in place but we would not have the revenue funding, and the service could not be provided. That is not in the best interests of patients and other people who need to use the services.

About 28 per cent. of the running costs of adult hospices are met by the NHS. As the hon. Gentleman said, it is about 5 per cent. for children's hospices. However, there are marked variations even within those figures. It must be recognised that there are some recent arrivals in the children's hospice sector. The Shooting Star Trust, for example, is still being planned, although people in that community have done an excellent job in raising funds.

We must also ensure that we have proper standards. For the first time, the care standards regulations have set out the sort of standards towards which people should work.

On finance, and in response to some of the points raised by the hon. Gentleman, the New Opportunities Fund has committed £70 million to provide palliative care projects in England. Some £48 million of that funding is for children's palliative care, and will support several programmes for direct services in the community: £30.7 million will be spent on 24-hour care for children with life-threatening or life-limiting illnesses, £15.3 million on residential hospice care services, and £2 million on bereavement services based at home, in a hospice, or in the community.

The new opportunities funding is therefore balanced. Its guidelines and framework were debated in the House and drawn up as a result of close co-operation between the Department of Health and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. We must recognise that although hospice services are greatly appreciated by the people who use them, there is also a demand for care at home and in the community. There is a case, especially for children, for various options to help to meet the needs of people locally.

It must also be said that hospices are sometimes established in places where people have higher incomes. Successful fund-raising is perhaps more inevitable in more affluent communities where people can contribute more money. That is not always the case, but there are huge inequalities in hospice distribution and access to hospice care. The hon. Gentleman made the important point that social deprivation greatly affects a child with a life-threatening illness. The problems of such an illness are compounded if a community is poor and lacks transport and access to income. It is therefore right that we should consider deprivation as well as access for as many people in the community as possible. I do not say that that should be the overriding, or only, factor under consideration, but the problems are undoubtedly compounded for those who are socially excluded and who find it more difficult to access services.

The £50 million that the Government have committed is part of the money announced as part of the cancer plan to spend an extra £50 million a year by 2004. In my answer to questions yesterday, I recognised the concern in the hospice sector about how much of that money was getting through to the frontline of hospices. That £50 million is not only for hospice provision but for palliative care, including community and home-based provision. As I said, we shall examine the mechanisms for ensuring that that money is spent on the areas that we said should be a priority. We shall consider the outturns of the expenditure for this year and see where the money has been spent, to see whether we can strengthen the mechanisms for next year to ensure that more of that allocation goes through.

The hon. Gentleman also referred to the extra funding for specialist registrars for pathology and imaging, and to meet ambulance costs. We announced that all those things should be available to NHS patients in hospices in the same way in which they are available to NHS patients of other services; that is in addition to the £50 million for the strategy. We sent out guidance to the trusts throughout the country, emphasising that people are NHS patients, and therefore that the costs should be borne in that way.

I acknowledge the hon. Gentleman's concerns about the lottery money not being available for capital funding. A small amount is available for capital, but that is primarily for equipment. The hon. Gentleman is right that the lottery money is designed to support revenue funding; that is the point that I made earlier. In many cases, capital funding is easier to raise through public subscription and charity fund-raising than revenue funding is. That is why it was decided to put the majority of funding into supporting the day-to-day services that people need.

It is important that we try to get hospices on a firmer footing so that they are more a part of everyday services. As we said in the NHS plan, everyone should have access to good, high quality palliative care services. That is why we commissioned the National Institute for Clinical Excellence to undertake an evidence-based review of palliative care services as part of the palliative care guidance. We want to identify services that are most likely to result in high quality care. The NICE review will benefit the voluntary sector. It will help decision making about service delivery in local areas and it will provide primary care commissioners with a much more robust framework and better information when they are taking their spending decisions.We expect that the initial findings will be available from this autumn. They will be fed into the strategy that we are developing as part of the cancer plan. That will enable us to develop good and robust standards for palliative care.

We have also required all the cancer networks to develop costed strategic plans for palliative care. For the first time we now have a palliative care strategy in each cancer network, based on provision and local population needs. Also for the first time, comprehensive data on the current provision of palliative care at a network level in England are available. Those data will enable people to plan more strategically where services should be. Because the sector has grown up in an ad hoc fashion, we have not had a handle on where the provision is, its quality and how it fits in to ensure that people have access to services right across the field.

It is important that voluntary sector providers are fully played into the decision-making process. That is why we funded them with £54,000 to organise themselves to ensure that their voice was heard in the planning process. A joint conference in May brought together key commissioners and key providers in the statutory and voluntary sectors. We are moving on apace with this whole agenda. The current expenditure on palliative care is about £300 million, of which about £170 million is provided by the voluntary sector and £130 million by the NHS. As I have said, by 2004 there will be an additional £50 million from the statutory sector, which will mean that for the first time we shall make an equal contribution.

I think that I have made it clear that we intend to take action to try to ensure that this money gets further down the line. I also want to place it on the record that many people prefer to die at home. We must achieve the right balance between hospices, community provisions and home. We recently established the Diana community support nurses, who have helped with community care for children with life-threatening diseases. We have a wonderful provision through the Macmillan nurses, who can provide tremendous support for people at home at a distressing time for them and their families. Marie Curie Cancer Care also plays an important role at this difficult time.

It is important that we also invest in training for support for district and community nurses. We put an extra £6 million into cancer networks to train district and community nurses in the principles and practice of palliative care. They are working closely with the hospices in developing their own skills, to extend the

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range of all skills that all district nurses will have in future to enable them to deal with these issues sensitively.

This is an important debate. It clearly engages many of our constituents. Caring for people in the last days of their life, whether they are adults or children, has to be an increasing priority. I hope that in future we shall develop a much more robust framework so that everyone in our community may expect to get the best possible care in the last months and weeks of their life. We are determined to see that that happens.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute to Two o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 20 June 2002

[SIR MICHAEL LORD *in the Chair*]

Armed Forces

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Jim Fitzpatrick.]*

2.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): No one could be more delighted than I am that we have this opportunity for a full debate on equal opportunities in the armed forces. It is a matter to which the Government and the armed forces attach great importance. As my right hon. Friend the Minister of State with responsibility for the armed forces announced in the House last week in reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer), a new diversity policy has recently been agreed for the armed forces. That policy seeks to define diversity in a military context and to articulate the benefits that diversity will bring to the current and future operational capability of the armed forces. It will build on, rather than replace, the services' existing equal opportunities policies and practices.

The armed forces recognise that in order to continue to operate successfully in increasingly complex, high-technology and unpredictable environments, they need fit, capable, resourceful and highly motivated men and women from all sections of society. To recruit and retain such people, the services must provide a working environment and organisational culture that respect and value individuals from diverse backgrounds.

At the same time, it is important that we do not lose sight of the fact that the armed forces have a unique and highly demanding role, and that the need to preserve combat effectiveness must remain our overriding concern. In practical terms, that means having fully fit, trained and disciplined personnel ready and willing to deploy worldwide at a moment's notice, and to perform many difficult tasks not found in civilian employment. It also means that individual soldiers, sailors and airmen and airwomen must often be prepared to subordinate their own individual needs for the greater good and to abide by certain core values and standards of behaviour that are generally more demanding than those of society at large.

In a military environment, diversity is about valuing individual difference and harnessing the ideas, talents and skills of all personnel, with the aim of maintaining and enhancing team cohesion and performance and thus operational effectiveness. There are, however, limits to recognising individual differences, and it must not be pursued at the expense of team cohesion or allowed to place operational effectiveness at risk. That brings me to the topic on which I would like to focus in opening this debate today: my announcement on 22 May that women would continue to be excluded from serving in close-combat units in the armed forces. I would like to take this opportunity to explain the rationale for that decision a little more fully.

First, as I made clear in my announcement and as was underlined strongly by the Chief of the Defence Staff, women play a vital role in our armed forces. Since the early 1990s, women have taken on an increasingly wide range of roles and tasks, including front-line positions, with great success. They are able to serve as pilots and navigators in attack helicopters and fast jets, and in all roles on board surface warships. They also serve in many parts of the Army including, since 1998, the Royal Artillery and Royal Engineers. Demanding roles in support of 3 Commando Brigade of the Royal Marines are also open to women. I am sure that hon. Members will have read about the recent success of Captain Tattersall, the first woman to complete the all-arms commando course successfully and thus qualify for one of those roles.

Some 62 ships have women on board, and more than 900 women currently at sea have served on or are serving on operations. Four women have now commanded P2000 fast training boats and one has qualified as a principal warfare officer and is serving as the executive officer of a type 23 frigate. A female Army officer holds a senior media ops appointment in the international security assistance force in Kabul and, elsewhere in Afghanistan, female Chinook pilots bear heavy operational responsibilities. A female squadron leader has been appointed as the first commander of an operational flying squadron, flying Wessex helicopters in Cyprus, and another female Royal Air Force officer in the UK commands the operations wing on a busy Harrier base.

The great majority of posts within the armed forces are open to women, and their contribution to the combat effectiveness of the armed forces is absolutely essential. In total, they may serve in 73 per cent. of posts in the naval service, 70 per cent. of posts in the Army, and 96 per cent. of posts in the Royal Air Force. More than 10 per cent. of recruits to the enlisted ranks, and almost 20 per cent. of officer recruits, are women. Female personnel may make up more than 8 per cent. of the strength of the regular armed forces. I am determined to see the figures increase, and to see more women take advantage of the wide range of opportunities that a career in the armed forces offers. Further work will be undertaken to consider how that can be achieved.

The only posts closed to women for reasons of combat effectiveness are those that engage in ground close combat, such as those in the Royal Marines general service, the infantry, the Household Cavalry, the Royal Armoured Corps and the Royal Air Force Regiment. The ground close-combat forces operate in small, usually four-man, fire teams. As part of their primary function, they may be required deliberately to close with, and kill, the enemy face to face. That requirement poses extraordinary demands on individuals and, in such extreme circumstances, success, failure, even survival, depends on the cohesion of the team. Even small failures may lead to loss of life, or to the failure of the team to meet its objectives. It is therefore critical that such teams perform to the highest possible standards.

After the last review in 1998, which led to a large number of Army roles opening to women, the Ministry of Defence undertook a detailed study into the performance and suitability of women in close-combat

[Mr. Geoffrey Hoon]

roles. That work is reflected in the report "Women in the Armed Forces", which has been placed in the Library with a summary paper. The study considered existing data and new research on the physical performance of men and women in a military context, the psychological differences that impact on performance in close combat, the dynamics of mixed and single-sex teams, and the legal and ethical issues surrounding equality and diversity in the armed forces. It identified physical differences between the sexes that mean that, in general, men are better suited to the physical demands of high-intensity close combat. Few women would be able to meet the required entry standards for these roles, but there can be no doubt that some could.

I want to make it clear that the physical differences were not considered to be a sufficient reason to exclude women from ground combat. The deciding factor in retaining the exclusion was not whether women could physically or otherwise do the job of a soldier or a royal marine, but was based on the military judgment of whether including them would have an adverse impact on the combat effectiveness of close-combat teams in the extreme conditions of the battlefield. Our armed forces are, and will continue to be, raised, structured and equipped principally for combat. We are rightly proud of their ability to engage in high-intensity warfare, and to intervene effectively at short notice in any conflict. That has served us well and has earned us a worldwide reputation for our ability to engage successfully across the full spectrum of operations. A high level of cohesion in small fire teams or tank crews in those units is a vital component in sustaining the combat effectiveness that underpins that capability. The survival of our forces could depend on team cohesion. We will do nothing to risk impairing that.

The study found evidence that including small numbers of women in teams adds to the difficulty of creating the necessary degree of cohesion. The attitudes of group members, especially positive and negative attitudes to gender and gender stereotypes, can affect group dynamics and ultimately group effectiveness. The findings suggest that under normal conditions, and given proper management and training, the presence of women in small units need not affect performance detrimentally. However, the close-combat environment is anything but normal. We do not know whether the findings remain true under the extreme conditions of high-intensity close combat.

None of the evidence available was based on combat situations and, unless we send experimental mixed-gender teams into combat, we have no way of knowing whether they can function as well as all-male teams. Given the lack of direct evidence, the expertise of the service chiefs of staff was critical, and I concluded that military judgment would have to form the basis of any decision. The chiefs of staff view was that under the conditions of high-intensity close quarter battle, group cohesion becomes of much greater significance to team performance. In such an environment, the consequences of failure can be far reaching and grave. To admit women would therefore involve a risk with no possibility of gain in combat effectiveness to offset it.

I am keen however to ensure that women have the opportunity to progress to the highest ranks in the armed forces. Some 168 service women currently hold the rank of lieutenant-colonel or higher, or its equivalent in the other services. I hope that more women will come through to even more senior positions in the future. I am delighted that more women are now successfully combining a career in the armed forces with family life and other commitments. Initiatives are under way to establish what additional support systems are needed to allow more women to achieve that difficult balance. The armed forces are examining ways to introduce more flexible working where that can be done without implications for operational capability.

The Ministry of Defence and the armed forces will continue to work closely with the Equal Opportunities Commission and will share with it the results of further work to examine these and other issues raised by the study on women in close-combat roles. I look forward to seeing that work come to fruition.

We should not forget that the position of women in the armed forces has been transformed in a way that would have been inconceivable 20 years ago when women served in separate women's services, and could not go to sea or fly aircraft. At the same time, there has been an equally dramatic change in other aspects of equal opportunities. The armed forces have made significant progress in several areas. The robust equal opportunities regime introduced in the late 1990s is starting to bear fruit, with evidence of real and lasting change. Indeed, I would like to congratulate the Army, which today has been named the top public sector employer by Business in the Community's race for opportunity scheme. That recognises a significant and welcome culture change in the Army in recent years.

I want to place on the record my recognition of how much all three services are doing to make themselves more representative of our richly diverse society and to engender a culture that truly welcomes and values individuals with talent, skills and commitment from all walks of life. However, much remains to be done and we cannot afford to sit back.

Recruitment of ethnic minorities is one area in which there has been an overall year-on-year improvement but, despite vigorous efforts, results across all three services have fallen short of the challenging recruitment goals we have set ourselves, which culminated in last year's goal of 5 per cent. In the case of the Army, there are already encouraging signs. Although we do not yet have audited figures for 2001–02, the indications are that the proportion of recruits from the British ethnic minorities joining the Army last year exceeded the 5 per cent. goal for the first time.

For the coming year, we have set a goal for each of the services to achieve an increase of 1 per cent. in their outturn for 2001–02. If we are to increase ethnic minority recruitment further and meet the targets, we need to build on the work of recent years and endeavour to attract applicants from all sections of the population, including those where we have in the past had comparatively little success. That means building bridges with the ethnic minority communities to increase their awareness of what a career in the services has to offer. I am delighted that all three services are working hard to build strong relationships with ethnic minority communities throughout the country, to raise their public perception and profile and to encourage young people from those communities to consider a career in the armed forces.

Each of the three services has diversity recruiting and action teams in areas with large ethnic minority communities, which forge partnerships with secondary schools, local boroughs, councils, and community and religious organisations. They are engaged in numerous initiatives aimed specifically at people from ethnic minority backgrounds. For example, there are open days at service establishments, graduate recruitment seminars, mentoring schemes and personal development courses for schools and community groups with high numbers of ethnic minorities. In addition to the continuation of recruiting activities nationwide, the services plan a higher concentration of initiatives in Greater London, an area that holds the richest source of ethnic minority recruits. All those initiatives will help to build common ground and a mutual understanding between the armed forces and the diverse communities from which they are drawn, and which they are there to serve.

Increasing recruitment of ethnic minorities is vital, but it will fail if we do not at the same time make sure that we do everything we can to make full use of the individual skills, talents and experiences of all those who join, whatever their race, ethnic origin, religion, gender, social background or sexual orientation. It is paramount that we build on a solid framework provided by our robust equal opportunities regime. Much has been done in recent years to root out racism, sexism and other forms of unacceptable behaviour and to create an environment free from unlawful discrimination and harassment.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): What is the attitude to equal opportunity for the disabled in the armed services?

Mr. Hoon: That poses a significantly more difficult problem. The test of combat effectiveness runs through all that I have set out, and it would be less than honest for us to change as far as the disabled are concerned. It would be wrong to say that we had opened up positions to disabled groups if we had also set a test that we knew from the outset they would not satisfy because of their disabilities. We have sought to identify areas of disablement that could allow individuals to satisfy the combat effectiveness test, but it is better to proceed honestly and openly.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): I cannot remember where it was, but I visited a military establishment where I was shown, rather ruefully, facilities for the disabled that had had to be installed, even though the probability of disabled people using them was nil because of the qualifications for being an active member of the armed forces. Does the Minister think that there is a case for a legal reform to prevent such a waste of resources?

Mr. Hoon: Obviously, I do not know that example but I suspect—I have seen such facilities—that the armed forces concerned were complying with public legislation that affects visitors rather than the armed forces.

Mr. Paul Keetch (Hereford): Regardless of whether disabled people are serving in a unit or in any place of employment, such facilities exist for visitors—including the relatives of staff at that place of employment. It is right that such facilities should exist.

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for reminding me of the fact that disabled people work for the civil service who need access to military establishments and bases, and therefore need the same access to facilities as any other employee.

Initiatives include setting up confidential advice, support helplines and a network of equal opportunities advisers at every unit and formation. I welcome all the initiatives and look forward to seeing them bear fruit. I also particularly welcome the challenge presented by the amended Race Relations Acts to review the full range of our activities to ensure that in all we do we recognise the importance of eliminating unlawful discrimination and of promoting equal opportunities and good relations between people from all ethnic groups. I am delighted that the Ministry of Defence's race equality scheme was published on 31 May. In the case of the armed forces, that builds on the successful five-year partnership agreement with the Commission for Racial Equality that has been in place since 1998.

It is fundamental to the long-term success of our armed forces that they rise to the challenge of diversity. That means doing everything that they can to reach out to, and engage with, as wide a pool of potential applicants as possible, and to ensure that they take full advantage of all the talent and experience that already exist within the armed forces.

2.47 pm

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): I disagree with nothing that the Secretary of State has said—I should say virtually nothing, so that I am not caught out later. I thoroughly endorsed the objectives that he set out of maximising opportunities in the armed forces for women, ethnic minorities and, where possible, the disabled, although I fully concur with his fundamental caveat that combat effectiveness must be key. I do not know whether a modern fast jet could cope with a Douglas Bader, who was a paraplegic, but I leave that to technicians; I regard it as a technical rather than a moral issue.

Let no one say that we are not as committed as any other political party to opportunities for all wherever possible. Indeed, I listened with pride to the Secretary of State describing how the major initiatives, particularly for women in the armed forces, were taken in the early 1990s under the Conservative Government. I am sure that he would not begrudge us that. I wish to deal only with his decision on equal opportunities for women in the armed forces. He has not taken a wrong decision: in view of his personal commitment to equal opportunities throughout his political career and the expectations of some in his own party for a different decision, it was right and courageous.

My starting point, however, is a quote from Lord Guthrie who, as Chief of the Defence Staff addressing the Royal United Services Institute on 20 December 2000, said:

> "Taking part in battle is not like going to the office."

[Mr. Bernard Jenkin]

I would add my own viewpoint that the British armed forces exist to defend democracy, not to embody it in its policies and procedures. The advice that really counts is that of the chiefs of staff and we have always maintained that the Government should accept their advice. We have been perplexed since 1997 because the chiefs of staff gave straightforward advice, yet the Government went through the rigmarole of assessing the possibility of extending opportunities for women to enter front-line infantry regiments, the Royal Marines and so forth.

Mr. Hoon: May I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to the requirements of EU law, under which not rigmarole but a regular review of procedures is necessary?

Mr. Jenkin: That is the point. I defer to the Secretary of State's legal expertise on these matters: he is a professional and I am a mere amateur, but I hope that he will be gentle and not tie me up too much in legal knots. I hasten to add that I have taken the opinion of Queen's Counsel and come reasonably well armed.

This is the nub of the matter. When the Government defended the Sirdar case, which was eventually heard on 27 October 1999 and did not start under the present Administration, the argument then—and it was wrong—was that matters of national security were somehow outside the scope of the equal treatment directive and the treaty. The judgment in Sirdar *v.* Army Board rejected the submissions of France and the United Kingdom that matters concerning the conduct and discipline of members of the armed forces that were relevant to national security fell outside the scope of the treaty of Rome. That subsequently led the Government to attempt to justify sex discrimination in the armed forces on grounds of combat effectiveness.

I am concerned about the grounds adopted by the Government to sustain the policy judgment delivered today. The Secretary of State made it clear in a letter dated 22 May—the day on which he made the announcement—that in themselves physical and psychological differences cannot be a justification for discrimination. The Secretary of State referred this afternoon to cohesion among team members, which he described in his letter as

> "a vital component in sustaining combat effectiveness. There is some evidence in the report that the inclusion of a small number of women adds to the difficulty of creating the necessary degree of cohesion."

He then uses a phrase in the letter that he did not use this afternoon:

> "It found that the attitudes of group members, particularly positive and negative attitudes to gender and gender stereotypes, could affect group dynamics and ultimately group effectiveness."

If I was not listening properly, I will defer to the Secretary of State. *[Interruption.]* He did say that; I stand corrected. That is the basis for concluding:

> "There is no way of knowing whether mixed gender teams can function as well as all-male teams in a combat environment.".

My belief and concern is that in time there will be another legal challenge and perhaps a number of challenges. The problem is that the court has already reserved its options for future revisions of its attitude in the Sirdar judgment.

In the Kreil case—I wade into this with some trepidation—which was a sex equality case involving a German woman who wanted to serve in the German tank service, the European Court of Justice said:

> "as a derogation from an individual right laid down in the Directive, that provision must be interpreted strictly".

Referring to the need for proportionality in the application of the derogation, it states that that

> "requires the principle of equal treatment to be reconciled as far as possible with the requirements of public security which determine the context in which the activities in question are to be performed."

The problem with relying on proportionality lies in article 9.2 of the directive to which the Kreil judgment refers. In a nutshell, that article provides that these judgments must be made

> "in the light of social developments".

I put it to the Secretary of State that the whole purpose of sex equality legislation is not to prosecute people who practise discrimination, but to change social attitudes, and there is widespread evidence that the changing social attitudes that led to sex equality legislation are in turn changing attitudes. Therefore, those positive and negative attitudes to gender and gender stereotypes are not a stable basis on which to sustain a legal position. As has happened in the past, it is likely that, as the court revisits the issue, it will reassess the social context in which the judgments are to be made. The time could come, perhaps quite soon, when the Secretary of State will not be able to sustain the advice that the chiefs of staff have given him, because he will lose a case in the ECJ.

Mr. Hoon: I hope that that largely sound legal advice did not cost the hon. Gentleman a great deal of money. He has criticised the basis on which the case was conducted before the ECJ, and I am not necessarily quibbling with the basis of that or of the court's conclusion. However, to sustain his argument, he should say what should have been the basis either of the argument advanced on the Government's behalf or of the court's decision. Clearly, we were successful in arguing the case before the court—we were vindicated by its ultimate decision.

The hon. Gentleman may be uncomfortable with the decision, but he has to admit that there has been significant social development on equality and that that will continue. I can see that there is some logic to the line that he is pursuing, but for me to be able to deal with it, he must say what should have been the basis of the court's decision, and so far he has not done so.

Mr. Jenkin: If the Secretary of State, who understands these matters, had been in at the start, there would have been no case, because he would have known that he would be up against it. I think that the previous Government started the case because they were trying to prove something that they did not want to accept, which is that the equal treatment directive has jurisdiction over this matter. I was criticising not the way in which the case was presented, but the basis set out in his letter and comments this afternoon. The basis of a future case will be that particular positive and negative attitudes to gender and gender stereotypes could affect group dynamics and ultimately group effectiveness. That is what he will use to justify continued discrimination in any future court case.

Mr. Hoon: Any case that arises in the future—I assure the hon. Gentleman that the Government will not look for a case or encourage it to be brought to court—will have to be argued on the basis of the existing law, which is the reason for my original intervention. It is not as if we can choose the grounds of the argument. The grounds are chosen for us according to law laid down by the European Court of Justice.

Mr. Jenkin: The right hon. Gentleman is usefully making my case for me. He will not be able to choose the law, but he has already chosen the grounds on which he will defend the case. That is why we have gone through this rigmarole of the report and him writing to me and setting out the arguments in Parliament. He is preparing to prove, in the event of another case, that he has considered all the arguments and that the discrimination is justified.

My difficulty with that phrase is that it is similar to what was used by the previous Government—I admit, mistakenly, both morally and legally—to try to deny the rights of homosexuals in the armed forces. That case went to the Strasbourg court, which dismissed an argument based on the views of members of the armed forces canvassed in the "Report of the Homosexual Policy Assessment Team" by categorising the views of the heterosexual majority effectively as equivalent to prejudice against women or racial minorities, which should not be the basis of policy. To talk about positive and negative attitudes to gender and gender stereotyping suggests that the right hon. Gentleman is basing his policy on the prejudice of the armed service men concerned.

Mr. Hoon: I emphasise categorically that the decision was not based on any kind of attitudinal view or stereotyping. The case was fought on the basis of our lawyers' understanding of what was likely to be successful, given a much more difficult equal opportunities legal basis, at the European Court of Justice or the Strasbourg court. That legal advice was vindicated because the case was won, but it was won subject to the existing law, and I repeat my earlier observation. The hon. Gentleman cannot criticise the basis on which that case was won without providing an alternative basis on which it might have been fought ultimately successfully.

Mr. Jenkin: I am probably not being 100 per cent. clear, but I am not criticising the way in which the case was handled. The Secretary of State is setting out his current case for justified discrimination. My point is that that case, which he has set out to the House, the public at large and me in his letter, will not be a sound basis for sustaining the policy that he has chosen to accept. As I said, it is wrong to rely on the known prejudices of service men—I am using the wrong words, as that sounds derogatory. It would be more correct to talk about positive and negative attitudes to gender and gender stereotyping, which I submit will be taken to be prejudices by a court at some time in the future. Moreover, because the Strasbourg court has already dismissed such reasoning in the case of homosexuality and the European Court of Justice tends to follow its lead in human rights issues, it will be increasingly difficult to defend the policy that the Secretary of State has chosen to adopt on those grounds.

Mr. Hoon: I understand the point that the hon. Gentleman makes. I may have read out my observations too quickly. I was referring to research on group dynamics, the findings of which included the fact that, whether positive or negative, the attitudes of group members to gender and gender stereotypes can affect the group's dynamic and ultimately its effectiveness. I said that the report concluded that the presence of women in small units need not affect performance detrimentally and I went on to say that, although it could not be considered a scientific assessment of group performance, in one case the mixed group performed more effectively than any single-sex group.

Experience suggests that mixed groups have a more sophisticated understanding of problems, which is drawn from the diversity of the group's background. I said that that is fine in normal circumstances and with effective management but that those circumstances do not apply in close-combat operations. I went on to say that the very different circumstances in close-combat operations meant that I could not rely upon the results of the assessments of group dynamics in reaching the difficult decision that I had to take. It was to avoid the risk that findings that applied in normal circumstances might not be applicable in close-combat, high-intensity warfare, that I reached the conclusion that I did.

Mr. Jenkin: I wonder whether the Secretary of State is beginning to dig a grave for his policy. By suggesting that group dynamics are sometimes better than single-sex groups, and by accepting that today's gender stereotyping is likely to diminish as society becomes more equal, the fundamental basis for his argument—that we do not know how the groups will function in close combat—rather begins to diminish. It may only be a matter of time before the court takes a different view.

It is very easy. All that the Secretary of State has to do—I shall give way to him again in a moment—is give me an assurance that if the legal situation begins to change, he will address it either directly in negotiations with our European partners or, if necessary, with regard to our adherence to the European convention on human rights. In the past, we made a strong case that our armed forces, like those of other nations, should not be subject to the jurisdiction of the European Court of Human Rights; that sex equality legislation should not apply directly to the armed forces.

I put it to the right hon. Gentleman that the armed forces have an exemplary attitude to equality of the sexes and to race equality. They have yet to achieve what we want on that front, but the policies are in place and legislation is not needed to improve behaviour in the armed forces. Indeed, the ethos of the armed forces is that what counts is the discipline of the chain of command, not legal sanction.

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way yet again. At the risk of encouraging him further, I repeat that the Government are bound by existing law and by case law. I listened carefully to his

[Mr. Hoon]

enunciation of what I take to be modern Conservative policy, but I wonder how he proposes to change the existing legal position to be able to deliver those policies.

Mr. Jenkin: The Secretary of State is going down an even darker alley. He says that if circumstances change, the armed forces will have had it; they will have to accept whatever ruling comes from the European Court of Justice. It would be better if the Government looked to the future, to ensure that we can protect the armed forces' combat effectiveness, and that we are not subject to a court that may not have their best interests at heart.

Mr. Hoon: I have always recognised the hon. Gentleman as being at the revolutionary end of the Conservative tendency, but he should think carefully about what he has just said. It appears that if he were in government, he would not accept judgments by the European court or, indeed, any court if he were unhappy with them.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): Change the law.

Mr. Hoon: The hon. Gentleman says that we should change the law. Perhaps he needs to think a little harder about the treaty of Rome and the way in which European Union law might change. No doubt he and, I suspect, the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin), who speaks for the Conservative party on defence matters, retain the logic of their previous position, and would leave the European Union.

Mr. Jenkin: I will not be drawn further on that matter, because that is not our policy. The right hon. Gentleman has, however, underlined the difficulties that we may face if the law develops in the way that it is likely to, even if he hopes that it does not. The Government have no policy to deal with that eventuality.

3.11 pm

Mr. Eric Joyce (Falkirk, West): We have had two learned and effective speeches. I did not agree with everything that the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) said, but he seemed to have an idea about what he was saying, and he has done a great deal of research.

I should apologise at the start, because I have an appointment and will not be here for the winding-up speeches. None the less, I wanted to take part in this important debate.

I want briefly to comment on two of the points raised by Opposition Members. The hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) raised the interesting issue of disability. I did not intend to refer to it, but the hon. Member for North Essex followed up with a reference to Douglas Bader. That was not particularly helpful; indeed, it was entirely misleading.

I am not an expert, and I may be wrong, but I suspect that there are disability issues relating to serving disabled soldiers. The Disability Rights Commission occasionally refers to the issue, and the Ministry of Defence will have to respond, because it keeps soldiers on where it can in non-combatant roles. The commission occasionally lobbies the Secretary of State for Defence, and I suspect that any discussions are rather a long way off. If and when they happen, they will probably deal with fairly marginal employments, and there might be arguments about asthma and about whether people have to leave. However, the reference to Douglas Bader was not particularly pertinent.

Mr. Gray: I had a particular constituency case in mind when I raised the issue of disability. A constituent was turned down by the Army because of a mild nut allergy, which seems absurd. I hope that the Secretary of State will enlarge a little on his policy so that I can give my constituent some hope.

Mr. Joyce: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that. I do not know a great deal about nut allergies, although the Secretary of State may well refer to them at the end of the debate. My instinct, however, is that there was a sensible reason for what happened.

I noticed that there was a frisson of excitement among Opposition Members at the mention of Europe. It is not for me to counsel them, but they should not let their judgment about the effectiveness of the armed forces be clouded by their assumptions about Europe and about all the evil that they think it brings.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, operational effectiveness is paramount in the organisation and running of our armed forces. The unique demands that we place on them mean that their norms will deviate from time to time from those in wider society. In that context, the role of equal opportunities can be misperceived, unless we are very clear about it. Several sketches in *The Guardian* and *The Daily Telegraph* earlier this week were quite funny, but they suffered from exactly such a misperception.

Equal opportunities are important to the armed services, not at the symbolic level, but at the practical level, in that the services need to recruit the best people that they can. That means not putting people out of consideration for irrational reasons, but removing impediments that might have existed historically across our society in terms of race and gender. Those are the two most relevant factors. A successful equal opportunities regime in the armed forces is ultimately needed to ensure their fighting effectiveness, as well as their ability to carry out the wide range of tasks that we have become used to them fulfilling in recent years.

What I say on gender may be fairly similar to what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, but I have arrived at it through my own reasoning. I suspect that there will be an element of difference, so I shall not simply replicate what he said, although I might back it up in some respects. At face value, the decision not to allow women to serve in teeth arms units seems sensible, based on the risk that extends from the lack of hard evidence about how mixed-gender teams perform in combat.

The Ministry of Defence clearly intends to monitor the policy and, if appropriate, to revisit it. I welcome that pragmatic approach, which does not necessarily shut the door to women in close-combat roles for ever. By chance, it reflects residual concern about wider society and combat. I say that having spoken to many of my constituents about it. I have had quite a few letters on the subject. It is not the issue on which I have had the most letters, but I do receive letters about it fairly regularly. It might be considered marginal but it is not as marginal as one might imagine. Most people would be against the idea of women serving in combat roles.

Interestingly, the full study carried out by the MOD refuted many traditional arguments often used by previous Governments against the wider employment of women. It agreed that there was an element of gender overlap up to and including the most arduous of activities. We have seen that personified recently in Captain Pip Tattersall, now the proud owner of a Royal Marine Commando green beret.

The study also considered psychological factors and decided that, although there might be gender differences, that would probably not prevent women from serving in combat roles. The document from the director of service personnel on the outcome of the study was published in May, and the part of it that struck me most was about psychological factors. It stated:

> "The report found that few of the psychological differences between men and women could be said to have a significant bearing on their respective suitability for close combat roles. Their capacity for aggression, however, was generally lower for women, who required more provocation and were more likely to fear the consequences of aggressive behaviour."

The last line caught my eye, as it read:

> "There was evidence though that this gap could be closed given sufficient social licence and provocation."

I wondered what the experimental methodology was. I had an image in mind of white-coated scientists taking a bunch of women down town for 15 pints and then poking them with a stick. How else would one give them "sufficient social licence and provocation"?

The outcome of the study orients around psychology and teamwork. In that respect, it is interesting to note that, in some teeth arms units that had been studied in the early days of gender studies, it was not uncommon or at least unknown for male soldiers to be physically unable to carry out some of the tasks, especially when they involved heavy lifting. I am thinking especially of moving artillery and high explosive shells in relation to the AS90. Essentially, such tasks could be completed by the team because the team apportioned tasks according to who was the strongest in the unit. That was an interesting early aspect of the studies that have led to what we know now.

The policy will not have enormously significant implications for manning—personning, or whatever one says—as there is little gender overlap in relation to physical capacity. Some women could pass the most stringent physical tests, but because the percentage is pretty small, it would not make up a significant part of any shortfall that might exist. In that sense, the decision not to allow women to serve in the teeth arms is probably marginal.

Whatever the current evidence tells us, however, it will be important that senior officers keep an open mind on the subject, in case new evidence comes to light. The literature survey mentioned in the report seems to represent a fairly modest form of scientific evidence. I am not an expert, but I am not aware of a huge amount of literature on the subject resulting from scientific study. Perhaps a wider survey, future studies or the experience of other countries may flag up some significant new evidence. Broadly speaking, however, the policy seems sensible, although it might be revisited in due course. I urge members of the armed services to keep their minds open about the possibility of change in the long term, should some of the other changes that have already been alluded to come to fruition. My mind is not closed on these issues.

The Ministry of Defence and the Army have clearly made enormous efforts in respect of race over the past five years. There is a welter of evidence to that effect, including several awards and warm comments from the Commission for Racial Equality. For five years, there has been year-on-year improvement in the proportion of non-white recruits, although there is still a considerable way to go. There is a great deal of documentary evidence, including reams of policy statements, the Race Equality Scheme 2002, initiatives on mainstreaming, and the Armed Forces Overarching Personnel Strategy—AFOPS. Significantly, the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 is referred to in more detail in Ministry of Defence documentation than in any other Government Department's personnel documents that I have seen. The fact that the MOD can take a new policy such as this in its stride is a clear sign that its personnel systems have come a long way in the past five or six years. On the proportion of non-white soldiers and air and naval personnel, it seems that the recent events of 11 September and thereafter created a much more difficult climate in which to reach the ambitious targets already referred to by the Secretary of State.

There is clearly a relationship between people's sense of identity, even national identity, and their preparedness to join the armed services of any particular country. In the past week, *The Guardian* has been carrying extensive reports and surveys on that subject. I noticed that it said that Muslims in Britain who come from the Indian sub-continent were more likely to refer to themselves as British or British Muslims than as anything else, which is probably encouraging in respect of their likelihood of wanting to join the armed services, and that there is a substantial increase in the number of people who describe themselves as such. That may indicate that, in spite of the events of the past few months, since 11 September, people will be more likely to join the armed forces. That is a significant factor.

I worked at the CRE for a short time, yet I still do not detect quite the enthusiasm that I would like to see from all the leaders of ethnic minority communities in encouraging their young men and women to join the services. Women from ethnic minority communities may be less likely to join the armed forces because of cultural variables, but as women make up a small minority in the Army, that probably does not affect the overall intake. If women make up 7 or 8 per cent., that proportion of the overall ethnic minority intake would be fairly small. The significant factor seems to be the extent to which community leaders and young men and women inform themselves about the significance and benefits to not only themselves, but the country, of joining the armed services.

It is a two-way street. The Government are tackling under-representation relatively successfully and as effectively as they can. The armed services are doing so in an exemplary way, as the CRE says. However, it is a two-way street and the other side have to play their part as well. Although, to an extent, they have done so recently, more could be done in that respect.

[Mr. Joyce]

Effective equal opportunities is not about making symbolic statements but about making organisations more effective by giving people as many choices as possible. We must ensure that we maximise the chances of those who work for the organisation to make that organisation effective and so that they benefit from that effectiveness themselves.

I remain unconvinced that Opposition Members perceive the matter in that way. The hon. Member for North Essex referred provocatively to Douglas Bader. If he approaches the matter from that point of view, it suggests that he may not be instinctually sympathetic to equal opportunities. A good, sensible and pragmatic equal opportunities policy will invariably help the armed forces to be more effective. That is precisely the direction that the Government are taking.

3.26 pm

Mr. Paul Keetch (Hereford): It is gratifying that you should be in the Chair, Mrs. Roe, as I remember the 12 months that you and I spent assigned to the Royal Navy as part of the parliamentary armed forces scheme. We found that particular role invaluable in understanding the armed forces of today. My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey (Sandra Gidley), who is involved in the Royal Navy scheme as you and I were, is also hoping to catch your eye and participate in the debate. *[Interruption.]* She is with the Army, in fact. She should be with the Navy—it is far better.

It is apposite that we are holding the debate this afternoon, given the Secretary of State's announcement a couple of hours ago that some of our forces are returning from Afghanistan. All of us who have an interest in the subject through our portfolio or who served as members of the armed forces are struck by the extraordinary efforts that our armed forces invest in their work and the high esteem in which they are held throughout the world. That has been the case in Afghanistan and is the case wherever they go.

Most of us are aware of the invaluable role that our armed forces play in peacekeeping as well as war fighting. I remember that when my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) returned from Sierra Leone, she glowed with the praise she had heard for the work that she had seen our armed forces doing and the genuine difference that the British had made. Recently, we saw the excellent elections that followed those efforts.

Whether in peacekeeping or war fighting, our forces perform a wide range of tasks with remarkable skill. Because they have such a remarkable role, the forces should be made up of a wide range of members of society and continue to change in an ever-changing world. One lesson that we learned from the terrible events of 11 September was that if we had had intelligence and security forces to infiltrate al-Qaeda more effectively, we might have understood that organisation better. That is another reason why our recruitment in security services should not be done in the style of James Bond films; we should recruit from members of ethnic groups in our society. That may be an extreme example of why ethnic diversity is important in our security and armed forces, but it at least highlights the need for the armed forces to reflect on the nature of our society while recruiting.

Today, the Secretary of State announced some good news about the Army. Despite measures such as the equal opportunities directives and action plans and the corporate equal opportunities goals and principles, which are worthy ideas, ethnic minorities still make up a small percentage of the armed forces. The Government figures for 2001–02 show that ethnic minority recruitment rose to 6.2 per cent. of all intake. That is a promising figure, but it includes elements of Commonwealth recruitment, which often make up a substantial part of ethnic recruitment figures. Will the Secretary of State clarify whether those figures include Commonwealth recruitment? Will he tell us what the ethnic recruitment figures for the United Kingdom are?

The Government are to be praised for improvements in the level of recruitment. It has been a rocky road. I recall commenting in 2000 on the Government's failure to meet ethnic minority recruitment targets. If they are doing so now, I will be the first to congratulate them, but the House should be regularly brought up to date on the matter. The Ministry of Defence has made some impact, but more could be done. I suggest to the Secretary of State that we consider in particular ethnic minority recruitment into the cadet forces, because that could be a good way to bring more people from our ethnic communities into our armed forces.

Turning briefly to the role of women in the armed forces, the publication of the MOD's recent document on that subject is welcome and it is right that we are debating its conclusions today. I have stated my opinion on the matter before and I shall do so again. I believe that no post in the armed forces should necessarily be closed to either male or female personnel, provided that they can meet the mental and physical requirements of the task. The Department's document made some valid points. The Liberal Democrats do not want to compromise in any way operational effectiveness or group cohesion. We understand that the demands of front-line combat are severe and we should never compromise on them, because to do so could cost lives. However, as the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Joyce) said, those issues should be kept under constant review.

The Secretary of State mentioned Captain Pip Tattersall, who completed the all arms course at Commando Training Centre Royal Marines in Lympstone and I am aware that my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and West Devon (Mr. Burnett), who served with such distinction in 40 and 42 Commando, is sitting next to me. I am glad that Captain Tattersall is pleased that she has performed that task. It goes to show how far women have come in our armed forces. Nevertheless, we still have far too few women in our armed forces. The latest figures suggest that they make up just 8.2 per cent. of personnel. Figures also suggest that there is a distinct correlation between the number of roles open to women in an individual service and the number of women who serve in that service. For example, 96 per cent. of posts in the Royal Air Force are available to women and that force has the highest proportion of women in service—10.6 per cent. The Navy, with 73 per cent. of its posts open to women, has only 8.5 per cent. and the Army, with only 70 per cent. of its posts available, has the lowest figure at 7.2 per cent. Those figures are unsurprising, but the point is clear—the more posts available to women in a service, the more women will join, and rightly so.

I want to say something about disability rights, because they were mentioned by the Conservative spokesman and we have had a debate on them. Disability is not always visible. People can be disabled in many ways—although I do not quite understand why a nut allergy should stop a person from serving—and we should not consider disability as solely concerning those who are unable to perform physical tasks. Simply being disabled should not be a bar in any way to serving in the armed forces.

There was a great discussion earlier between the Secretary of State and the shadow Secretary of State, the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin), about various court cases. In the past, the MOD has been in court or has been threatened with court on cases of basic civil liberties. That is because equal opportunities go hand in hand with equal rights.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): On the matter of physical disabilities do I take it that my hon. Friend is not resiling from his earlier point that military efficiency and fighting effectiveness are paramount?

Mr. Keetch: That is absolutely right. I am glad to repeat that nothing should in any way detract from the ability of our armed forces to do the job that they have to do. There may be some roles in our armed forces that people with some disabilities could fulfil. I do not want to go down the Douglas Bader route, but other members of the armed forces—there are some in my constituency—have returned from action disabled, some of them recently, and are considering ways in which they can continue to play a role in the armed forces. Those people are very valuable to our armed forces and we should encourage them to stay.

There have been cases of pregnant women being wrongly dismissed and of unmarried partners threatening to claim their pension rights, and recently threats have been made by the Gurkhas—at least some of them—that they will claim pension rights. Those cases have landed some bad publicity for the Ministry of Defence. I greatly appreciate the civil servants who work in the MOD and I am happy to repeat that today, but I believe that the Ministry is under incredible financial constraints imposed by the Treasury. Sometimes I suspect that those constraints lead to such cases being brought. The instances in which the Ministry of Defence is seen as, perhaps, too conservative do nothing to help our recruitment initiatives. The MOD has made an excellent effort to become an employer offering equal opportunities and equal rights not just to the serving members of our armed forces but, as the Secretary of State said, to the 100,000 or so civil servants involved in the Ministry's work.

I conclude by offering some suggestions to the Secretary of State which might help all members of our armed forces—men and women—from every ethnic background. The service family taskforce, which we supported, should have its remit extended, to allow it to look after the rights of service personnel even more closely. We must ensure that our soldiers, sailors and airmen are afforded full and equal rights within the armed forces and within the disciplinary procedures of those forces. The zero tolerance approach to bullying and harassment must be enforced and backed up with effective family services. As I have suggested in the past, there should be a family officer on every base.

If we can offer equal opportunities and equal rights to our forces, we can surely go some way towards addressing the problems of recruitment and retention that affect our—

Patrick Mercer (Newark): I bow to the hon. Gentleman's understanding of the matter, but I was under the impression that every unit already had a family officer.

Mr. Keetch: The hon. Gentleman, too, has excellent knowledge of these matters, but I do not believe that that is the case. Perhaps the Secretary of State can confirm that to both of us, either today or later in writing.

Equal opportunities and equal rights for our forces should be a matter of course. We should be able to assume it and not have to debate it. Nevertheless, I am glad that we are having this debate, because our service men and women are the most important asset that our armed forces possess. If we neglect them, we neglect our own protection.

3.36 pm

Patrick Mercer (Newark): I am sorry that I missed the early part of the debate and I apologise to those on both Front Benches. I am grateful to the Secretary of State for having brought the subject to our attention. I should like to throw some light on the comments of the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch) about disability. I assume, and he will put me right if I am wrong, that he is talking about one or two of his constituents or near constituents serving in the Special Air Services in Hereford.

That particular regiment has a different role, in that it is one of the few Army units that has a fixed base. He is right that a number of soldiers from the Special Air Services are allowed to serve on, despite, in many cases, hideous wounds and disabilities, because the base is fixed. Those troops will never deploy—they physically cannot do so—but I urge him to look at both battalions of the Light Infantry of his county regiment. I do not think that he will find anybody with severe disabilities serving in those battalions. If a ship or a battalion has to move at short notice, every person who deploys has to be operationally capable. It is slightly different in the Royal Air Force and there may be certain military exemptions. While I echo the words about making military bases available and accessible and the jobs thereon available to civil servants with disabilities, and trying to be as accommodating as possible, the matter of disability is not as simple as the hon. Gentleman might make it seem.

Mr. Keetch: The hon. Gentleman knows my constituency well—he used to live close to it. I was not referring to that regiment; I am always careful about referring to it and to its exact location. Of the constituents concerned, one was a member of the Royal Navy and the other a member of the Royal Air Force. They were going to stay in training establishments. They happened to be constituents, but they wanted to stay in training. They wanted to stay on because they could offer valuable experience to other officers who followed them. I see no reason why people who might have been

[Mr. Keetch]

injured should not continue to play their valuable roles. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would agree that we want to keep them in the armed forces.

Patrick Mercer: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for underlining my point. Such people can, rightly, serve in certain elements—fixed units in the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force and, indeed, inside the Army.

In my battalion, a Corporal Clark had his thumb shot off in Crossmaglen in the 1980s. He was able to continue to serve up to a specific rank. We kept him for as long as possible, but he could not continue to serve in a rifle section or platoon because he could not handle a firearm effectively. He eventually had to be discharged because his promotion possibilities ran out. None the less, I endorse the point about being as flexible as possible. However, it is one thing to keep under arms a soldier, sailor or airman who has bled for his or her country, and ensure that they can rightly gather their pensions. It is a different matter to recruit a service man with a disability, who will always have a restricted ability to serve in different theatres with different units. I ask for the application of a large dose of common sense to that problem.

On the comments of the hon. and gallant Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Joyce) about open-mindedness, I hope that hon. Members will forgive me if I restrict my comments to the Army, which I know best. The Army has been remarkably open-minded, especially about employing women. I refer the hon. Gentleman to the many tours that he conducted in Northern Ireland and ask him to consider the way in which the intelligence effort in battalions such as his and mine went from being a largely male domain in the 1970s to a largely female domain in the early 1980s.

In 1982, I took over as intelligence officer in west Belfast and, to my surprise, inherited a platoon of what was then called the Women's Royal Naval Service. It consisted of first-class intelligence operatives, with minds that were better attuned to retention and the analytical aspects of intelligence than those of their male equivalents. I appreciate that I am generalising and being deeply sexist.

I ask the Secretary of State to consider one or two anomalies that may have escaped his attention. The first involves females serving in the Territorial Army infantry. Several years ago, I was sufficiently lucky to be chief instructor of the platoon commander's course. I had a course for Territorial Army platoon commanders, two of whom were women. They served in units in the north and I was a little surprised when the ladies turned up; as we have heard, infantry units do not generally have women in combat roles. I checked whether the ladies should have been on the course and I found that they were platoon commanders with TA infantry battalions. There was no legislation that stated whether they should do the course.

Although both ladies were more than capable of the technical elements of being infantry platoon commanders, they could not cope with the physical difficulties of carrying an infantryman's load. Anyone who doubts those difficulties and strictures can ask the hon. Member for Falkirk, West. Those two ladies simply could not deal with them. In every other way, they were equal and sometimes superior to their male equivalents. However, they could not command infantry platoons and I therefore endorse the Secretary of State's policy, with all the provisos that have been mentioned.

I shall underline another anomaly. Although women are encouraged to serve in more roles throughout the combat arms, female recruiting faces difficulties. The Nottinghamshire Regiment and the Royal Horse Artillery are the only two units that have come to my constituency, which the Secretary of State knows well, to recruit. Neither unit is accompanied by an arm that can and will accept females. Why not? Why does not the Worcester and Sherwood Foresters Regiment have an Adjutant-General's Corps female representative or an Army Air Corps female representative to mop up the pool of ready female recruits who come forward? Young ladies always mob the soldiers who turn up in Newark. Many would make excellent soldiers. However, the lack of flexibility in the recruiting system means that the regular Army is heavily under-recruited, and many potential recruits—male and female—are often missed. I commend that to the Secretary of State's attention.

Mr. Jenkin: My hon. Friend referred to anomalies. I believe that an infantry battalion in the Royal Irish Regiment takes women. Will he explain how that fits into what he was saying, or is it another anomaly?

Patrick Mercer: I do not believe that it is an anomaly. The Royal Irish Regiment has several battalions of home-service force soldiers; in other words, battalions that are restricted to serving in Northern Ireland under that regimental cap badge. The old phrase for female soldiers serving there used to be "Greenfinches", and their conditions of service were entirely different from those of what used to be called the Women's Royal Army Corps. They were serving soldiers with a commitment to serve only at home in what used to be the Ulster Defence Regiment and is now the Royal Irish Regiment. The first battalion of the Royal Irish Regiment, which is a general service infantry battalion that is committed around the world, does not allow lady soldiers to serve in combat roles. There is a clear distinction between the two that is eminently workable.

I may be at odds with my hon. Friends on the Conservative Benches, but I believe that homosexuality in the armed forces has been heavily mishandled. Others who have served may disagree with me, but in my 25 years as an infantry officer—I must measure my words carefully—I came across homosexuality several times, although I would not say that it was widespread. It did not seem to cause a problem or threaten discipline. Of course, it is different with the more overt and aggressive forms of homosexuality that are so often thrust in our faces on television. Those forms that I saw in the armed forces never gave me cause for concern in my service. What gave me cause for concern was the way in which the armed forces dealt with it. They created a problem where none existed. I would have preferred them to take a more open-minded and flexible approach to homosexuality and say, "Fine, if that's the way it is, so be it. We will not stand in the way on this, because it does not undermine our operational effectiveness."

Mr. Burnett: What would be the hon. Gentleman's approach if that activity alone, in one individual or others, was undermining military efficiency?

Patrick Mercer: That is a pertinent question. The answer is simple: in his time with the Royal Marine Corps, the hon. Gentleman will have come across difficult sexual relationships springing up between officers and female soldiers.

Mr. Burnett: To be honest, I did not, but there we are.

Patrick Mercer: I am surprised. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman must have come across infidelity in the case of married soldiers.

Mr. Burnett: Yes.

Patrick Mercer: The commanding officer's firm and stringent hand dealt with any heterosexual relationships that caused a problem. If homosexual relationships cause a problem, the commanding officer would deal with it in the same way.

I take much the same approach on racism. The Secretary of State will understand the mixed racial nature of the county of Nottinghamshire. The Nottinghamshire Regiment in which I served reflected that. In the 1970s, my battalion had a large number of racial minorities, Englishmen all, who served without any difficulty. During my brief period in command of my battalion, I was delighted that all five of my company sergeant majors were black. That did not cause a problem.

I commend the work of the ethnic recruiting team that has put so much work into, and has had so much success in, recruiting ethnic minorities to certain parts of the Army where ethnic recruitment is difficult. It is not necessarily because of prejudice, but it is difficult. I point to some highland regiments where ethnic recruits are simply thin on the ground. I also point to the Brigade of Guards where, rightly or wrongly, there has been a perception that there is ingrained racism.

Mr. Joyce: In pictures of the Royal Scots marching through Edinburgh about a month ago, there was a striking number of non-white faces among them. There has been a substantial advance, although I would not call the Royal Scots a highland regiment.

Patrick Mercer: I will come to the point about recruiting in a moment. The hon. and gallant Gentleman is absolutely right. There have been some extremely flexible and far-reaching approaches to recruiting. I would applaud the way that, despite the highly prejudicial and distasteful question at Prime Minister's questions on Wednesday, our regiments of foot guards and household cavalry now show a considerable number of coloured faces among their ranks—and quite right too. I look forward to seeing many more coloured faces in their officers' messes. That has already happened and it will doubtless continue.

Clearly, the first battalion of the Royal Scots has fully embraced the idea of recruiting from the Commonwealth, due to its huge recruiting difficulties in the past. Anyone in this Chamber who goes to a passing out parade anywhere in the British Isles will see a number of ethnic recruits from the Commonwealth. In many cases, English is not their first language, but all the young men and women I have seen have been absolutely first class. I endorse that and I praise the work of the recruiting group, for once, for having achieved it.

I have one question: if we approach the recruitment of Commonwealth members in that way, why do we not try to make up the 8,000 or so shortfall in our Army from members of the Ghurkha regiments? They are Nepalese people who are clearly not necessarily Commonwealth members but they are ready, willing and able. There is no prejudice against them: on the contrary, their reputation stands high. If some military salaries went back to Nepal, it would help not only this country; it would considerably help Nepal in its current difficulties.

In conclusion, I welcome the policy that the Secretary of State for Defence has put forward. I have my reservations about it and I believe that it contains some anomalies. I should be grateful for any answers that he can give me. I would be chary, however, about calling the forces narrow-minded. With their customary flexibility, they have approached the problems that I have described with great energy. For the most part, they have conquered them or are in the process of doing so. They have my warm congratulations and, as ever, my admiration.

3.53 pm

Sandra Gidley (Romsey): My hon. Friend the Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch) has outlined the party position, but I hope that the Chamber will be indulgent if I present a much more personal view. I do not claim to be an expert on gender in the armed forces, but I thought that it might be useful if I described how my opinions have changed since I took part in the armed forces parliamentary scheme. I was delighted to do that with the Army because it is a wonderful organisation. I do not like boats, which is why I did not choose the Navy. Before I recount my experiences I should like to say how impressed I was by the document "Women in the Armed Forces". It laid out the facts in an analytical way, which showed how much work had gone into examining the issues and how much care had been taken to present a range of them.

At the beginning of the year my starting premise was a bit feminist: "Anything you can do, I can do better" or at least "I can do it just as well as you, if you are male." I have a reputation in some quarters as a bit of a women's libber, so it is not surprising that I started with the attitude that women should be able to do everything. The armed forces parliamentary scheme has modified my views. I hope that people will not say, "Jolly good thing, that scheme, if it gets the girls to come to their senses." I hope that that attitude is not prevalent today.

[Sandra Gidley]

It might be helpful if I describe some of my recent personal experiences, which may put my comments into perspective. Early in the scheme, I visited the Army training school at Winchester and saw recruits undergoing their 12-week training. I was surprised when the Minister said that only 20 per cent. of recruits are female, as the gender balance on the course that I followed was about 50 per cent. I realised that I was working with the Adjutant-General's Corps, which employs a large number of women in clerical and administrative roles. It was clear to the average observer that, in general—one always has to be general in these cases—the men were coping much better with the physical demands of assault courses, for example. It also struck me powerfully that a lot of team building was going on; people were supporting the weaker members who, in some cases, although not invariably, were women, because they realised that ultimately it was a team effort.

I will sidetrack slightly and say that throughout my two days with the course, I was accompanied by a female captain who impressed on me her view that, during her time in the Army, she had not been subjected to discrimination. She was a mother, and was married to another soldier. She said that the Army ensured that in such families there would never be a time when both parents would be separated from the child on an unaccompanied posting. That may be unofficial, and I am not sure that I am supposed to have said it, but if that is the practice, I wholeheartedly support it because it means that the Army is reacting realistically to the practicalities of life.

Another key factor at the start of the scheme was that from day one the Army left us in no doubt about one thing. It used one word a lot, which I have since learnt underpins everything that it does. The word was "win", which should be blindingly obvious, but it takes a while to get to grips with the culture. I realised that this was serious stuff. When face to face with the enemy, people have to win, they must have that mentality and it must underpin everything that they do. There can be no failures, and the Army is highly trained and highly motivated to achieve that aim.

I am a services daughter, so I thought that I knew a reasonable amount about the Army, but the modern Army has changed completely. Twenty years ago, a soldier could enlist and it was feasible that, like my father, he could spend 24 years in the armed forces and never see any action, even in a support role. That is no longer so.

I did not change my views very much until I spent some time with the Second Royal Tank Regiment in Fallingbostel. It was great fun; they let the MPs lose and we were allowed to drive Challenger 2s and fire them. I wondered about the wisdom of it before I did it. Some of the chaps on the scheme got rather excited and talked about boys' toys and I thought, "They could be girls' toys too; let us not have any of this." The reality is that it is easy to drive a tank and incredibly easy to fire it and hit the target, so I have no truck with the argument that women cannot take on those roles.

Patrick Mercer: Did the hon. Lady get a chance to live for 48 hours closed down inside a Challenger tank?

Sandra Gidley: I am coming to that.

I asked the tank crews how long they would expect to be cooped up in one of those things and they said that eight to 12 hours was the longest that they had ever experienced, but that it could be longer in a war situation. It was rather unpleasant and stuffy, but I have no doubt that I could put up with the conditions by myself or with a group of women. We women are made of tough stuff. However, I am not sure that I would like to be in a Challenger 2 tank with three men for that length of time. That would present problems. I do not intend to go into the fine details: people can use their imagination.

I do not want to dwell on the issue because I shall return to the physical aspects of war, but the key factor is that, although a woman can easily fire and drive a tank, any member of a tank team must be capable of taking on any of the other roles, which include loading ammunition—possibly over prolonged periods—and replacing the parts of a tank track. Such tasks are physically demanding. A minority of women could meet the physical demands, but I was struck by the statement in the report "Women in the Armed Forces" that

> "A review of female recruits entering the Army in 1999 showed that if current selection standards were applied retrospectively, only 0.1% of those applying would have reached the standard for entry to the Infantry or RAC. Of trained female soldiers, 1% would reach the standard."

We are talking about a small proportion of women.

For the reasons I highlighted earlier, mixed tank crews are a non-starter. I even considered the possibility of all-female tank crews—if one could find women with the physical strength and stamina to perform all the roles—but that is pie in the sky if one thinks things through to their logical conclusion. It is unlikely in a war that one would have a neat number of women to fit into a tank and, in any case, one does not want to be thinking about such issues in such situations. I have therefore decided, reluctantly, that the practicalities militate against women being used in that way, even though I fundamentally agree with equal opportunities and believe that there should be no barriers as long as women can meet the physical and mental requirements.

That brings me to the question of attitudes, which ultimately leads to the thorny problem of group cohesion, which many hon. Members have touched on today. Before people misunderstand my remarks, I should emphasise that the vast majority of people I encountered on the scheme were open, keen to discuss the issue and unfailingly generous in spirit. The Army seems the last bastion of old-fashioned gentlemanly manners; I have never come across so many well-mannered men in my life.

When I was discussing the matter—mainly with men but sometimes with women—three lines of argument were often advanced. The first argument was that women would not be able to put up with the physical conditions. I think that some could. However, I was very struck in that regard by a piece written by the hon. Member for Watford (Claire Ward) about her time with the armed forces parliamentary scheme—it seems to be a trend. She had asked to join the Royal Marines and they arranged for her to accompany them on an exercise in the jungle in Belize. She describes how physically close everybody was and how there was no escape from the group; she painted a vivid picture. She went on to say:

> "This was an exercise, but the reality of combat can be far worse. With a real enemy in close proximity, troops must live as inconspicuously as possible. The space they occupy may be only a few feet square, yet it is their space. Space to live, to observe, to eat and to do what nature requires. They must understand and respect their fellows. In such cramped spaces, they are even taught how to hold a bag while another defecates into it. They must have no qualms at all. This is man at his most raw and most primitive. But that is war."

She goes into more detail and says at the end:

> "Women, frankly, cannot be part of that when it is at its most intense and raw."

Despite what we say in a politically correct manner, I concur wholeheartedly with the conclusion of the hon. Member for Watford.

Mr. Burnett: I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way because she is making as powerful a case as the hon. Member for Watford (Claire Ward) made in her admirable article. My only operational experience was in the far and middle east, and although no one held a bag for me, the levels of intimacy were such that it would make life impossible to have mixed front-line troops deployed in such circumstances. Does my hon. Friend agree?

Sandra Gidley: I do agree. Those who know me well will know how much it has pained me to come to these conclusions.

The second argument, which has been put forward on occasion, but by no means universally, was something that people have often preferred to ignore. It was put to me on several occasions that women in a minority can become a focus for the attention of men and can be distracting. That seems to be problematic, as it would have an impact on group cohesion. It reminded me of when I was at school. I attended an old-fashioned all-girls school, which did not think that girls should do physics. It arranged for me to go to the boys school down the road to take A-level physics. One girl among 600 testosterone-fuelled boys creates quite a stir, and I was a focus for attention. However, in an average comprehensive where boys and girls work side by side, they do not take a blind bit of notice of each other. Is not part of the problem the fact that women are still a rarity in such situations? If the imbalances are addressed, that factor will disappear.

The third argument, which is commonly held, is that when it comes to it, we do not know if women will be able to kill. I could answer flippantly that there are plenty of women in jail for murder, but that is not the issue. We are talking about a war situation and must think carefully about whether, when push comes to shove, they are up to it. I repeat what was said earlier. The "Women in the Armed Forces" report stated that

> "given social licence and enough provocation, the gap between male and female aggression could be closed."

I was also struck by the fact that the Minister said that the results of the group dynamic studies could not be extrapolated. Why was that? In the 21st century, with all the techniques that we have at our disposal, we must be able to find the answer.

Patrick Mercer: As a matter of curiosity, what is the hon. Lady's view about the all-female Russian sniper units that operated during the second world war, especially give that the highest scoring Russian sniper at the siege of Sebastopol was a lady?

Sandra Gidley: I do not have a great knowledge of that incident. As I said, I am a bit of a beginner in this field, but it is proven that women have the skills. The report says that the skills exist and that mixed groups perform well. However, before we move ahead, we must answer to our satisfaction the fundamental question of how mixed groups will work in a mixed Army.

Mr. Burnett: My hon. Friend is hitting on the solution. In an intervention, the hon. Member for Newark (Patrick Mercer) spoke about Russian troops in the second world war. Some Russian tank regiments were not mixed, but female only, and they proved to be brave, distinguished and effective.

Sandra Gidley: I have to agree. I would love to know how well mixed groups perform under pressure, but evidence suggests that all-female groups—occasionally they are not practical as I explained earlier—can perform well. Will the Minister investigate further what ultimately will happen in the group situation and reflect on whether all-female units can be used, as long as all their members comply with the full range of physical and mental requirements?

4.11 pm

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): We have had an interesting debate this afternoon and I hope that it receives wider coverage than the depleted ranks, particularly on the Secretary of State's side of the Chamber, might suggest—

Mr. Hoon: It is three-all.

Mr. Howarth: I remind the right hon. Gentleman that he has three times the number of infantry in his party that we do. Clearly, there are signs of defence cuts on his side of the Chamber.

As I said, our debate was useful and we heard some well-informed contributions. The hon. Member for Romsey (Sandra Gidley) who serves, like my hon. Friend the Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) and I, on the armed forces parliamentary scheme, remarked that the Army is the last bastion of old-fashioned manners. I hope that the Army will take that as she intended—as a profound compliment at a time when manners are in short supply elsewhere. Some of the old-fashioned values under threat should be enduring values. They certainly contribute to the professionalism and superb skill of our armed forces, to which the Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for North Essex and the whole Chamber paid tribute this afternoon. Results in Afghanistan were no accident: they were brought about by the adherence of Her Majesty's armed forces to a set of standards and values that are enduring but, I fear, under threat.

Sandra Gidley: I want it put on record that my comment was intended as a compliment. Occasionally,

[Sandra Gidley]

good manners can seem patronising, but I have encountered many gentlemen who have retained good manners and have the highest respect for women. I often wish that more men in other walks of life would follow their example.

Mr. Howarth: I am glad that the hon. Lady has put that on the record. I had understood from the outset that she intended her remark to be a compliment.

I shall not rehearse the speeches of other contributors to the debate. However, I was surprised to hear the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch) say that the Army should not contain many James Bonds. I have always thought that James Bond was, in some respects, a good role model for the armed forces. That sort of derring-do military enterprise has a valuable role to play in our armed forces.

Mr. Keetch: The hon. Gentleman will see in tomorrow's *Hansard* that I was talking about the security forces, especially their ability to infiltrate organisations such as al-Qaeda in response to 11 September. I am sure that he will agree that James Bond might not have been the best operative to send to infiltrate al-Qaeda.

Mr. Howarth: I am not sure that the hon. Gentleman's original remark was right. All I can say is that those who are stationed not a million miles from his constituency have made a significant contribution to the battle to win hearts and minds.

The essence of the debate this afternoon has centred on ethnic minority recruiting and the role of women in our armed forces. The ethnic minorities recruiting unit for the Army is based in my constituency of Aldershot. I have met its representatives and pay tribute to their work. It has an important role to play, but I hope, equally, that we are careful to ensure that we are not completely obsessed by targets to the detriment of what the Secretary of State set out as our key objective, which is to ensure the combat effectiveness of our armed forces. That must be the guiding principle and the priority, and other things must be tailored to meet it.

The Secretary of State's announcement on the role of women in our armed forces, and the documentation that he released on 22 May, inspired today's debate. It is important to make the point that women have always played a key role in our armed forces. The idea that the role of women in our armed forces is new is simply not true. Along with countless thousands of other women during the second world war, my mother served in various capacities in uniform, not least in the operations room of RAF Coltishall as a plotter—one of those ladies pushing billiard-type cues across a map of the North sea. That was a valuable role that my mother and others like her played during the war. She was also a mechanic. Thank God she did not get too near important components of aeroplanes to do much damage, although women were also involved in physical activity in aircraft engineering during the second world war.

A distinguished constituent of mine was in Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps—a QA, for short. She played an important role on D-day plus six during the D-day landings. She was in the front line, but she was not armed with a bayonet, commanding or serving in a tank: she was a nurse. Another constituent is a modern-day QA who served in the Falklands conflict. She told me that the first casualties were treated by male nurses, but the morale of the troops shot up when the female nurses arrived. Women have a role to play as nurses in our armed forces that should not be underestimated. In our drive to try to make the armed forces reflect society, it is dangerous to ignore the roles that men and women play in different aspects of the armed services.

As my hon. Friend the Member for North Essex made clear at the outset, we welcome the Secretary of State's decision most warmly. However, I remind the Chamber that, in an interview with *The Times* on 2 October 2000, the Secretary of State said:

> "Women must be treated as equals at every level. . . . Women are already serving in frontline jobs in the Armed Forces, with artillery units, as fighter pilots and in warships, which means they are just as likely to be in a position to kill people in combat as men are. That would be the same if they had an infantry role."

Greater joy is there in heaven over the one sinner that repenteth. I do not suggest that the Secretary of State is a sinner, but he has clearly heard the arguments of the chiefs of staff that the hon. Member for Romsey articulated. We welcome that change of heart. However, he could have acknowledged at the outset that military judgment had to form the basis of his ultimate decision. Why spend so much time and money and distract military planners in dealing with the issue when he concludes that military judgment was right all along? The Chief of the Defence Staff said that to have made any other decision would have resulted in an irresponsible experiment. The common-sense view has prevailed, and I welcome that—it is important to ensure that common sense prevails.

As the hon. Member for Romsey mentioned, there are physical aspects to serving in the armed forces. I see young girls and older women involved with the Royal Engineers at Gibraltar barracks in my constituency. Sometimes I marvel at their ability to lift large ammunition boxes and huge girders and I wonder what that is doing to their physical health. Interestingly, in his letter, the Secretary of State made the point that each of the services has in place

> "demanding, gender-free, task related physical tests for the roles in question. The study identified that approximately 1 per cent. of serving female soldiers and 0.1 per cent. of female Army applicants could nevertheless be expected to reach the required standards."

In other words, a very tiny minority. We should not be obsessed with sex equality at the expense of combat effectiveness, as the Secretary of State has said.

I shall now turn to an issue that my hon. Friend the Member for North Essex dealt with at length. I shall not do that, but will simply reinforce the point that he made about the judgment that caused him to review the position. As he says,

> "The Sex Discrimination Act (1975),"

which was passed by a Labour Government,

> "allows the Armed forces to exclude women from those posts where the military judgement is that the employment of women would undermine and degrade combat effectiveness."

That was the position of the Labour Government of the day, and the policy was upheld by the European Court of Justice. However, that ignores the developments that have taken place since 1975. The British Government had a policy that determined how we should treat our armed forces—a key issue of national security. Originally, those questions of national security and defence were regarded as being far removed from the treaty of Rome, which related to trade and economic matters. However, as the scope of European Community law has expanded, so the extent of its intrusion into the functions of the armed forces and national security matters has increased. The court rejected not only our submissions, but those of the French Government, suggesting that matters concerning the conduct and discipline of members of the armed forces relevant to national security were outside the scope of the treaty of Rome.

Sovereign Governments are now subject to the will of the European Court of Justice on essential matters of national security. It will decide whether our essential national security is at stake, not the Secretary of State. That is dangerous. My hon. Friend the Member for North Essex pressed the Secretary of State to say how far he could resist if there were a challenge. Essentially, the Secretary of State acknowledged that under EC law we had no defence whatever. We basically have to roll over and accept it.

As others have pointed out, the manner in which the Secretary of State accepted the policy of the chiefs of staff opened the door to a further challenge. Immediately after he announced his policy, the Equal Opportunities Commission announced that it might challenge it. Indeed, the report that I read suggests that

"a new legal challenge is widely expected".

In a sideswipe at the EOC, I want to say that that reaction is ludicrous. Its deputy chairman, Jenny Watson, said that the EOC still believed that

"automatically excluding women from armed combat posts is not the right approach and that mixed units would not have a negative impact on operational effectiveness".

I hope that she gets a copy of the debate. If the Secretary of State does not send her one, I might do so, so that she is aware that hon. Members throughout the House do not agree with the policy and do not expect a challenge.

I am bound to have a swipe at the hon. Member for Hereford who, like the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Joyce), wants to have it both ways. He is reported to have said that the rigorous standards required for front-line roles should not be compromised,

"But as a matter of principle, no post should be closed to male or female personnel provided they can meet physical and mental requirements of the task."

Perhaps he was wrongly quoted. Today, he said that we did not want to compromise our armed forces and that the matter should be under review, but recognised that that could put them at risk. Either a policy is right and changing it would put our troops at risk, or it is wrong; he wants it both ways. He should not try to placate his Army constituents, and also be nice and cuddly with the feminist vote. Sitting on the fence ain't going to work. Our armed forces will expect only an uncompromising stand from all of us in the House.

Mr. Keetch: In what has been a good-natured and well-balanced debate, it is sad that the hon. Gentleman cannot resist petty sideswipes at the Opposition party that has a higher percentage of its Back Benchers present than the official Opposition do. My party's policy is clear. As a matter of principle, we believe that no post should be closed to male or female applicants. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey (Sandra Gidley) rightly pointed out, there should be no diminution in the standards required. That is not sitting on the fence, but accepting the facts and understanding them.

As for keeping that position under review, I would have thought that the Conservative party more than any other ought to recognise that policies sometimes need to be reviewed and brought up to date. If it does not understand that, Conservative Members will be on the Opposition Benches for ever.

Mr. Howarth: Of course I intended to provoke the hon. Gentleman, but he has condemned himself out of his own mouth. He said that he wanted to have it both ways. He should go and have a cup of tea with the hon. Member for Romsey. She will put him right, as she clearly has a grasp of the matter. All his time in the armed forces parliamentary scheme has not done him as much good as the hon. Lady's time has done her. It has been a good-natured debate. I am not being ill-natured by saying that I disagree with the hon. Gentleman. For goodness' sake, this is Parliament; we are entitled to differences of view, and I am expressing mine. I think that the hon. Gentleman is dangerously wrong. He seems to want to have his cake and eat it.

Time marches on and I know that we are anxious not to delay the Secretary of State. I understand that he has been in Bulgaria, and I hope that he had as good a visit as I did when I went there with the Defence Select Committee. Perhaps we can have a word after our debate on that country's prospects for NATO membership.

I conclude as I started by casting a note of caution. Today, on the Floor of the House, we paid tribute to our armed forces for their professionalism in Afghanistan. I do not apologise for repeating it, but that professionalism, that happy outcome, in which they suffered no causalities, was not achieved by accident. It was achieved because our armed forces recognise, as their political masters have tended to recognise, that they are not a microcosm of society. They are not supposed to be a reflection of society. It is their job to protect society, and in doing so they may need to be treated differently from other organisations.

As my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Newark (Patrick Mercer) knows only too well, the armed forces operate to very high standards. Indeed, the recently produced document entitled "Values and Standards of the British Army" sets them out; they include selfless commitment, courage, discipline, integrity, loyalty and respect for others. Those qualities are not universally to be seen in organisations in our country, whether in the public or the private sectors, but they are to be seen every day of the week in our armed forces.

[Mr. Howarth]

If the ethos of our armed forces were to be attacked—because people did not like the way that they dress, because they did not like the division between officers, non-commissioned officers and other ranks, or because they did not like the way in which certain roles were retained only for men—it would do huge damage. As *The Daily Telegraph* said:

> "once institutional cultures are undermined, they can almost never be replaced."

We play with this issue at our peril. We should recognise that the combat effectiveness of our armed forces is the key determining factor. In close-quarters combat, the bonding between a group of men is something very special; it is a unique element in the task that we give to our armed forces, who risk making the ultimate sacrifice for the job that they undertake every day of the week. If we lose those values and that culture, we shall no longer have armed forces of whom the Secretary of State will be able speak as he did today at the Dispatch Box, when he paid them such a fulsome and richly deserved tribute.

4.33 pm

Mr. Hoon: We have had an interesting and valuable debate, which has understandably concentrated on women in close-combat roles, and their role in the services generally. We have also touched on efforts to increase recruitment from ethnic minority communities.

We heard a number of thoughtful speeches. In particular, my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Joyce), who apologises for his absence for the winding-up speeches, made a thoughtful and thorough speech, drawing on his experience. So, in a sense, did the hon. Member for Romsey (Sandra Gidley). From their respective experiences, both hon. Members came to the same conclusions. The hon. Member for Romsey asked whether it would be possible to conduct further investigations into the impact of group dynamics and the role of mixed groups and I see no difficulty with that. Indeed, I expect that such investigations will be necessary given the legal requirement to conduct further reviews, and I shall mention the legal background in more detail in a moment. I certainly see the need to discuss further investigations along the same lines with the Equal Opportunities Commission.

The hon. Member for Newark (Patrick Mercer) made some excellent points about recruitment and brought his usual common sense to bear in seeking to ensure that our approach is as wide as possible. The Government are committed to improving recruitment from all walks of life, and I will ensure that his suggestions are followed up.

The hon. Gentleman also mentioned the Territorial Army. Notwithstanding the potential anomalies to which he referred, the essential policy is that a woman will not be selected to fill a battlefield role in which she cannot serve as a member of the regular armed forces. The historical background to that was largely exposed in the exchange between the hon. Gentleman and the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman. It is important that we are consistent in our treatment of reserves in close-combat front-line positions and in non-close combat activities.

The hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch) made several points about ethnic minority recruitment, and I should emphasise that, with one important qualification, our figures do not include Commonwealth recruits. They include Commonwealth citizens who travel to the United Kingdom by their own means and who are recruited here. They do not, for example, include Fijians—they are often used to illustrate this point—who are enlisted in a deliberate recruiting effort in Fiji. The real test is whether people are part of the British labour market when they are recruited or whether, as in my example, they are recruited abroad.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about families officers, and I can confirm that not all services have dedicated officers. The Royal Navy has no one with that title, but there are dedicated trained people with similar roles among naval personnel. The Royal Air Force has full-time community workers and social workers with equivalent responsibilities. Only the Army has dedicated families officers with that title. Most units have officers who are dedicated to that role, although it may be combined with other duties in some smaller units. Nevertheless, the function is carried out.

I shall risk provoking Opposition Front-Bench Members on matters European by setting out the legal background to the European Court decision, because they both raised it. The hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) largely set out the position in his concluding speech. The Sex Discrimination Act 1975 allows the armed forces to exclude women from posts when the military judgment is that employing them would undermine and degrade combat effectiveness. That was considered in the European Court of Justice judgment in the case of Sirdar *v.* the Army Board and the Secretary of State. Relevant European Community law upheld the position that the equal treatment directive did not preclude the exclusion of women from certain posts, where such exclusions were necessary and appropriate to ensure operational effectiveness. That was, however, subject to a legal requirement periodically to assess the position to decide whether a derogation from the general scheme of the directive could be maintained in the light of social developments. The directive places the onus on member states to keep such derogations under review. It would be for the Government, not the European Court of Justice, to decide when such a review should take place. Clearly, however, there is a legal obligation on the Government and any future Government of any other political persuasion to conduct such a review.

At the risk of further provoking Opposition Front-Bench Members, the difficulty for them is that we have a legal regime to deal with, which successive Governments have signed up to, accepted and, I assume, agreed with, and which they would have to apply in those circumstances. Although both Conservative Front-Bench Members have huffed and puffed about it, they will have to accept the law as applied by the European Court of Justice. Forgive me for stating the obvious, but it was a Conservative Government who signed up to that.

Mr. Jenkin: I am not disagreeing with the right hon. Gentleman. He is absolutely correct. In fact, he is reinforcing the point. It is not up to the Government to review the situation. It will be up to the Government to defend the next case that someone brings, which will be funded by the taxpayer and the Equal Opportunities Commission. That is the irony of the situation.

I remember the Barber judgment, which threatened to wreak havoc with our pensions industry. The result was an intergovernmental agreement, agreed with the Council of Ministers, and an amendment to the law, so that the effects of the Barber judgment were limited. If we head towards losing a case on sex equality in the armed forces, I would expect the Government to go to the Council of Ministers and seek an amendment to the law, at the very least.

Mr. Hoon: Let us hope that we do not get into that situation. In a flourish criticising the Liberal Democrats, the hon. Member for Aldershot said that we had the freedom to express our views in Parliament. No one can argue with that, but it is the working assumption of Parliament that Her Majesty's Opposition seek to replace Her Majesty's Government, so commenting on policy is not enough. The Opposition must be able to form policies that they would be able to implement in the, admittedly unlikely, event of them being elected to government. I have heard nothing from Opposition Front-Bench Members that leads me to suspect that they have a policy on this subject. I accept the force of some of their criticisms, but there is a real difference between making informed criticisms and having a policy that could, one day, be implemented, however remote a possibility that may be.

Mr. Keetch: Does the Secretary of State recall the detailed policy paper on defence that I sent him from the Liberal Democrats? He may not have agreed with our paper, but has he received a policy paper on defence from the Conservative party since the previous general election?

Mr. Hoon: If I have, I do not remember it. I know that there are difficulties on matters European for the Opposition Front-Bench Members here today. Having tried hard to confuse themselves over European issues, I do not want to provoke them further, but I am happy to give way, if they are still anxious to pursue their psychological difficulties on European matters.

Mr. Jenkin: The only discovery that we have made this afternoon is that the Secretary of State does not have a policy. Until I mentioned the Barber judgment, he had no idea what he would do if he got into legal difficulties on this matter.

The contribution of the hon. Member for Romsey (Sandra Gidley) was extremely effective. Her arguments about combat effectiveness were stronger than the somewhat technical arguments about gender stereotyping.

Mr. Hoon: That, of course, formed the basis of my decision, so we all agree on that at least.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hoon: I had not realised that only one of the Opposition Front-Bench Members had spoken.

Mr. Howarth: Obviously my hon. Friend the Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) has dealt with the fundamental principle of the Sirdar case. However, the intrusion of the European Court into our arrangements has forced us to take a different view. My hon. Friend has offered the Secretary of State a way out in the event of another challenge.

Given that the right hon. Gentleman accepts that he has a legal obligation to review, how does he intend to fulfil that obligation? Does he intend that the periodic review will be annual, bi-annual or quinquennial? Perhaps, as a lawyer, he can tell us whether the European Court itself has the power to check up on what reviews he is undertaking. We cannot simply leave it hanging in the air that there is a liability to review without the Secretary of State telling us how he intends to meet that liability.

Mr. Hoon: I made it clear that the obligation to conduct a review and the timing is a matter for the Government and not for the European Court of Justice. We have just concluded a thorough review, which both Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen criticised because of its cost and the amount of time that it took. However, I hope that they at least accept that it was thorough and presumably, therefore, satisfies our legal obligations in that respect. My judgment is that a further review would be necessary only when appropriate and when the Government of the day had judged that sufficient time had elapsed to make that necessary.

I reaffirm the Government's commitment to making the armed forces more representative of the community that they serve. It is vital that we do this, not just because of the difficulties that we face in achieving full manning in an increasingly competitive market but because it is right that we should do so.

We are committed to rooting out unlawful discrimination of any sort and ensuring that every member of our armed forces, regardless of race, ethnic origin, religion, gender, social background or sexual orientation, has the opportunity that they deserve to make a full success of their career.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at fourteen minutes to Five o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 25 June 2002

[SIR ALAN HASELHURST *in the Chair*]

Education (Cities)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Joan Ryan.]*

9.30 am

Mr. Stephen O'Brien (Eddisbury): I am grateful to Mr. Speaker for granting me this opportunity to debate education, which is of the highest importance to pupils, parents, teachers, governors, local communities and the country at large. The title of the debate was chosen deliberately because the country and the Government must get education right in the cities, which contain most of the population and the greatest spread of economic and social living circumstances. If they do not, what hope is there for the education of children who live in all the constituencies?

Like all my hon. Friends who carry the education brief for the Conservative party, I am a parent. Since being elected, I have made education a priority, and I served on the Select Committee on Education and Skills—formerly the Select Committee on Education and Employment—and on its Education Sub-Committee until assuming Whip responsibilities for the Opposition Front-Bench education team.

I welcome the Minister for School Standards to his new role, and I pay tribute to his predecessor, who is now the Minister with responsibilities for e-commerce and competitiveness. Despite our common and contemporaneous university college background, we had widely diverging political opinions. Those were displayed not least during consideration in Committee of the flawed and centralising Education Bill, in which the present Minister was also involved. The former Minister was well into his stride, but, somewhat extraordinarily, the Prime Minister peremptorily shuffled him off to look after e-commerce.

When last in power, the Conservatives introduced many excellent measures to improve education provision, but we did not get everything right. However, despite the Labour Government's electoral rhetoric and spin, the situation that they inherited was considerably better for children, families and teachers than what we have now, after they have been in power for more than five years. To substantiate that, let us consider the evidence.

On GCSEs, there is now a widening gap between the best and worst-performing local education authorities in England. The Department's figures are based on the GCSE achievements of 15-year-olds who gained five or more A* to C grades in each English LEA by the end of 2000–01. All the worst-performing LEAs are city configured and, in terms of the number of children, the gap between the best and the worst increased significantly, from 25 per cent. to 26.3 per cent. between 1996–97 and 2000–01. That proves that the most deprived areas and the most vulnerable children are being left behind because of the Government's failure to deliver.

Taking those same measures, we find that all of England's cities fall far below the Government's 2002 national learning target of 50 per cent., and that excludes special schools. The figure was only 31 per cent. for Nottingham, 32 per cent. for Manchester and 35 per cent. for Liverpool. The last two cities are, of course, in the north-west, in which my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) and I have a direct interest. The figure was 34 per cent. for inner London's Hackney and 43 per cent. for Sheffield, and even the Secretary of State's own LEA, Birmingham, achieved only 42 per cent. Disturbingly, the average in her constituency of Yardley was a mere 29.5 per cent. At the end of 2001, the average in the Minister's constituency of South Shields was 35.4 per cent.—down from a seriously under-performing 37.6 per cent. in 1999. Labour has been in control of the LEA for 30 years, and the area has had a Labour Member of Parliament for 60 years.

In 1997, the Government relied heavily on their promise to reduce class sizes. On 1 May this year, however, the evidence that I have cited compelled even Matthew Taylor of the Institute for Public Policy and Research—a think tank that is not unknown to the Minister or for its new-Labour leanings—to tell the Press Association:

> "I think the Government made a mistake in 1997 and that was the class size pledge. Reducing class sizes from 32 to 30 makes no difference at all. Nonetheless, I think the money should have gone to the schools with the worst problems and should have massively reduced class sizes to those of the independent sector. We know from US research that it would have made a difference."

That is the line that should be taken. In areas of worst under-performance, the Government should aim for class sizes in line with those in the independent sector; substance, not headlines, is needed in the worst-achieving areas of our cities.

Why am I, a Member with a predominantly rural constituency, taking such an interest? Apart from my broad concerns about education, in Eddisbury, the principal town of Winsford has some wards with the characteristics of an inner city. There is significant economic and social deprivation. I want cities to do better so that my three Winsford wards can be measured on the same basis, and can qualify for the support that is given to areas with the worst education problems in the country. They do not currently get that because of the sparsity factor—the relative prosperity and educational achievement of other areas of Cheshire counts unfairly against them. Winsford needs and deserves, but does not yet get, a sure start programme similar to that up the road in Warrington. Imagine how much worse the unfairness will be if county councils are killed off by the Government as they seek to make real the Deputy Prime Minister's ghastly dream of English regional government. If the north-east is the first area to be so established, South Shields will come off even worse than it does now, as will Eddisbury if the north-west, heaven forbid, follows suit.

For further evidence of the Government's failure to deliver—despite their much-trumpeted March 1999 excellence in cities programme, another headline initiative that has failed to deliver for children in

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England's cities—we need look no further than London. Inner London is undershooting the national targets for GCSE passes by 12 per cent. There is only 38 per cent. GCSE achievement, against the 2000 national target of 50 per cent., according to the Department's figures, research by the Institute of Education and other sources.

That is a scandal, and a cause for deep anxiety for all. I know, as a former employer in manufacturing, that if the current low GCSE pass rate goes unchecked, education under-performance will result in 219,000 unfilled skilled jobs by the end of the decade—and that is in new Labour's inner London. Demand for qualified labour will outstrip supply by more than 7 per cent., with profound effects on the capital's economy.

Despite Labour's rhetoric, average class sizes in London are higher than the national average in both primary and secondary schools. Since 1997, class sizes in London's secondary schools have risen from 21.7 to over 22.1 pupils and those in London's primary schools have remained static. So far as discipline is concerned, secondary school exclusions are higher in Conservative-run councils, showing that those councils take a firmer stance on discipline. On average, 4.8 per cent. of pupils were excluded by Conservative councils, compared with 3.15 per cent. by Labour and 2.13 per cent. by Liberal Democrats. [*Interruption.*] I have also looked at special measures. Schools in Conservative-run councils are less likely to be put into special measures—only 1.1 per cent., compared with 2.5 per cent. under Liberal Democrats and 2.8 per cent. under Labour.

We should consider the evidence. It is no good trying to make the rhetoric work when the evidence does not support it. When all that data are coupled with the finding of the National Foundation for Educational Research, backed up by Ofsted, that 20 per cent. of children in London and the other cities of England achieve the standard assessment test targets in the last year of primary school, but get lower grades a year later, in the first year of secondary school, the evidence is overwhelming that education in our cities is in dire trouble. Standards have declined under the Labour Government.

The Minister appears unconvinced. Will he demonstrate, when he speaks at the end of the debate, that he is prepared to be accountable for his Government's actions, rather than for their relentless spin? Initial literacy and numeracy targets for 11-year-olds—80 per cent. of pupils reaching the standard for English and 75 per cent. reaching it for mathematics—were announced as part of the comprehensive spending review for the public service agreements 1999 to 2002, published in December 1998. However, the Government's figures show that last year only 75 per cent. of 11-year-olds reached the literacy standard—no change from the previous year—and 70 per cent. reached the numeracy target, which is a decrease from the previous year. The then Secretary of State for Education promised to resign if those targets were not met, but surprise, surprise, he was moved on ahead of his mistakes, and his successor has so far refused to meet his commitment.

The problem of truancy is most pronounced in cities. It is also a real problem in schools in Winsford in my constituency. Between 1999–2000 and 2000–01, in key inner-city areas, the number of half days lost through unauthorised absence rose by 16 times more than the national average. Yet in 1998, the Government announced that they planned to cut unauthorised absences from school by one third by this year. A written answer, however, reveals that truancy has risen by 12 per cent. under the Labour Government. We are told that the Secretary of State still regards benefit cuts to parents of truanting children as being on her agenda, despite reported Cabinet disunity. No wonder there is disunity, because the measure will hit the poorest parents hardest. I am not surprised that the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers has said that the idea is a disaster, especially for single parents, for whom it would be an injustice.

As if the Government's record on truancy were not bad enough, the tale of ill-discipline in city schools takes one's breath away. According to the Association of Teachers and Lecturers, pupil and parent assaults on teachers rose fivefold between 1998 and 2001, and that is compounded by the Department's complacency. My hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale, West asked the Department for Education and Skills how many teachers had been the victims of serious assaults by pupils and parents in each year since 1997. In his reply, the then Minister for School Standards replied:

> "My Department does not collect this information."—[*Official Report*, 10 April 2002; Vol. 382, c. 195W.]

That is in sharp contrast to other Government-employed staff, such as those employed by the Benefits Agency, for whom data on both physical and verbal assaults are collected.

For too long, the Government have undermined discipline in schools by insisting on a reduced number of exclusions, regardless of the circumstances, and despite all the "tut-tutting" that we heard earlier from Labour and Liberal Democrat Members when the statistics comparing various local authorities were read out.

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): I apologise for tut-tutting earlier, but will the hon. Gent, explain to the House why he regards the number of exclusions as a measure of success?

Mr. O'Brien: I did not paint the number of exclusions as a measure of success. I know from my experience as a parent—I expect that the hon. Gentleman will know this both from his experience as a parent and as a teacher—that one of the greatest difficulties is having disruptive and unruly children in a class. Although, in an ideal world, it would be possible to help such children to feel included, there are cases where it is appropriate to consider exclusion and to make available special opportunities for those who are disrupting other children, who are willing to work, and distracting teachers. That is especially prevalent in our city schools. In my son's primary school, because of the Government's agenda, the teacher had to hold the hands of two of the most unruly children, who were not excluded, although everyone concerned thought that they should be. The teacher had to hold their hands because, as soon as those children were released, they wanted to put the fingers of all the other children into pencil sharpeners, so the education of the entire class was completely disrupted. Therefore, far from exclusions being a measure of success, we should properly evaluate all the issues to determine what is in the best interests of children and teachers.

As I was saying, for too long, the Government have undermined discipline in schools by insisting on a reduced number of exclusions regardless of the circumstances. Real powers should now be given to headteachers and governors to take decisions about discipline in their own schools. Then, there might be some improvement in the dire statistics that show us, for example, that permanent exclusions have declined by 51 per cent. in south Tyneside. There are similar figures for the surrounding areas, including a staggering 90 per cent. in Middlesbrough.

It is the teachers in inner-city areas and elsewhere who need more support from the Government, under whom it is pitifully clear that violence on teachers by some children and parents is greater in inner cities and is significantly on the increase. To take a favoured Government gimmick, how many parenting orders have been issued since the Government introduced them? Teachers need the Government to protect them: it is clear, from everything that I am being told both locally and throughout the country, particularly in the cities, that they do not feel that they are getting that protection.

It is no wonder that there is a teacher recruitment and retention crisis. Teachers in Lambeth schools, for example, have to cope with children arriving zonked out on drugs because of the softly, softly approach to certain drugs that is apparently being blessed by the Government. I pay tribute to my MP, the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey), who so rightly and courageously spoke out recently against that policy at Prime Minister's questions. Teacher vacancies have doubled under Labour, which is not surprising given the terrible truancy discipline problems in the cities, the Government's gimmick-a-day announcements, the relatively high costs of housing and living in some cities and the fact that core funding is being seriously diminished and adversely affected by this centralising Government holding back money for their pet ring-fenced schemes. One need look no further than the Education Bill to see how obsessed the Government are with their centralising agenda, despite all the rhetoric of autonomy.

According to the National Union of Teachers, only 42 per cent. of final-year teacher trainees will still be in the profession three years after qualification. To emphasise that point, a class of GCSE pupils at Our Lady and St John RC high school in Blackburn have been taught by seven different teachers as reported in *The Mirror* on 8 February 2002.

Angela Watkinson (Upminster): On teacher retention and recruitment, is it not an additional problem that so many long-serving and experienced teachers in London are nearing retirement? The problem of replacing them with newly qualified teachers will be even more difficult in view of the cost of housing, administrative problems, discipline in schools and the entire package, which deters students at teacher training colleges from going into the profession. The problem will be exacerbated. We will also have an imbalance in schools with a lack of long-serving and experienced teachers and too many newly qualified teachers.

Mr. O'Brien: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention. She makes a real and palpable point. Increasingly across many sectors, the transfer of functions to the younger, less experienced element is all too real. That is particularly serious in the teaching profession. Not only does one lose the experience, which is half the secret of motivating pupils and delivering education, but the Government's actions and the raising of false expectations have led to a serious crisis in morale, which is exacerbating the problem of the teacher demographic time bomb.

In our cities, as elsewhere, more and more teachers are being forced to teach subjects in which they are not trained in a desperate attempt to meet teacher shortage problems. That acts as a deterrent to those thinking of entering the profession and exacerbates the difficulty of attracting teachers, resulting in even higher percentages in city schools of teachers on supply teaching contracts, which eat away at the stability of a school. I hope that we can all agree that that is an essential element for raising pupil confidence and thus standards.

In addition, the Government have inundated schools with centrally produced paperwork. In the 12 months to March this year, the Government issued documents totalling 4,440 pages to primary and secondary schools. On average, that equates to 17 pages of Government documents for each working day. Many of these involve surveys that have to be completed by busy teachers. A recent report by the National Union of Teachers found that 57.8 per cent. of teachers leaving the profession said that one reason for doing so was the work load. There must be an immediate reduction in bureaucracy to ease the bureaucratic burden on heads and teaching staff, but with the current regime at the Department for Education and Skills, and the Government's obsession with centralisation and control, evidenced not least in their attitude to further education colleges, I am pessimistic that the desperately necessary shift in that direction will take place, to the huge detriment of teachers' morale, their recruitment and retention and the interests of children alike.

I shall leave my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale, West to deal with the misery, stress and highly questionable educational efficacy of AS-levels, which are having such a negative drag on teacher and pupil morale and on our city schools—I hesitate to suggest that my hon. Friend or, indeed, anyone, can be called an expert on these embryonic and unproven exams—and the Government's failure to widen access to higher education, which the Minister responsible for higher education appears to have admitted.

I draw to a conclusion by saying to the Minister that there are only a very few simple answers that I and the teachers, pupils and parents of schools in cities and elsewhere are looking for. These are that the Government, despite their dangerously arrogant self-belief, admit that they do not have a monopoly of wisdom on education; that they admit also that they have failed to deliver for more than five years, despite their rhetoric, electoral and post-electoral spin and after raising so many hopes and false expectations; that they

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are now willing to think again and go back to the drawing board—not least as the Secretary of State is now saying she would not touch some schools with a bargepole, having sworn undying allegiance to the one-size-fits-all comprehensive system for the whole of her career—and recognise that the way forward is for the Government to back off setting more and more targets for a demoralised teaching work force, especially in cities, as that will not raise standards.

Above all, the Government must trust teachers with the resources to deliver what we all crave, for the sake of the children and the future of this country: an improving—not as it currently is, declining—education system in our cities, where the most vulnerable children in the country, on the whole, reside. The Government need to break their meddling, gimmicky habits, stop slagging off teachers and trust them to teach children in cities and elsewhere, and free the necessary resources from the centralised diktat of the Government so that they can run schools for the children of our cities, not for the daily diet of new Labour-spun headlines.

9.52 am

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Mr. O'Brien) on securing this important debate, which is on a matter of great interest to many of us in the Conservative party.

I welcome the Minister to his new post; he and I have known each for half our lives. We were together as undergraduates, when we were also on opposite sides of the political divide. At that time, the Oxford university students union was run by the Liberal Democrats—it was then the Alliance party—which provided an opportunity for us to co-operate. I hope that we can continue in a similar vein today, and beyond.

The issue is most important. Looking through the speeches that I have made in my first year in Parliament I see that this is the first time I have spoken on education, which is not to say that it is not an issue close to my heart—rather, it is the opposite. Many people of my age who have gone into Conservative politics, in particular, were scarred, having been at a grammar school, by worries about those schools being pushed into the comprehensive system during the 1970s. It was a central, defining totem of my political beliefs.

I am glad that there are several Conservative Members present. I do not wish to make a churlish point at this juncture, but it is sad, especially as there are 55 London Labour Members, that none of them is present. It looks as though no cities south of Nottingham are represented on the Government Benches in the debate. However, I appreciate that these are important issues that affect all of us.

As the product of a state school education—I was the first Member of Parliament to represent the historical constituency of Cities of London and Westminster who was not privately educated—I am proud to be able to say a few words about the matter. I will not introduce a blizzard of statistics; I left those to my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury. The Minister will no doubt digest them in full before his summing-up speech.

I want to say a few things about the local education authority in Westminster, and in Kensington and Chelsea where I served as a councillor for eight years until May this year. They are inner-city local authorities that traditionally have been run by Conservatives, and have surprisingly strong academic results, given the catchment area. More than 40 per cent. of Westminster's pupils live outside its boundaries. A significant number of relatively affluent parents opt out of the state sector and send their children to the private sector, which makes Westminster's results all the more admirable. It is to be regretted that the middle class has been determined to withdraw from the system to such a large extent.

As I said, as a grammar school boy it struck me that the grammar school system was the antidote to the thriving private school sector. I do not wish to make a narrow point about grammar schools—the Labour party has thankfully moved away from that campaign—but it is often articulate middle-class parents in areas with grammar schools who can make a real difference to parent-teacher associations as governors. There is no doubt that such schools begin to decline the moment those parents vote with their feet and get out of the public sector. Westminster's education system has been in place only for a dozen or so years since the abolition of the Inner London Education Authority. To its credit, it has strongly improved its standard assessment tests for seven to 11-year-olds in recent years.

I want to say a few words about my own educational background. I was educated at Bishop Wood school—a Church of England school in Tring, Hertfordshire—before going to Reading grammar school. Bishop Wood was an excellent school with a positive aspirational ethos which has stuck with me throughout the years. I entered it at the age of seven, and it was a great guiding force for respect, honesty and security. It allowed pupils to flourish academically in a mixed area of middle class and council estates.

A fortnight ago, I was reminded of my experience there when I visited Hampden Gurney school, a local inner-city Church of England school off the Edgware road in the city of Westminster. The school was opening a brand new building, which took me back almost 30 years to the opening of the building of the school where I had been a young pupil. As an aside, Jarvis—the large construction concern—was responsible for the excellence of the building work on an entirely new site a stone's throw from Marble Arch. In recent weeks, that company has been in the headlines for perhaps the wrong reasons. However, it is fair to say that it had done an excellent job, which parents, governors and local residents widely praised. Much of its work is outside the railway sector, a fact that has been widely forgotten.

Mrs. Evelyn Chua, the headmistress of the school, leads from the front as one of the best head teachers in the Westminster area. As anyone who has been in education will know, and as the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) will confirm, the best schools are led by the best head teachers. That leadership is all important.

I was struck by a comment made by a member of the parent-teacher association, Mrs. Candida Coghlan, that the school was such a success because it maintained high behavioural expectations, acknowledged that all children had special learning needs and ensured that all children had the opportunity to fulfil their potential whatever their ability. Nothing is nearer the truth. The lack of aspiration and the low expectation in many inner-city schools are of great concern.

A minor criticism of the remarks made by my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury is that there was a negativity about the statistics, especially in the London areas, which he brought to bear in his otherwise excellent speech. The central idea is that we must raise expectations. We should not have any excuse for failure and, above all, if we are to encourage middle-class parents to use the state sector again, we must impose on schools the view that special educational needs are not just for failing children but for all children. Each child must be treated as an individual.

I appreciate that other hon. Members want to speak, so I shall start to wind up. There are some specific problems for London schools, and I should like to address one or two. On pay and conditions, Unison and other specifically teaching unions have insisted on national pay bargaining, which undermines the interests of many London public sector workers. The cost of living and working in central London is much greater than in, for example, South Shields, Middlesbrough or Liverpool. A far more reasonable London weighting is needed to take account of the increased costs and greater inconvenience. Many teachers in my constituency have to live in the suburbs, or even outside Greater London, and have long commutes both to and from work. We all know about the difficulties with the transport system, which the Mayor of London confessed would remain scratchy for at least a decade to come.

I should like to praise Westminster city council's innovative policy of assisting teachers with lifestyle coaches. The idea made the press on Sunday and is designed to help to differentiate with a benefits package at a time when central Government have put ever more pressure on the funding settlement. If I may make one small point of special pleading for London as a whole, I hope that the Minister will work with the Chancellor to ensure that the area cost adjustment, which has previously been inadequate in taking account of the genuine cost of living in London, is enhanced as far as possible. There has been great speculation that London will suffer with the area cost adjustments for the employment of public sector staff. That would make unbearable what is, for many schools, a crisis situation.

I wish the Minister godspeed in his new post. I know that he will have an exciting time and that, like me, he is the product of a state education. We used to discuss that when we were at Oxford together. I hope that he can make an impact that will ensure that many other middle-class parents entrust their children to state schools so that we have a thriving sector that genuinely competes with what the private sector can offer.

10.2 am

Mr. Mark Hoban (Fareham): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Mr. O'Brien) on securing this important debate. We all believe that education is vital to the success of children throughout the country especially in disadvantaged and economically deprived city areas.

One problem that the Government have encountered is that they have had high expectations and made great promises, but have failed to improve children's education, particularly in cities. Many failing schools are in city areas, and it is interesting that last year's Ofsted report, produced by Mike Tomlinson, notes that

> "the gap between the highest and lowest attaining schools remains too large."

He points out:

> "Although at primary level, the gap between the highest and lowest performing schools is narrowing, at secondary level, despite improvements within the lowest performing schools, the gap has widened."

That analysis of secondary school education is proved by statistics. In Sunderland, which is the adjacent local education authority to South Tyneside, although grades have improved, the relative gap between it and the rest of England has deteriorated since 1997, widening from 10.7 per cent. in 1997 to 10.8 per cent. in 2001. At A-level, the points increase in Sunderland between 1997 and 2001 was slower that in the rest of England. In Sunderland the average increase was 0.7 compared with 1.2 for England as a whole. The Government have yet to tackle that widening gap. A similar pattern emerges in South Tyneside. In 1997 the gap between that area and England as whole in respect of the number of 15-year-olds achieving five A to C grades at GCSE increased from 9.4 per cent. to 10.9 per cent. For AS and A-levels the improvement in South Tyneside between 1997 and 2000 was 0.7 compared with 1.2 for England as a whole.

That reveals a significant problem in those areas. Although the Government have improved results in absolute terms, the gap has widened relatively. The same Ofsted report affirms that education action zones made no difference between the best and the worst schools. Although improvement to zones was faster in key stage one than in schools nationally, the report states that

> "the gap between schools in zones and schools nationally . . . has not reduced significantly"

in the other key stages. It is not surprising that education action zones collapsed into education excellence in cities. However, as Mike Tomlinson again points out in his Ofsted report:

> "At this early stage, the initiatives had not yet resulted in rates of improvement in attainment, attendance or teaching quality significantly higher than schools nationally".

Even excellence in cities, which is supposed to be a better scheme, has yet to yield the results that the Government want and has yet to narrow the achievement gap between the best and the worst schools. Increasing centralisation under the Labour Government has failed to achieve a narrowing of the gap in educational attainment.

These problems are exacerbated, as my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury said, by further difficulties with bullying and with teacher recruitment and retention. All those problems are far worse in areas of socio-economic deprivation at the heart of our cities. If we are to improve the education of children in this country, we must tackle those problems.

When they talk about overcoming the barriers of social exclusion, the Government make great play of improving participation in higher education. Ministers regularly trot out the target of 50 per cent. participation in higher education for this age cohort. The Government have always managed studiously to avoid explaining what higher education means, but the aspiration remains. It is a pity that social inequality in

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universities has deteriorated rather than improved under the Labour Government. The Minister for Lifelong Learning acknowledged that fact at the weekend. Given that the gap between the best and the worst schools has widened, not narrowed, that deterioration is not surprising.

The answer is not to lower standards of admission to university for certain groups—a huge mistake because it amounts to recognition and toleration of under-achieving schools in cities. We should be raising educational standards in all inner-city schools to narrow the gap and ensure that children from those areas can gain access to university without the need for Government targets for greater social inclusion. We risk leaving a whole generation of inner-city children behind.

Education is an important issue in the north-east. I was born and brought up in the area. I do not share my university with the Minister for School Standards, but I did at least fight South Shields in the 1997 general election. I know the area well. The Minister will know that education is viewed as a ladder of opportunity to gain greater skills, improve access to higher education and escape low-paid industrial jobs in the region. That was the message of voters on the doorsteps in 1997. I suspect that the message was not dissimilar in 2001.

It is interesting that South Tyneside local education authority has been Labour controlled for nearly three decades, as I think my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury said. Indeed, there has been continuing pressure from Labour-controlled LEAs across the north-east over decades, which has led to a decline in standards rather than an improvement. By embracing comprehensive schools and not encouraging a meritocracy and educational attainment, they have consigned vast numbers of people in the north-east to poor educational standards.

A flagship reform of the previous Conservative Government was grant-maintained schools, which gave schools in particular areas the opportunity to raise standards and develop their own ethos. However, attempts by schools in the north-east to attain grant-maintained status were very much stamped on by LEAs, which shows that Labour-controlled authorities want children and parents in their areas to be dependent on their education.

What happens in those areas? Parents, whether wealthy or on average incomes, try to send their children to the local private sector day schools, thereby removing articulate parents and bright children from the other schools. They do not believe that their children will receive the education that they deserve in those schools. However, the vast majority of pupils, whose parents cannot afford to take that decision, are left behind to suffer a substandard education.

If the Minister wants to achieve anything in office and show that he has changed the educational culture in the north-east, he must contribute to improving the life chances of children throughout that region, particularly in the cities of Newcastle and Sunderland.

We must create a new agenda for education in our cities. The Government's centralising tendencies have so far failed to produce the narrowing of standards that we want. Given that many Labour Members have served their time on education authorities throughout the country, it is not surprising that those same authorities have not backed children in their areas, in that they have abolished grammar schools and diminished academic values. It is therefore left to Conservative Members to try to create a new education system that encourages children and teachers to give of their best, and that encourages teachers to teach in schools in inner-city areas, which have the greatest problems.

Picking up on the work by Matthew Taylor of the Institute for Public Policy Research, my hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) made a valuable suggestion about focusing more money on those schools and giving them the opportunity to set their own agenda and excel. Far too often, we hear about centralising diktats from Government and schools not having the opportunity to decide how to develop their own ethos and how the money should best be spent in the interests of their children.

That centralising tendency has been the downfall of education over the past five years, and I hope that the Minister has learnt from what has happened. I am sure that he has been sent to the Department for Education and Skills to look after it on the Prime Minister's behalf, so that we may see a change—I do not hold out much hope—for parents in the north-east and other city areas, and great improvements in educational standards. The Government seem bent on destroying academic excellence, lowering standards and removing parents' and teachers' ability to run schools as they want, but they have an opportunity to make changes. The past five years have seen a tendency towards greater centralisation; now it is time for that to change. I hope that the Minister will assure us today that that will happen.

10.14 am

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): As a Back Bencher on this subject, I am grateful to be able to say a few words on it, because it interests me greatly. I declare two interests: I am the chair of governors of St. James's Church of England primary school in Bermondsey, and a trustee of Bacon's city technology college. I take a close interest in both, as I do in education throughout the borough.

I welcome the Minister. My local authority has just changed hands for the first time and become a Liberal Democrat council, and I know that our new executive member with responsibility for education, Bob Skelly—a competent and experienced individual—is looking forward to working with the Government and the Minister. Given the Minister's past close links with Downing street and the Cabinet Office, and given that there has been great interest in both places in trying to move the educational agenda on, I look forward to seeing a constructive partnership.

It may surprise the Minister to hear that I will not say anything critical about Government policy. That is not because I have no criticism, but because it would be more useful to make constructive suggestions that I hope he will consider.

My constituency and borough contain a wonderful educational diversity, and there are some brilliant examples of good practice in nursery, primary and secondary schools and special schools, such as the Spa school, which greatly impressed a Conservative spokesperson during a visit this week. There is also good practice in further education colleges such as Southwark college and universities such as South Bank university, King's college and the London school of economics. We must not forget important places such as Morley college, which has provided excellent adult education for years. In that great diversity, there is evidence that often the leadership of an institution determines how well it does. Similar schools with the same numbers and mix can do very differently depending on how they are run, the impetus and enthusiasm of the head teacher and the contribution of the governing body.

There is a big issue in our community about faith schools. I repeat my view as a member of the Church and from experience: it is important for whomever runs the school to move away from faith-based admissions policies. I have seen them do no good, and although it is important to have a minimum number of pupils of the faith of the school's management, it does more harm than good to exclude people because they do not have a particular faith.

With an ever-changing school family—in inner cities, people come and go out of the school community every day, week and month—I am sure that the Minister understands that we must improve the way in which housing is allocated. That is a local authority matter, but if people are moved around from one community to the next, their children are moved too, which is not helpful in their community.

I want to put my community's shopping list. We have a great shortage of nursery places and schools, which is hugely important for inner-city development. The Government understand that, but the quicker we can move in that direction, the better start many children will get. We still have major problems with admissions at nursery, primary and secondary level. I urge the Minister to come with a fresh mind to the debate about the Greenwich judgment and re-examine whether local authorities can give the first opportunity to the children resident in that authority. There are many good community cohesion reasons for that. Will he be able to ensure, as we hope to do in a year's time in Southwark, that there is the same common admissions policy for schools that we have for universities? There is a terrible unfairness between those who know how to work the system to their advantage and those who do not. Every summer, many children in inner cities are left not knowing where they will go in September, which causes great pain and anxiety and often makes them feel undervalued.

One or two schools still do not have an independent appeals system like that of city technology colleges. I hope that the Government will review that and ensure that every state-funded educational institution has a system that allows appeals against a school's decision. Lastly in my shopping list for institutions, I hope that the Government will re-examine the funding formula for further education colleges. It is unfair that they get so much less per pupil than schools teaching sixth form pupils of the same age. FE colleges feel significantly disadvantaged.

As I have said before, to make the most of children we should provide mentors for final-year primary school pupils who share a strong interest in a subject such as cars, rockets, ballet, fishing and football. Those children would then be more likely to be motivated as they go into secondary school. If the mentor system can remain throughout secondary school, it will work best. Such role models are a valuable addition to those provided by teachers and parents.

In addition, we must maximise the opportunities for teachers. There is still a desperate shortage of male teachers in my local authority, and in many other places. If boys and young men are to have the role models that they need as they grow up, we need to ensure that we have a greater ethnic mix and a better gender balance in our teaching staff. That case was made strongly at the conference about excluded black teenagers, convened by the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), which I attended and found impressive.

Perhaps we should insist that, in future, every time a school is extended or a new one is built, planning permission is given for housing and accommodation for every sort of staff. Schools have great difficulty in attracting staff, and one head teacher tells me that congestion charging may make the situation worse.

To ensure that more parents are involved, we can follow the example of the faith communities. Many of them run schools on Saturdays and Sundays and out of hours in school buildings. We have to get away from the idea of nine-to-four school buildings and consider what has been done for years in Cambridgeshire, where all schools are seen as community institutions that need to be open during daylight hours, seven days a week.

Buildings need to be well used, but we in inner cities have suffered badly from a lack of outside space where children can be energetic. Children must enjoy adequate play and sport—including competitive sport—from the beginning. Competitive sport is important; I have never understood the argument for non-competitive sport. We do not see children watching the World cup and not feeling competitive about it; they understand the idea that somebody wins and somebody loses—the chance of winning is an incentive to do better. There must also be adequate playing fields and swimming facilities, and the charges must make it possible for them to be accessed not just during school curriculum hours but outside them.

Finally—I know that the Government are reviewing the issue—unless we go back to a way of funding university places that does not put off people from lower-income families, we shall continue to distort the cohort of people who go on to the sort of further and higher education that many of us have enjoyed. We must ensure that, for those who want it, education at all ages is seen as an option, but we should not drive 16-year-olds who do not want it into further education.

I hope that we can have a more flexible attitude to work and work experience. I have seen brilliant examples in Leeds and elsewhere of work experience for kids aged 10 or 11 who have no working role model in the family. If they want to work, we should encourage them to go down that route; they can come back to education later when they are motivated and know what they want to do. I look forward to a dialogue occurring with the Minister, and hope that we can help by learning from the Southwark experience and sharing with the Government to mutual advantage.

[Simon Hughes]

10.23 am

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): I welcome the Minister to his place. He comes with an excellent pedigree, and I hope that the lessons that his father taught him on his knee are part and parcel of his psyche. I remember, as a young student, listening to his father and being inspired by his views on society—on education, in particular. There is a significant difference between what Professor Miliband said and what the Minister's mentor says at No. 10—perhaps that is a debate for another day. I congratulate the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Mr. O'Brien) on having secured the debate. It is an important one and he made a serious contribution. He put on record a series of facts that have been repeated at least 10 times, every time someone has spoken from the Conservative Front Bench.

It is a sad reflection on the present Conservative party that the hon. Gentleman failed to make any positive comments about the huge successes that many of our schools have achieved against great odds, particularly in the inner cities. He swept all that aside in his catalogue of moans and groans.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman, however, on one fundamental issue. He enunciated the Dutch philosophy of funding students according to their needs, and I hope that the whole House can ultimately get behind him on that. The Liberal Democrats have adopted such a policy, and we commend it to the Minister. It would be useful to have his comments on it. The Dutch philosophy says that children in the education system have certain entitlements and that we should fund them according to their needs so that they can enjoy those entitlements. We should all be able to agree on that basic philosophy, which we could use to build a new school system. I thank the hon. Gentleman for mentioning it, and we will be pleased if his party moves in that direction.

I also agree with the hon. Gentleman on the Government's failure to make huge inroads into some of the core problems. I am saddened, however, that he does not accept that 18 years of Conservative rule led to 7 million adults being functionally illiterate and to one in four being functionally innumerate. It will take significantly longer than one Parliament to deal with those problems.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: On that point, the figure of 7 million includes many adults who went through their education in the 1960s and 1970s, when the comprehensive school experiment was introduced. The hon. Gentleman's attempt to relate the figures to a particular Administration is somewhat tendentious.

Mr. Willis: The hon. Gentleman has made his comment, but he cannot simply ignore 18 years of Conservative control over education, or excuse the failure to tackle even the literacy and numeracy problems of older adults. That is quite sad.

As always, the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) made a telling contribution, on which I hope he will reflect. He referred to the flight of the middle classes from state education, and I agree that people in many of our communities see the private sector as their only salvation. That is incredibly depressing, but the fact that 10 out of 11 members of the Conservative shadow Cabinet send their children to private schools hardly puts them in a position to tell voters, "Follow our example." They live in some of the most privileged areas, with some of the most highly performing schools and local authorities, but that is still not good enough. They prefer to send their children to the private sector; the state sector is all right for somebody else.

I was grateful to the hon. Gentleman for referring to the cost of living in London, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) returned. A policeman cannot get £6,000 in additional allowances for looking after unruly youngsters after 4 o'clock, when a teacher gets half that during the day. We must deal with that fundamental issue, but it is not the long-term solution. In the long term, we must do something about chronic housing problems for key professionals in London and other cities.

The hon. Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) made an important point about the gap between the highest and lowest achievers, and drew attention to issues relating to higher education. My hon. Friend the Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey commented on the issues that the Government need to address, including the admissions policy. Unless the Minister is prepared to consider the admissions policy as a key tool for ensuring that children from the poorest homes get access to the best schools on an equitable basis, we will continue to fail many of them. In winding up the debate, I hope that the Minister will say something about the plethora of admission arrangements, especially in our big cities and in London, which are aggravated by the Greenwich and Kingston judgments.

I was appalled to hear the Secretary of State's astonishing comments about our comprehensive system. Of course the system is not perfect; it has never been allowed to work or flourish, because no Government of any political persuasion have ever had the courage to create a fully comprehensive system. However, to say that she would not touch many of our schools with a bargepole and to announce the end of comprehensive education is a most appalling thing for a Secretary of State to say. I hope that the Minister will condemn those comments and those of his former friend, the Prime Minister's press secretary, which go together. It is typical of the way in which the Government smooch up to the teaching profession and to state schools, but meanwhile have another agenda. The Government's real thinking was revealed in the comments that came out of the mouth of the Secretary of State yesterday. She has sold her soul to No. 10 Downing street in order to keep her job.

I apologise to my hon. Friend the Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey for being critical of the Government, but I intend to continue on that theme. The failure of Conservative Members and an increasing number of Labour Members to understand how difficult things are for many schools and teachers in our inner cities beggars belief. The former Secretary of State was right to say that that is not an excuse for failure, but the social deprivation in many schools makes the mountains a little harder to climb.

The comprehensive system has been an enormous success, despite its critics. In 1970, 47 per cent. of our youngsters left school without a qualification. In 2001, that figure was 5.4 per cent. Between 1899 and 1999, the number of 16 to 19-year-olds in full-time education rose from 37.5 per cent. to 75.5 per cent. That is not failure; it is success. In 1972, 14 per cent. of youngsters entered higher education under the age of 21. Last year, the figure was 34 per cent. That is success delivered by a comprehensive education system.

The accusation that we have a one-size-fits-all system is absolute nonsense. Anyone who goes into comprehensive schools, as I do, knows that each school is different. That myth exists because, since 1988, we have had a standardised curriculum and testing system, and we have introduced league tables and a standardised inspection system. What do the Government expect to happen if they move away from a one-size-fits-all system? Their notion of introducing specialist schools in the name of one-size-fits-all is appalling. The Government say that their ambition is for half the schools in Britain to be specialist and to get £500,000 extra—presumably the other half will be bog standard secondary moderns. How can they claim to want to give the poorest and most under-performing students, in the most under-performing areas, a better quality education when they are deliberately dividing them to ensure that those with more get more and those with less get less?

I would love another hour in which to attack the Government's philosophy and the demise of comprehensive education. I and my party are proud of what our schools have achieved. There is more to do, but the appalling divisions that the Conservative party envisaged and which the Minister and his hon. Friends now envisage are not the way forward.

10.36 am

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): We are all grateful to you, Mr. Pike, for your firmness in the Chair. I shall try to behave with forbearance in the few minutes that we have left.

First, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Mr. O'Brien) on securing the debate, which he introduced in a magisterial fashion. He referred to the comments of the Secretary of State about schools that he would not touch with a bargepole. The Minister must tell us whether a bargepole school is better or worse than a bog standard school. Perhaps he will indicate how the Government's thinking on that is developing. I understand that the Minister told my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury yesterday that he was expecting considerable support from his hon. Friends this morning. I am sure that we are all disappointed that that support did not materialise. We would have loved to hear Labour Members speak about education in our cities. They obviously think it better to avoid the subject.

I welcome the Minister to his debut in his new role. My hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) said that he was making his first speech in the House on education. The Minister is making his second speech on education, so this is an important opportunity for him to put his thoughts on record. Although he is a new Minister and new to the House, hon. Members will know that he does not come to the job with clean hands. He may talk now about the need to allow teachers the space to do their job and to be professionals with time to undertake what he yesterday called their core function, but he played a key role in the Government's education policy through the years when red tape and bureaucracy were piled on schools and teachers.

The Minister spoke yesterday to the Select Committee on the importance of the creative side of education—music, art and other cultural activities in schools. I agree with him strongly. However, he sat in the policy unit in Downing street while music was squeezed out of the school curriculum up and down the country and while all creativity was squashed by AS levels and Curriculum 2000 for vast numbers of our sixth formers. He may now champion discipline in schools, but he was in a key position when the Government introduced the now infamous circular 10/99, which did more than any other single factor to undermine discipline in our schools, especially in urban areas. That in turn had an appalling effect on recruitment and retention of teachers which, as my hon. Friends have said, is a particular problem in cities. In short, the Minister may be new to his role but he has form as long as one's arm. He has much to do if he is to absolve himself of blame for the Government's failures to date.

None of us would be here today, Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Peter Pike (in the Chair): Order. I am not a Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Brady: I am sorry that you are not a Deputy Speaker, Mr. Pike—I am sure that it is only a matter of time and that you will be one in short order.

None of us would be here if we did not care passionately about education, and especially about improving city schools whose achievements are all too often the worst—what the Minister calls the diversity of achievement, or the Secretary of State calls the schools that she would not touch with a bargepole. We wish him well in the challenges that he faces. The Government will have our support where they are right, for example in the specialist schools initiative or the expansion of city academies, but we will oppose them where they remain misguided. The debate gives the Minister the opportunity to engage in genuine debate about education in our cities.

I freely admit that Conservative Governments did not do enough for education in the past, although I am sure that the Minister will give us credit for establishing the city technology college movement, which is the precursor of the academy policy, and that improvements in test results began before 1997. However, he and I should accept that test results may be open to question. Performance indicators in primary schools—PIPS—results, and other measures of attainment, may have remained flat while standard assessment test results have generally improved, but there is real concern that improving SAT results may be the result of teaching to the test. Many experts in measuring educational attainment believe that that would have a stronger, sharper effect on improvement at the bottom end of the scale. Does the Minister accept that there is a pressing need for a full inquiry into the examination system, and a thorough investigation of how standards have changed over time?

[Mr. Brady]

With regard to the underperformance of schools in cities, the Minister was open enough yesterday to say that the Government were still at the point of pinpointing what holds us back. Hon. Members who are less charitable than me may say that, after five years, it is not good enough for the Government to be only at the point of pinpointing what holds them back. However, he will agree that discipline, truancy, and difficulties in recruiting and retaining good teachers are all important factors.

Does the Minister also agree that low expectations and poverty of ambition are the most important factors of all? His colleague, the Minister for Lifelong Learning, suggested that lower standards for university admission should be set for children from urban schools. Does he accept that that would set in stone a lower expectation for the schools that are performing worst? It would legislate for poverty of ambition, not seek to improve it, and would send a message from Government that schools in our most challenging inner-urban areas are not expected to provide the same standards of performance or levels of attainment as schools elsewhere.

Will the Minister also take the opportunity to disown the idea that he floated on 19 April in an article in *The Times Educational Supplement* that university places should be guaranteed for the top performing pupils in any school in an urban area, regardless of their ability or attainment? Does he accept that guaranteed university admission, which he suggested only a few weeks before he was appointed to his current post, would create an unfair system that penalised genuine achievement and operated against the interests of those from less-privileged backgrounds who have achieved? Such a system could operate unfairly across a spectrum of schools where low achievers are concentrated in one school, but where other schools in a similar area with similar challenges and levels of deprivation are succeeding and giving their pupils the ability to compete openly for places in universities. Will he instead bend himself to the urgent, harder and nobler task of raising standards in our worst-performing schools throughout the country?

Yesterday, the Minister used a telling phrase in front of the Select Committee. He said that if the Government believe something, they must try to put it into practice. Perhaps his appointment indicated the despair that is felt in Downing street at the Government's inability to put their education policies into practice over the past few years. We should all remember that the last agent of Downing street to be parachuted into the job of School Standards Minister was the right hon. Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers). We must all hope that the new Minister meets with more success both in his career and in his objective of putting the Government's policies into operation.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House must accept that the challenge of raising educational standards and levels of attainment in schools, particularly inner-city schools, is vital and urgent. We must all work together to address it. I have made it clear that we will oppose in the most responsible manner and will support the Government where they get things right. But if we are to do that and to move forward in a mood of consensus over some of the Government's thinking on specialist schools, greater diversity of provision and having freer schools by giving them greater autonomy, the Government must accept at the core of their policy that there must be no excuse for failure. That phrase was used tellingly by my hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster.

We expect our schools in the cities, as elsewhere, to perform at the highest level. They owe it to our children. It is for Ministers and for all of us in the House to give our support in the best and most effective way possible. I wish the Minister well in his new brief. It is vital. It cannot be neglected. We look forward to what he has to say. We all hope that he will be open and will make it clear where he has the courage to break with the failures of the last few years. I do not say that everything that the Government have done has been wrong, but he must have the courage to admit what has been wrong, to break with those failures and to show us how they intend to move forward.

10.47 am

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. David Miliband): It is an honour for me, Mr. Pike, that you are presiding over my first Adjournment debate. I want to address four sets of issues that have been underlined in this debate. The first is the challenges of education in cities; the second is the role of targeted programmes in meeting those challenges; thirdly, I want to pick up some of the other matters that have been raised in the debate; and, fourthly, I want to flag up some of the challenges ahead.

Before I do that, I congratulate the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Mr. O'Brien) on securing this important debate. He and I served on the Education Bill. He walked out only once. I hope that we manage to get through the next 13 minutes with a fair degree of harmony. I should also like to pick out two hon. Members. I hope that the wing of the Tory party that the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) represents comes back into fashion so that his merits are finally recognised and he makes his way up within his party. I am always pleased to hear about people who have had experience of South Shields. The hon. Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) fought the 1997 election. I think the hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) also fought his first parliamentary election in South Shields. If we are nothing else, we are a breeding ground for Conservatives who later win other seats. Since 1882, South Shields has been the only constituency in the UK never to elect a Conservative.

I was genuinely disappointed by the tone and approach of the hon. Member for Eddisbury. He must be living on a different planet from the rest of us if all he can see in 24,000 schools up and down the country is failure—a word he used half a dozen times. The world that I see is confirmed by the international research conducted by [illegible] OECD, which says that England has the fastest improving education system in the industrialised world. That is [illegible] tribute to teachers, pupils, parents, classroom assistants and learning mentors all around the country. It would be a crying shame if the message that everyone in the House wants to pay tribute to those efforts did not go out loud and clear. I hope that every speech and intervention has made that clear.

The facts are important. In 1997, almost half of all 11-year-olds in primary schools were unable to read, write or do basic maths to an acceptable standard; today, 71 per cent. reach such a standard in maths and 75 per cent. in English. In addition, more than half of secondary school pupils now get five good GCSEs. Those are important steps in the right direction. In 1997, the Office for Standards in Education identified 1,336 schools as failing; between May 1997 and May 2002, 899 schools came out of special measures. Those are all indicators of growing success in our education system. It would be folly not to acknowledge that.

Mr. Brady: To what extent are those trends the result of introducing better inspection regimes through Ofsted and of better information and data preparation through league tables?

Mr. Miliband: Those reforms are important underpinnings of the system, but anyone who considers primary schools, for example, will recognise that introducing the national literacy and numeracy scheme after 1997 contributed enormously to the step change in achievement.

I remember listening to the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) debating pensions in the House when the issue of low interest rates and low inflation was raised in relation to Bank of England independence. He said that the Conservative party was thinking about that in 1997, and I get the feeling that the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) might say that it was also thinking about many of the things that Labour has done in education. The truth is that his party did not do them in 18 years in government. Teachers and pupils should take the credit for those achievements; the Government contributed to making them possible.

Before proceeding to my four main themes, I must respond to the attempted character assassination of South Tyneside. I did not realise that this went with being a Minister, but given the remarks of Opposition Members, it is important that I say that, in all the schools that I have visited—32 primary schools and all five secondary schools in my constituency; I will have visited all 36 primary schools in the academic year—I have seen teachers of outstanding commitment and energy. It is a travesty to suggest that they are delivering a failing system. In a constituency with the fourth highest unemployment in the United Kingdom, we are achieving above average results in primary education, and we look forward to that being replicated in the secondary sector.

We must recognise, however, that there are particular challenges for teaching and learning in cities. Obviously, cities are characterised by dynamism and enterprise, but they are also characterised by poverty, generational unemployment, high levels of social exclusion, linguistic and cultural diversity, high mobility levels and transient populations. Those are all challenges for education.

When the excellence in cities programme started, only 33 per cent. of inner-city pupils achieved five or more GCSEs at grades A to C; 13.5 per cent. of inner-city schools had been identified by Ofsted as failing or having serious weaknesses, compared with 5.4 per cent. nationally; and 38 per cent. of inner-city schools had excluded five or more pupils in the previous year, compared with 26 per cent. nationally. Those are challenges, not excuses for failure, and I have met no one teaching in a city who wants to use those challenges as an excuse for failure. A culture of high expectations has developed over the past five to 10 years, and those challenges are not a list of excuses, although they deserve recognition.

I am a great believer in the idea that we have to get the general conditions right for school improvement. It is not right to believe that there is a programme for every problem; there must be a general system that drives up standards overall. There is now increased investment and increased numbers of teachers. Increased support is going to all schools, including those in the constituency of the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West, where £550 more per pupil is spent now than in 1997, compared with a real-terms cut of £120 in the last Parliament during which his party was in office.

We must address the particular challenges of education in our cities on the basis of that rising investment. That was the purpose of the excellence in cities programme, which is designed to provide targeted support for city schools. It involves the extended use of learning mentors and the development of learning support units for pupils whose behaviour is causing problems, beacon and specialist schools, and—particularly noteworthy, given the hon. Gentleman's comments—a gifted and talented stream, which is designed to pick out the talents of pupils with particular gifts.

The evidence on the excellence in cities programme is interesting and I should like to go through it: 3,500 learning mentors, 105 city learning centres, 500 learning support units and 383 beacon schools. What standards have they achieved? I was impressed when I learned that in phase 1 local authorities, which have been going since 1999, the percentage of pupils gaining five A to C grades at GCSE rose from 34.1 to 37 per cent. Furthermore, the number of pupils gaining five or more good GCSEs improved particularly strongly in London, where the average increase over just two years was from 32.8 to 36.6 per cent. The rate of improvement in English of secondary school pupils was four times the national average, which shows that the programme should be supported, not condemned.

I shall now deal with specific points raised in the debate. I hope that the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) will forgive me for not dealing with all his points. Some were particularly interesting. I could not agree with him more about extended hours of schooling. Any business using its plant for only 40 per cent. of the time would be viewed as a serious problem. We all know that provision for out-of-school activities has a powerful influence on performance in school. I therefore associate myself with the hon. Gentleman's wish to see school plant used more out of hours. I hope that we can improve after-hour schooling, weekend schooling and summer schools. A start has been made, but we have further to go.

Some hon. Members referred to the flight of the middle classes from the state sector. We should be careful about using that sort of language. There are serious issues about where people send their children to school. However, my figures suggest that over the past 15 years, the number of pupils in the private sector has risen from 540,000 to 560,000—an increase of only

[Mr. Miliband]

20,000. No one should pretend that that is a perfect state of affairs, but it does not reflect any notion of a mass exodus from the state system.

Mr. Brady: The Minister is making a valid and important point. Does he agree that the true measure of the crisis in education in inner cities is the flight of middle-class people from those areas, which is largely a result of the quality of education available? Middle-class people have the wherewithal to make a change: they are voting with their feet and moving into areas with good schools. That is the flight of the middle classes—a problem that needs to be tackled.

Mr. Miliband: That is a broad-brush statement. As someone who lives in an inner city, I know that many middle-class people still live in such areas. I am prepared to consider the data, but without any supporting evidence I would not associate myself with the hon. Gentleman's view. I have not heard him specify any particular data, so he should be careful about making such allegations.

The hon. Member for Fareham mentioned creativity and the importance of a broad and balanced curriculum. Significantly, schools doing best scholastically often do the most to develop creative talents. It is dangerous to counterpose academic achievement and broader activities. The hon. Gentleman suggested that the emphasis on literacy and numeracy was squeezing out kids' creative potential, but in my experience that is not the case.

In my remaining time I want to speak about the challenges ahead. The main difference between the Government side and the official Opposition is that we are pleased to have the fastest improving education system in the industrialised world, but without being complacent about it. We are proud of the achievements of parents and pupils in schools up and down the country, but we acknowledge that it is not enough. The Opposition say that everything is hopeless, which is a dangerous position to adopt.

The Government want to make further progress in four particular respects. First, primary schools have seen magnificent improvements in achievement, but we cannot be satisfied while a quarter of young people cannot read, write or count well when they leave them. Secondly, reform of the teaching profession is a legitimate issue, particularly regarding the time available to teach, the support that teachers receive and leadership. I shall be addressing those issues in half an hour in north London, if anyone wants to follow me up there.

The third issue is the step change in secondary schooling that is clearly necessary, and the fourth issue is the continued focus on schools in challenging circumstances. In 372 schools, less than 25 per cent. of pupils get five good GCSEs, and 199 of those schools are in inner-city areas. That is our agenda: it is about building on what we perceive to be success, but it is success with which we are not yet satisfied.

Ships and Seafarers (Safety)

11 am

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): This debate is about the safety of ships and mariners at sea, which is a topic that the House has not debated for several years. In particular, my contribution will be about the sinking of the MV Derbyshire in 1980, with the loss of 44 lives, including the wives of two officers. The story of the Derbyshire is incredible, and I can only scratch the surface this morning.

Hon. Members may wonder why on earth a Member who represents an inland constituency should take such an interest in the sea. The truth is that I have been fascinated by the sea all my life. I was born close to it and went to secondary school in the seaside resort of Southport. My fascination with ships began on my many visits with my father to Liverpool in my formative years. I am old enough to remember the joy of riding on the overhead railway, long since demolished, along the dock road, to look at all the mighty ships that sailed the seven seas.

The Derbyshire sank during Typhoon Orchid. No SOS was received: only oil rising to the surface identified that the ship had sunk and located its approximate position at the time. The families heard about the loss mainly through media reports, which made their grief even worse. MV Derbyshire was a single screw ore-bulk-oil combination carrier, one of six sister ships. An OBO is a design of ship that was popular in the mid-1960s, because such ships were adaptable to carrying oil or bulk cargos such as iron ore, which the Derbyshire was carrying from Canada to Japan.

The MV Derbyshire was registered at Liverpool and, at the time, was the largest ship ever built: it was twice the size of the Titanic. In length she measured 294.1 metres and, in extreme breadth, 44.28 metres. If stood on end, the ship was 60 metres taller than Canary Wharf, and had nine holds or tanks and nine hatches. She was built by Swan Hunter on the River Tees, and handed over to Bibby Tankers in Hamburg on 10 June 1976. MV Derbyshire was managed from that point until her loss by Bibby's. She was classed by Lloyd's Register of Shipping in London as a

> "+100 A1 strengthened for ore cargoes; holds 2 and 6 may be empty or oil cargoes".

Since the tragic loss of the MV Derbyshire, bulk carriers have been sinking at a rate of one a month. From the loss of the Derbyshire in 1980 to August 1998, 1,632 seafarers lost their lives in bulk carrier incidents alone. The MV Derbyshire Family Association was established following the loss of the ship and sought to persuade the then Government to investigate its loss and the loss of loved ones. The Government declined, citing the technological difficulties of examining the wreck at a depth of two and a half miles below sea level.

I want to pay tribute to the DFA and its members for their persistence. I have worked with them since my election to Parliament in 1997, and have been impressed by their work. Their primary aim has been to use the loss of the Derbyshire to improve the safety of all those who sail at sea in OBOs. Several right hon. and hon. Members have promoted their cause in this House, and I pay tribute to them. Some of them have been elevated to the other place. My hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) has been applying for this debate for several weeks, and last week I promised to give him assistance as a member of the all-party parliamentary group on the MV Derbyshire. Unfortunately, he is away in Strasbourg this week and is devastated that he cannot be with us today.

A draft Government report, published in 1985, concluded that the most likely cause of the loss of the Derbyshire was major cracking of frame 65. However, after consultations with Swan Hunter and Lloyd's Register of Shipping—and perhaps others—the draft report was substantially altered. The final version, published in March 1986, listed five possible causes for the loss: explosion, a shift of cargo, failure of the hatches, external hull damage and structural failure.

With the loss of a sister ship, the Kowloon Bridge, in November 1986, a finger of suspicion was again pointed at frame 65. Consequently, a formal investigation was appointed under Mr. Gerald Darling QC, as wreck commissioner, with three assessors. It considered the loss from October 1987 to March 1988. Its report concluded:

> "For the reasons stated in this Report the Court finds that the Derbyshire was probably overwhelmed by the forces of nature in Typhoon Orchid, possibly after getting beam on to wind and sea, off Okinawa, in darkness on the night of 9/10 September 1980, with the loss of 44 lives. The evidence available does not support any firmer conclusions".

The families of those who perished were extremely disappointed at such an inconclusive result, and at the allegations of bad seamanship made in the report. The report cast further suspicions on the design features of the Derbyshire, particularly the strength of frame 65, and it was promoted as a cause of the ship's loss in articles in learned journals, by lecturers and in a book on the sinking of the Derbyshire written by Dave Ramwell and Tim Madge, which was published in 1992. The MV Derbyshire Family Association continued to put pressure on the Government for a full inquiry, with support from the International Transport Workers Federation and the maritime unions. In March 1994, the ITF agreed to back a mission to locate the Derbyshire, raising the money independently of the Government. Its part in the story cannot be over-emphasised. It brought in Oceaneering Technologies, and the wreck was located on 8 June 1994.

In a joint UK-EC assessors' report, Lord Donaldson used the results provided by Oceaneering Technologies and recommended that a joint UK Government-EC investigation be carried out in the interests of international ship safety. The deep submergence laboratory of Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution of the United States carried out an extensive groundbreaking survey, which at the time was the deepest underwater forensic examination of any wreck. It provided more than 200 hours of video and 135,774 photographs, which located the position of 98 per cent. of the wreckage in 2,500 separate pieces. Through pressure from the MV Derbyshire Family Association, the all-party parliamentary group on the Derbyshire and others, we persuaded the Deputy Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), to reopen the formal inquiry under Mr. Justice Colman. The present Government's role in unearthing the truth surrounding the sinking of the Derbyshire cannot be underestimated.

[Dr. Brian Iddon]

The inquiry was unique in that it took place in the High Court and was presided over by a senior judge. Tribute must be paid to the inquiry team, who worked with all parties involved to arrive at a definitive conclusion on the loss. From evidence of the condition of the wreck and data derived from model tests, which were conducted by MARIN in the Netherlands, strong inferences were drawn about the cause of the loss. Ventilators and air pipes located on the foredeck and leading down to the bosun's store, machinery space and ballast tank were damaged before sinking commenced in such a way as to admit substantial volumes of seawater to those spaces; the hatch covers were damaged by impact from forward before they collapsed into the holds and before they were subjected to bending on a longitudinal axis; the hull girder had not lost its longitudinal integrity at any time until after sinking had commenced; the bosun's store hatch lid did not admit water to the bosun's store until it was destroyed by impact, probably by some part of the starboard windlass; and the starboard windlass broke loose by reason of hydrodynamic loading, probably after some or all of the ventilators and air pipes to the bosun's store and ballast tank and probably the No.1 hatch covers had already been destroyed and had started to admit seawater, thereby reducing the vessel's freeboard and increasing the exposure of the windlass to weld-cracking waves.

The initiating cause of the loss of the vessel appears to have been the destruction of some or all of the ventilators and air pipes that were located on the foredeck, which led down into the boatswain's store, machinery spaces and ballast tank, and the consequent loss of freeboard at the bow due to the gradual flooding of those forward spaces.

Professor Tawn concluded from that data that the flooding of both the stores and the ballast tank—even the stores alone—could have produced sufficient loss of freeboard to expose hatch cover No.1 to at least one hatch-breaking wave during the typhoon on 9 September 1980. Therefore, hatch cover strength became crucial, not only to the safety of the Derbyshire, but to all similar vessels, many of which are still navigating the oceans today, thus putting hundreds more lives at risk.

The recommendations of the re-hearing of the formal investigation were significant, far-reaching and necessary to protect mariners' lives. Certain issues were highlighted as crucial to the achievement of increased safety at sea—hatch cover strength, permissible freeboard and navigational improvements.

Hatch cover strength applies equally to existing ships as to new ones. However, the problem with existing ships is whether shipowners would consider the fitting of stronger hatch covers to be economically viable. The underlying deck structure may not be strong enough to support heavier covers. That problem could be combated by an increase in either the minimum freeboard level or new covers, or a mixture of both for existing ships, which would allow heightened safety in dangerous waters. There is no excuse for building new ships without strengthening their hatch covers.

The international convention on load lines 1966 governs the weight of cargo stored in the holds of all bulk carriers worldwide. Justice Colman's inquiry concluded that:

"it provides for a level of protection substantially too low by reference to modern safety standards".

The RFI report recommends that that be changed and be

"applicable at least to all existing bulk carriers"

and that they should

"more than comply with the ILLC 66 regulations for minimum hatch cover strength".

An article in the *T2* section of *The Times* on 22 April 2002 entitled "Coffins of the High Seas" focused on the Derbyshire and the general safety of bulk carriers. A spokesman for the National Union of Marine, Aviation and Shipping Transport Officers was quoted as saying that the commercial life of those vessels is

"15 years maximum, but many of the vessels still working are more than 20 years old and the incidence of loss increases dramatically after 11 years."

That implies that many OBOs are death traps and unfit for service. That implication is reinforced by the sentiments expressed in the article's conclusion by Paul Lambert of the MV Derbyshire Family Association, whose brother Peter died on the Derbyshire. He suggests that the industry

"has known for 20 years what the problem is",

and that

"bulk carriers are not seaworthy."

Paul told me that some OBOs become rust buckets after 15 years, and that beyond that age they should be subjected to much more stringent inspections than younger ships.

The RFI report concludes that the International Maritime Organisation should require the

"compulsory daily reporting of all vessels".

The report also suggests that the mariner's handbook, NP1OO, should be amended as regards navigation in the dangerous semicircle of a tropical revolving storm, to include the possibility of running with the wind on the port quarter in certain circumstances. Masters should be made aware of the potential dangers of water entry into forward spaces and the resulting loss of freeboard.

According to the report, an increased participation by vessels in the World Meteorological Organisation's voluntary observing ships scheme should be encouraged by a British maritime notice and an IMO circular. Weather routing agencies should make clear to masters the precise circumstances in which positive routing advice will be given to vessels during voyages. Those navigational improvements will enable the safer passage of vessels through the most dangerous seas.

Many additional features in the report place obligations on the International Association of Classification Societies, the IMO and the Department for Transport, which should co-operate as necessary. Those features are aimed at ensuring the implementation of the improved safety standards set out in Mr. Justice Colman's report. The report recommends that IACS set up research programmes to investigate the establishment of a

"minimum strength requirement for and, if necessary, location and protection requirements for ventilators and air pipe fittings on deck".

It also recommends that chain locker access be through bolted manholes, not doors; that foredeck hatch cover displacements be monitored, preferably using camera surveillance on the foredeck; that deck fittings be secured; that as-built construction plans and plans showing alterations that have been in any dry dock worldwide be kept; and that powerful lighting and industrial video cameras be installed on the foredeck of all Capesize bulk carriers. It also contains recommendations on hatch-cover operating manuals, and recommends that the pumping system to deal with forward-space flooding be independent of the main pumps and be capable of running dry without damage and handling solid material.

Perhaps the two most important recommendations are that a marine accident database be established comprehensively to record storm damage incidents, and that all new ships be fitted with voyage data recorders, which are similar to the black box recorders that have always been fitted to aircraft. It is recommended that VDRs be retrofitted to existing ships, and the IMO is carrying out a feasibility study on retrofitting VDRs to existing bulk carriers, although it is not expected to report until January 2004.

In its 74th session last year, the IMO's maritime safety committee reported that some progress was being made. The committee was updated on the formal safety assessments that member organisations were carrying out on bulk carrier safety.

Andrew George (St. Ives): The hon. Gentleman rightly notes that action must be taken in the international context. Is he arguing that, given the IMO's record of reaching conclusions very slowly, the UK authorities should act unilaterally, rather than await the extremely sluggish development of new regulations?

Dr. Iddon: Yes, I am. I believe that the authorities are already taking such steps, and I look forward to the Minister saying something about that in his response.

Mr. Justice Colman has expressed concern about the progress that is being made in implementing the recommendations in the report. He warned that the sinking of the Christopher last December was a red light to the industry, and that there may be bulk carriers afloat with hatch covers that comply with ILLC 66, but which are

"of the order of 50 per cent. of what they should be in terms of structural strength".

According to him, the IACS should get its act together on hatch cover safety and lead any change on the issue.

Clearly, there is concern, given that 1,634 seafarers were lost in bulk carrier incidents in the period between the loss of the Derbyshire in 1980 and August 1998. The Christopher managed to get out a message stating that she had suffered forward hatch cover damage and was flooded—a fate similar to the Derbyshire's. It is clearly unacceptable for lives constantly to be lost when we have solutions to the problems within our grasp.

Mr. Ivan Henderson (Harwich): Does my hon. Friend agree that dealing with flags of convenience would be one way to tackle the poor safety records of some shipping companies? He mentioned the ITF, and I am sure that he will join me in congratulating it on its good work. Its inspectors examine ships to ensure that they are in good condition and use the right safety methods.

Reference has been made to solving the problem internationally, but we should surely tackle it on a European basis first. Every ship that enters European waters must comply with safety regulations, so that they are not unsafe or unseaworthy, and crews must be trained to a certain standard.

Dr. Iddon: My hon. Friend is right. If I had more time, I would mention those matters. I accept that it is difficult to achieve international agreement, but there is no doubt that, in recent years, cost-cutting exercises have driven the shipping industry. I am pleased that the Government are considering flagging back ships in Britain, because one problem has been that ships have flagged out of countries that have more stringent safety requirements. Training crews is important, as is insurance to cover those staff. There are so many complex issues to deal with in shipping that it is not easy to reach international agreements.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): The hon. Gentleman is perhaps the modern day Samuel Plimsoll. What action has Lloyd's taken to secure improved design for new shipping, as well as for the existing fleet?

Dr. Iddon: I am not an expert on shipping, but I understand that, for obvious reasons, Lloyd's Register of Shipping takes a great interest in the matter and is one of the leading promoters of safety for ships at sea.

Mr. Justice Colman is right to point out the dangerous delay in the implementation of his report. We should put pressure on all interested parties, including the Government, to speed up its implementation, so that we can offer a safe working environment for all those at sea, and provide justice for the families of the Derbyshire crew, who have fought for more than 22 years to improve safety at sea. I know that the Government are working actively to improve ship safety and that we are already well on our way to implementing many of Mr. Justice Colman's RFI report recommendations. I look forward to the Minister updating us on this important subject.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Peter Pike (in the Chair): Order. Before I call the next speaker, I should mention that five or six hon. Members wish to speak in addition to Front-Bench Members, so hon. Members must co-operate if everyone is to have a chance to contribute.

11.22 am

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): I congratulate the hon. Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) on securing this important debate. I want to focus on another

[Mr. Simon Thomas]

aspect of safety at sea, but I was interested to hear what he said about the lessons to be learned from the case of the MV Derbyshire. Unlike the hon. Gentleman, however, I have a coastal constituency, some 50 miles of glorious coastline, which hon. Members are welcome to visit at any time, as it includes some of the best features in the United Kingdom, including two special conservation areas—*[Interruption.]* I am sure that hon. Members representing Cornwall will have an opportunity to catch your eye, Mr. Pike—and only the second breeding pod of the bottle-nosed dolphin in the United Kingdom, so it is an important and pristine area.

I want to concentrate on a report published by the National Audit Office on 12 June, which deals with pollution from ships and accidents at sea. The report focuses on the contingency planning and response activities of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency. I was interested to read the report because I have been campaigning on the issue for several months and corresponding with the Minister's Department and planning officers in Wales. The report noted a severe gap in the contingency planning of coastal local authorities in Wales to deal with maritime accidents. As hon. Members may recall, the last serious maritime accident off the coast was the Sea Empress disaster, which caused a huge environmental problem for the beaches and tourist areas of Pembrokeshire and signalled a disaster in terms of safety at sea. Prior to that there was the Braer disaster. The independent inquiries into both those disasters—Lord Donaldson's into the Braer oil spillage and that of the Sea Empress environmental evaluation committee—one in 1994 and the other in 1996, made it clear that a key recommendation was for local authorities to have a statutory duty to plan for and undertake shoreline clean-ups following marine pollution incidents.

So far we have experienced oil pollution. The time will come when we see more serious pollution off our coasts. That call by the two inquiries was backed up by a report of the National Audit Office published a fortnight ago. It called for the Minister's Department to

> "consider the case for taking powers to require all coastal local authorities to have up-to-date oil spill contingency plans consistent with the national contingency plan so that the United Kingdom as a whole is properly prepared to deal with marine pollution incidents in compliance with international convention."

The implication in that statement is that we are not properly prepared at the moment; we need those statutory duties. That call has been supported by my local authority, Ceredigion county council, by Pembrokeshire national park and Pembrokeshire county council as the main sufferers of the Sea Empress disaster, by the Confederation of Scottish Local Authorities. It is also the subject of early-day motion 776, which has been signed by over 60 members of Parliament, including many—I am pleased to see—from the governing party but not, so far, by the hon. Member for Bolton, South-East. Perhaps he will consider whether he can support it; I would welcome that.

We need increased funding if we are to place a statutory duty on local authorities to deal with marine incidents. The three local authorities in Wales that were, unfortunately, identified by the NAO as not being sufficiently prepared for such disasters were Monmouthshire, Denbighshire and Newport. The BBC and the *Western Mail* report Denbighshire as having said simply that it could not do what was asked of it unless it had the resources to do so.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid-Bedfordshire): On a point of order, Mr. Pike. The hon. Gentleman raises an important issue, but it is not about safety at sea.

Mr. Peter Pike (in the Chair): I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will recognise that the debate is on safety of ships and seafarers at sea. I hope that he can bring his remarks back to that.

Mr. Thomas: Thank you, Mr. Pike. I thought that the NAO report on the Maritime and Coastguard Agency was pertinent to the debate. I shall move on to another aspect of the report, which I hope will please the hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed) more. The agency called for changes in merchant shipping legislation. Current legislation defines major areas of the UK coast, including mine in Cardigan bay, as internal waters. That means that those waters are insufficiently prepared for maritime accidents.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, all hon. Members will recognise my final concern, which relates directly to shipping at sea and the safety of mariners. In August, two ships—I do not know whether they are of the type that has been referred to—will carry cargo for British Nuclear Fuels plc through the Irish sea, off the coast of my constituency. The Irish Government and Governments in the Caribbean and New Zealand have registered their protests. They see such shipping as a possible terrorist target. I hope that the Minister will take the opportunity to say how he is addressing the safety of that shipment, and how he will ensure that there are no detrimental effects from the shipping of nuclear waste through the Irish sea.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am pleased—

Mr. Peter Pike (in the Chair): Order. I have let you say it twice, but I am not a Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Thomas: I apologise, Mr. Pike. You should be. I thought that all hon. Members who took the Chair in this Chamber were to be called Deputy Speakers.

Mr. Peter Pike (in the Chair): The four most senior members of the Speaker's Panel are additional Deputy Speakers. Other hon. Members are known by their names. That is why we have them in front of us.

Mr. Thomas: Thank you, Mr. Pike. I did not need to see your name to know it. I am sure that the fact that even I know your name means that you will soon be a Deputy Speaker.

I am pleased to have had an opportunity to outline some of the difficulties that I see affecting my constituency from marine pollution incidents; matters relating to the safety of shipping, particularly what will happen in August; and the history of some serious accidents that have been experienced off the coast of the United Kingdom, which affected both the lives of mariners and the pollution of our coast.

11.30 am

Ms Candy Atherton (Falmouth and Camborne): I will keep my remarks short, Mr. Pike. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) on securing the debate. The issue is important for my constituency.

I could take many tacks, but I would like to concentrate on safety in the Falmouth harbour area. Falmouth boasts one of the finest harbours in the world. For hundreds of years its mariners and fishermen have plied the seas, risking life and limb. Packet ships sailed to and from Falmouth with mail to and from the new world. Today it is home to a major ship repair yard and builds some of the great racing yachts of the world. The waters bustle and bubble with the activity of boats powered by both engines and sail. The shipyard has played host to many a ship needing repair. Disasters have long hit the Cornish coast; few hon. Members will need to be reminded of the tragedy of the Torrey Canyon.

I was delighted that the Government ensured a couple of years ago that a tug, the Far Sky, was based in Falmouth. Together with its successor, the Anglian Prince, which will be available for any future disaster, it has played a critical role in rescuing drifting vessels. A number of reports, including the Donaldson report, had recommended that we needed a western approaches guard ship on standby in Falmouth. I am pleased that the Government responded. The tug works locally with the internationally known Falmouth coastguard. The Deputy Prime Minister, a regular visitor and friend of the town, has seen its work. It oversees rescues around the globe—that of Pete Goss being just one relatively recent example. I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the coastguard and the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, to all at Culdrose and to those involved in sea rescues who, day and night, year in, year out, work for the good of all mariners. Hon. Members will remember the Kodima, which last winter foundered off the south Cornwall coast, providing endless decking for the gardens of Cornwall. The Far Sky was critical in rescuing the ship before it broke up on the rocks.

I do, however, have concerns. In Falmouth harbour, three different harbour authorities have jurisdiction over the Carrick roads. Pilots in Falmouth have argued long and hard that they need one authority. They are in no doubt that one authority would make for a safer harbour if a major catastrophe hit the area. I strongly support them. It seems that it is possible to reform local government and to create a Parliament in Scotland, but that to amalgamate three harbour authorities is beyond the wit of man and Government.

Twenty years ago, Falmouth was a relatively quiet harbour in terms of water sports. Now, hundreds of yachts mingle with ships weighing hundreds of thousands of tonnes. Safety measures for ships and seafarers within the harbour and local waters seem to involve many anomalies. My good friend the Minister introduced a private Member's Bill in 1996 to improve safety at activity centres. I congratulate him on that achievement. However, there are certain loopholes that I suggest, tentatively, he might address. Water sport companies training sailors need adventurous activities licences. They are happy to comply, but question why surfing is not included. Surf companies may have to obtain licences from the local authority, but those do not require the same standards as adventurous activity licences. I am sure that all current surf companies operate to the highest level in Cornwall, but that may be something to consider in the future. Powerboats, which are the equivalent of sports cars at sea, can be driven with no training at all. Would we allow untrained drivers on motorways? Of course not. We should, therefore, consider mandatory training for those who drive powerful powerboats.

On the wider issues, the mariners of Falmouth are keen for massive improvements to be made in safety at sea. The trade union NUMAST is clear that we need to attract many more young recruits to the sea, but flags of convenience will not do so, as hon. Members have said. Nationally, the industry fears that European expansion will lead to cheap labour, particularly on ferry routes.

Many people in Cornwall want on-board conditions to be checked during port state control inspections. In recent years, several ships have been stranded in Falmouth. The crews have been living among rats, and have been dependent on the charity of the people of Falmouth. The basic safety offered by such ships has been dreadful due to lack of investment and basic maintenance, and it has often been difficult even to identify the owners. In some cases, the crews have not been paid for months, and the ships have been taken into custody because of unpaid bills.

Mr. Ivan Henderson: Is my hon. Friend aware of the article in *The Guardian* today, which refers to the Cambodian ship that was arrested by the French Navy and the Spanish and Greek authorities? The article states:

> "Safety is also an issue: since 1995 at least 25 Cambodian ships have been wrecked or stranded. There have also been 41 collisions, nine fires and 45 arrests."

That is purely down to flags of convenience, and we should seriously consider tackling the issue.

Ms Atherton: I thank my hon. Friend. I have not seen that article, but I shall certainly review it. Flags of convenience are clearly a major issue, and I know that the Government have considered it. I shall listen with interest to what the Minister has to say in that regard.

Seafarers become the victims in the international game of pass the buck. Ships are often unsafe, and conditions are beyond the pale. It is vital that the Government take action internationally and in Britain to ensure that standards rise and conditions improve.

Mr. Sayeed: The fact that port state control in the EU has been toughened up has led to ships being arrested. Hitherto, they were not arrested, because port state control was ineffectively managed. The fact that they are now being arrested means that there are ships around with unpaid crews and poor conditions.

Ms Atherton: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, but he can hardly think that the current situation is satisfactory; people in my constituency and in the wider Cornish area certainly would not. There have been small improvements, but we need greater regulation.

[Ms Atherton]

If young people are to be attracted into the industry in the future, they need to be reassured that there will be no more stories of unpaid crews with rats for companions. Higher safety standards will not encourage new recruits if the industry still plies the seas with ships that are in such poor condition.

I have raised small and large issues today, but safety at sea must be our number one priority, whether in international or in own waters.

11.38 am

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid-Bedfordshire): The House should congratulate the hon. Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon), and thank him for once again raising the issue of the MV Derbyshire. It is particularly important, given that other ships of that class have been lost at sea. That seems to suggest—I put it no more strongly than that—some form of structural failure with that class, which maritime organisations should examine.

I take issue with some of the points that have been raised, particularly by the hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Ms Atherton). She did not recognise that some measures have already been taken.

Safety legislation can be considered on three levels: international, European and national. Internationally, the shipping industry is principally regulated by the International Maritime Organisation, which is a London-based United Nations agency. The IMO has no power to make Governments or industry take action, so the principal responsibility for enforcing IMO regulations on ship safety and environmental protection rests with flag states. Much of that work is delegated to bodies called classification societies. Flag state support and enforcement is supplemented by port state control, which means that officials can inspect foreign flagged ships to ensure that they comply with international requirements.

Through the years, the IMO has adopted much useful and important legislation. The first is the international convention for the safety of life at sea. The second is MARPOL, which deals with prevention of pollution. The third is the convention on the international regulations for preventing collisions at sea, which lays down what is known in maritime circles as the rules of the road. The fourth, which has already been mentioned, is the international convention on load lines, which sets the minimum permissible freeboard according to the season of the year and the ship's trading pattern.

Shipping companies have the international safety management code, which requires them to have a licence to operate. For seafarers, there is the international convention on standards of training, certification and watchkeeping for seafarers and ILO 147, which requires national Administrations to have effective legislation on labour issues such as hours of work, medical fitness and seafarers' working conditions.

The IMO is sometimes accused of being slow, but that accusation misunderstands how it operates. It must operate by agreement, which means that it must secure agreements from parties with many different interests. It is a slow process, and to circumvent it, port states, national Governments and the European Community have often implemented their own regulations.

European safety legislation has mainly concentrated on maritime cabotage, jobs and ensuring that internationally agreed rules, especially those of the IMO and the ILO, are strictly adhered to. The legislation has sometimes amplified those rules, particularly in relation to ferries. The EU has sought to improve the safety of navigation by developing two aids to navigation: vessel traffic management and information; and radio-navigation systems.

In the United Kingdom, the Government are advised by several organisations. The principal one is the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, which was formed by the merger of the Coastguard Agency and the Marine Safety Agency on 1 April 1998. There are many doubts about the agency, and as the Minister will know, the Transport Committee argued in 1999 that the two organisations should be demerged. The Government resisted, and have continued to resist, the proposal. The Comptroller and Auditor General has also been critical in his report "Ship Surveys and Inspections", much of which concerned safety. The Public Accounts Committee took up the cudgels and published a report on 6 February 2002. Three main conclusions emerged. First, the MCA needs to focus more of its work on the riskiest vessels, rather than taking the easiest targets. Secondly, it should give more attention to the human aspects of ship safety. Thirdly, it should take firmer action to uncover and pursue significant breaches of maritime legislation.

I have a further criticism. As far as I am aware there is not one master mariner in the MCA's senior management. It seems daft that the principal organisation chosen by the Government to advise them on safe, secure maritime operations has no senior practitioner of that art but relies on those whose experience is principally shore-side. It was announced in the Queen's Speech on 6 December 2000 that the Government were putting together a draft safety Bill to cover a wider range of different workplace and transport safety issues, including port and shipping safety. More details were in the press release of 3 May 2001. It is now a year on. Will the Minister tell us what has happened to that Bill?

One of the IMO's current concerns is safety from terrorism following 11 September. As that tragedy made painfully clear, economic globalisation and technological interdependence have brought unforeseen global security threats, which affect not only sovereign states but the vessels that constantly move between their legal jurisdictions. Shipping is now a direct component in a complex logistical chain that is an integral part of the world's manufacturing process. It has also become subject to that more notorious global force—international terrorism.

Thus, we cannot speak of shipping safety without also recognising the link with maritime security. Security measures, which at present cover only passenger ships and passenger ferries, need to be expanded to cover other potentially vulnerable ships, such as gas carriers, chemical and oil tankers, not to mention the safety of personnel who man the port areas. In view of that safety-security connection, I wish to highlight the potential implications of revising chapter V of the international convention for the safety of life at sea, which will come into force on 1 July and is at present being considered by the House.

The automatic identification system was developed to deliver digital information conveying a vessel's position, identity and other related information automatically from ship to ship and from ship to shore. The systems allow ships and coastal authorities to "see" the position of other ships, even in situations where physical obstructions would prevent radar detection. AIS also enables ships to identify other ships, assists in target tracking and simplifies information exchange by reducing verbal exchanges.

The principle of those regulations is admirable, yet the consequences of their implementation demand rather more thought and much less haste. There certainly needs to be much more provision for the training of seafarers and personnel at shore surveillance stations and ports in a number of new navigation technologies, including AIS. At the moment, that is merely being considered by the sub-committee on standards of training, certification and watchkeeping. Moreover, as a leading tanker owner and operator of large crude carriers warned, AIS

> "may delay the adoption of an urgently needed holistic approach to shipping traffic safety".

It seems odd that we intend to pass a statutory instrument before 1 July, but according to its Assistant Secretary General, the IMO is now

> "actively encouraging a more thorough consideration of AIS issues by means of a two-day seminar which will take place on July 15/16".

We are introducing a regulation that the IMO has not finished considering. Any seaman will tell the Government that the priority should be for multilateral arrangements that deal with collisions and groundings as prime threats to mariners and the environment. AIS may prove helpful in tracking vessels in the aftermath of an accident, but it may be less useful as a preventive measure. I hope the Minister will answer the loud call for a comprehensive international traffic control and routing system.

AIS also runs the risk of undermining the seaman's more safety-conscious reliance on the mark one eyeball, radar, proper passage planning, the rule of the road, separation zones, and a host of seaman-like actions that may be downgraded by an over-reliance on fallible VHF-AIS electronics.

I wanted to make points about flares and their disposal, but I shall write to the Minister instead. I shall also write to him about the suggestion that small boats should have to show that they have passage planning before they undertake any voyage.

11.51 am

Mr. Gwyn Prosser (Dover): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon), who has become a veritable expert on all MV Derbyshire-related matters.

The Derbyshire story has run almost throughout my career as a merchant navy officer, which began in the 1960s. It has become almost an icon of the continuing campaign to improve safety at sea and better the lot of the seafarer. I spent some 30 years at sea with the Blue Funnel line out of Liverpool and the Glen line out of London, and sailed on some of the safest deep-sea vessels ever built. I also had the harrowing experience of sailing on some of the world's worst ships during my time as a globe-trotting, trouble-shooting chief engineer, so I have seen the best and the worst during my deep-sea days.

During the last 13 years of my seafaring career before I entered this place, I sailed as chief engineer on Dover's cross channel ferries, and was employed in that capacity on Friday 6 March 1987 when the Herald of Free Enterprise capsized off Zeebrugge on passage to Dover. It was carrying 430 passengers and 80 crewmen, and 193 lives were lost. Safety at sea has therefore been real and personal for me, and it continues to be so. My constituency of Dover has the busiest ferry port in the world, and overlooks one of the busiest seaways in the world. Thousands of my constituents are associated with the port of Dover, or sail on the ferries.

Safety at sea is a massive, international subject, as hon. Members have acknowledged. I want to confine my comments to working hours, tours of duty, fatigue and training. Although there is much to be done to improve ship design, stability and fire and flood prevention, it remains an uncomfortable fact that 70 per cent. of all accidents, incidents and losses at sea can be attributed to humans. Most incidents and founderings are the result of a combination of factors, but the human factor is present in almost all of them. The hours of work and the quality and quantity of work periods hugely influence the way in which people perform and behave. That is pertinent to cross-channel ferries as well as to deep-sea operations.

The National Union of Marine, Aviation and Shipping Transport Officers—I declare an interest as an affiliate member of that august organisation—and the National Union of Seamen, now known as the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers, have for many years campaigned for safer hours. Hon. Members will recall that the P & O ferry strike of 1989 was called by the National Union of Seamen to fight for safer working hours and to resist the swingeing changes enforced by the ferry company. It is tragic to recall that after many months of struggle and strife and difficult times in Dover—we still face them today—P & O's response was to sack the entire work force and bring in replacements over their heads. I want to put on record the fact that the sacked seafarers committee, led by one of my constituents, Steve Stevenson, is still campaigning for safety at sea and for justice for the sacked seafarers.

The working hours directive and its effect on seafarers' hours and our domestic trade union laws is an important issue. Every time we reflect on these matters, we realise that the seafarer is a second-class citizen who is squeezed out of the game and omitted from rules and regulations. Seafarers never receive the protection that they deserve.

The ferry industry has always been hugely competitive. The challenge of the channel tunnel increased competition. The recent removal of duty-free sales from the ferry services built up further pressure on owners and employees in respect of conditions and hours of work. When I represented merchant navy officers at the port of Dover for NUMAST, the issue of

[Mr. Gwyn Prosser]

hours and fatigue dominated the negotiations. The battle for fair working conditions is, of course, continuing.

As to the effect of working hours and fatigue, my evidence is anecdotal. I have not carried out specific research for this important debate, because I did not receive early enough notice of it. I have a copy of the *NUMAST Telegraph,* a publication that I recommend to all. It tells of a shipping vessel running aground in the Shetland Isles after the skipper fell asleep while alone on the bridge:

> "Inspectors from the Marine Accident Investigation Branch found that the man had had only seven hours sleep in the previous three days."

It goes on to say that the skipper's lack of sleep was

> "largely the result of the vessel having a crew of only three, one of whom was very inexperienced."

Another item is entitled, "Dozy officer is sentenced":

> "A Russian officer was given a six month suspended prison sentence and fined £1,830 by a French court last month after his ship ran aground off the Brittany coast after he fell asleep while alone on the bridge."

They may not be headline incidents, but similar cases resulting from fatigue could be cited during any month of the year. They are mainly the result of the manning of the bridge and the navigation of the ship, but further areas of potential difficulty exist below that level: engine room watchkeepers, seafarers on deck and mechanics in the engine room can all have their attention spoiled by lack of sleep and rest.

Time is pressing and other hon. Members want to contribute to the debate. Rather than recount further incidents, I would like to make a plea on behalf of seafarers—both officers and ratings—in respect of hours of duty, rest periods and size of crews. We cannot impose a minimum crew size on many small fishing vessels. Statutory guidance exists on minimum crew levels for larger ships, but the minimum has virtually become the norm. Instead of companies considering the most appropriate manning levels and listening to the people who run ships day in and day out—master mariners, chief engineers and ratings—they try to get away with the lowest levels. Many companies use the lowest common denominator, which results in overstretch. The hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed) has experience in the area, but it is from afar. He painted a rosy picture, but the statistics and league tables on accidents, losses and flounderings at sea show that flag-of-convenience vessels are head and shoulders above British-staffed and British-manned vessels.

Mr. Sayeed: The hon. Gentleman suggests that I was unaware of, or unconcerned about, flags of convenience. I am not, as my remarks made clear.

Mr. Prosser: I take note of the hon. Gentleman's intervention.

When the problem of hours, fatigue, flags of convenience, lack of training and fraudulently gained qualifications are combined with, and superimposed on, the experience of areas such as my patch of the straits of Dover, which has fully-laden tankers, chemical carriers—indeed, the whole list of carriers—and cross-channel ferries from Dover to Calais and Zeebrugge, we have a dangerous mixture.

My final plea is that the issue of hours is reconsidered, and an inquiry is held into working hours and crew sizes, so that rational decisions can be made that will improve safety for the seafarer and the owner.

12.1 pm

Mr. Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Andrew George) for allowing me a few of the precious moments that he has been given. I offer my speech as a lesson to other hon. Members in how to tailor remarks to fit a time limit.

I had wanted to raise several issues but will consign myself to one: the standard of safety in the fishing industry, which is a matter of supreme concern in my constituency. It involves two issues. The first is the culture in the fishing industry that safety is not important and can be overlooked. I am mindful of my experience as a solicitor engaged in an inquiry into a fatal accident on the merchant fishing vessel Annandale. My client's son had gone over the side to fix a trawl door without a lifejacket or a safety line, and the boat was hit by a lump of water. The body was never found. During that fatal accident inquiry, one of the deck hands gave evidence that he had worn a lifejacket for two weeks afterwards but had eventually stopped doing so because he was being ribbed by his crew mates. I offer that as a mere illustration of the problem.

The second factor in the worsening situation is economics. As has been said, fishing boats operate with smaller crews and higher overheads, and spend much more time at sea and less money on maintenance. Those changes all cause decreased safety levels. However, it is clear that the problem will not be solved by regulation alone; regulation has been tried and has manifestly failed. The economic difficulties of the industry need to be resolved—that is not one of the Minister's extensive responsibilities—and a change of culture in the industry brought about.

12.4 pm

Andrew George (St. Ives): I congratulate the hon. Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) on securing this important debate. He was right that the subject is raised too infrequently in the House. According to my records, the last time that the issue of safety at sea was raised was in an Adjournment debate that I secured as long ago as 15 July 1998 on loss of lives at sea. It concentrated on the fishing industry, which concerns many hon. Members.

Several important issues were raised in the debate, and the Minister will want to respond to some of the points made about the integral role of the International Maritime Organisation. Many people are concerned that a body that can move forward only on the basis of consensus and agreement does not have sufficient teeth and cannot impose the necessary sanctions to be able to implement the regulations with which it agrees. Anything that the Government can do to rattle cages and encourage the IMO to establish the sanctions that we all want would be very much to the good.

Several projects have taken international safety standards forward, some of which were mentioned by the hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed). I want to highlight the standards of training, certification and watchkeeping for seafarers. I have spoken to a number of senior and experienced mariners, and there is concern that much of the new training on the international stage that is being promoted at present is based too much on technology and not sufficiently on an understanding of manual navigation techniques. Master mariners are worried that navigation standards are deteriorating as a result of the new training programme. The Government should recognise the argument that it is affecting navigation and watchkeeping standards on UK-registered and overseas vessels.

It is argued that an incident 18 months ago in the Dover straits involving Ever Decent, a Taiwanese cargo vessel, and Norwegian Dream, a passenger ship, was caused by the over-dependence on technology and insufficient use of visual methods of watchkeeping. In March 1997, the loss of the MV Cita in my constituency was partly the result of insufficient crew members on board. The watchkeeper fell asleep and the vessel ran into the east coast of the Isles of Scilly. The vessel was registered in one country, owned in another and insured in another, and as a result it was impossible to make any compensation arrangements for the crew or for the people of the Isles of Scilly who were affected by the incident.

The IMO should have more teeth. It should have sanctions available to it so that, with the maritime Governments at the cutting edge of improvements in this regard, it can jump on the low standards of shipping, which several hon. Members have emphasised in the debate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) rightly raised the issue of fishing. The Government can take the lead on that by showing that they live by the slogan of joined-up government, especially in the Department for Transport's relationship with the Ministry of Defence. When the MOD sends out reconnaissance aircraft to search for vessels, it does so as a favour, not under agreement between the Department for Transport and the MOD. In the past, I have appealed to the Ministry of Defence to scramble aircraft to go out and look for vessels, but it is under no obligation to do so, and there is no agreement between different Departments to employ the best resources for that purpose. Similarly, naval fishing protection vessels are used to inspect fisheries and to protect fish stocks. While inspectors are on board those vessels they could easily inspect safety aspects of fishing vessels. It is not beyond the wit of man or woman to sort out those issues.

The hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire made a number of important points. The introduction of the draft safety Bill announced in May 2001 certainly needs to be addressed, as do several other issues. The Minister must also take on board and investigate the often-repeated complaint that the Maritime and Coastguard Agency does not have sufficient advice from master mariners, either for its inspections or in its understanding of buoyancy. I again congratulate the hon. Member for Bolton, South-East on securing this important debate, and I look forward to the Minister's reply.

12.10 pm

Mr. Malcolm Moss (North-East Cambridgeshire): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) on securing this important debate. Although he rightly concentrated on MV Derbyshire—we listened carefully to him—he also introduced various general issues relating to maritime safety.

On the issue of MV Derbyshire, the then Secretary of State for Transport, who is now the Deputy Prime Minister, said in a written answer of November 2000 that Mr. Justice Colman had made

> "a total of 24 recommendations to enhance bulk carrier safety and safety generally."

The Secretary of State then made four promises. He said that the Department—the then DETR—

> "will prepare a response to each of the recommendations . . . This response will be presented to Parliament . . . the Department will give urgent consideration, in particular, to the recommendations that the IMO—"

the International Maritime Organisation—

> "should revise the relevant provisions of the International Load Line Convention 1966 and that any enhanced requirements concerning hatch cover strength should also apply to existing ships."—[*Official Report*, 8 November 2000; Vol. 356, c. 240W.]

It would be helpful if the Minister, some 18 months later, could confirm that all those commitment have been met.

Back in May 2001, the Department, through a Minister, announced new measures to improve maritime safety, an issue that my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed) has raised. It talked about the intentions set out in the Queen's Speech the previous November to draft a safety Bill, and it promised to use that opportunity to introduce three groups of measures to improve the safety of merchant shipping in the United Kingdom and safety at ports and harbours.

Let us take a closer look at some of the proposals. The first group was to improve the way in which maritime safety incidents were dealt with and to give fire authorities powers to recover the costs of fighting fires at sea. Although they have powers, but not duties, to fight fires, no mechanism is available for them to recover their costs. The second group was to improve the enforcement of shipping safety law, and the third group was to make some improvements to the powers of harbour authorities to regulate marine safety, so as to help them to implement the port marine safety code. As we well know, that was developed after the grounding of the Sea Empress in Milford Haven in 1996.

All those proposals would find acceptance and support among Opposition Members, but 13 months later there is still no sign of the Bill. Notwithstanding the problems and pressures in the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, what signal does that send to the shipping industry about the Government's priorities and their failure to regard safety at sea as a serious issue? Once again, the Government are keen to issue press releases promising action, but are apparently not so keen to deliver on their promises.

I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Bedfordshire referred to the revised chapter V of the international convention for the safety of life at sea, which is due to come into force through a statutory

[Mr. Malcolm Moss]

instrument on 1 July. I understand that the House of Lords is currently scrutinising it. Serious doubts and concerns have arisen, particularly from practitioners in the industry, about the universal ship-borne automatic identification system. Why, given that opposition, are the Government apparently charging ahead with the implementation of that statutory instrument? AIS is a new and untried system. What is the Government's estimate of the costs of evaluating not only the system but training shipmasters, officers and pilots in its operation and maintenance?

I have three short questions. The Minister may have time to respond to them today, but if he does not I should like him to write to me. First, is he aware that the chief inspector of marine accidents, Rear Admiral J. S. Lang, had no direct involvement in the development of AIS, nor did he contribute to the deliberations on SOLAS? Secondly, is he satisfied that the proposed statutory instrument is intra vires in committing the UK to adopt amendments to chapter V of SOLAS, which

> "embrace modern and future technologies for navigational instruments"?

Finally, is he convinced that

> "As a signatory of SOLAS, the UK Government is obliged to implement this revision of SOLAS",

and that

> "as the UK took part in the negotiations at IMO that agreed the revision of Chapter V, the UK is content with the provisions as they stand"?

If so, what is the point of the consultation called for by merchant shipping legislation?

12.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Jamieson): I add my congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) on raising these important matters. I also congratulate him on the clarity with which he raised so many points. He listed a number of chilling statistics of loss at sea. He also gave an excellent summary of the events leading up to the sinking of MV Derbyshire and what has happened since. I associate myself with his words of congratulation to the MV Derbyshire Family Association on their relentless campaigning for improvements to safety at sea.

The debate has given us an interesting tour of the coasts of this country. We have been to Cornwall and to Wales, and we have been down to Dover. I am not sure how much coastline there is in Bolton.

Dr. Iddon: We have a canal.

Mr. Jamieson: Notwithstanding that, I recognise my hon. Friend's enormous interest in these matters. One does not have to come from a seafaring constituency to have a profound interest in these important matters.

The hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) was very engaging and I will try to answer some of his points. Some of the issues regarding the environment perhaps went a little beyond the scope of my responsibilities and the debate. However, he raised the important issue of the shipments of materials from Japan. I can assure him that all the International Maritime Organisation requirements will be met on those shipments. They will be transported in packages that meet all the requirements of the International Atomic Energy Agency. I can assure him that the Government and my Department are taking a great interest in those matters.

My hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Ms Atherton) made an excellent contribution. As a slight diversion, I should like to congratulate her on her recent marriage. It is not true that the first 20 years are the worst. It is the first 25 years, and I have well surpassed that already. In the event of a major incident in Falmouth or anywhere else that exceeded the abilities of the harbour authorities, the Secretary of State's representative for salvage and intervention would take over the command and control. That was one of my hon. Friend's concerns. That is covered in the United Kingdom's national contingency plan, and it is supplemented by the port marine safety code.

A number of hon. Members raised the issue of flags of convenience. Some flags of convenience give considerable cause for concern, but the main concern is substandard ships, not just the flag of convenience. It may be more meaningful to talk about substandard ships. The UK has been at the forefront of achieving international agreement to improve the safety and environmental performance of ships on whatever register they are placed. As several hon. Members mentioned, the port state control plays an important part in that.

Moving seamlessly to the criticism of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency that was made by the hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed), I daresay that any organisation could be criticised. However, Maurice Storey is an outstanding person, and his leadership of the new organisation has been exceptional. The agency is now organised and highly competent and has responded to many of the points that have been made. One of its tasks is the port state control. The hon. Gentleman said that the agency should focus on the riskiest vessels, which it is doing. Another criticism was that more attention should be paid to human factors. Everyone would agree with that, including the agency. If the hon. Gentleman visited the agency and availed himself of the relevant information, he might change some of the views that he expressed today.

Mr. Sayeed: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Jamieson: No, I will not give way. The hon. Gentleman has already taken too long, to judge by some faces. I may give way to him on another occasion.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Prosser) made some important points about the working time directive and the fatigue experienced by people working at sea. He will know that the UK ratified the International Labour Organisation's convention 180 on limits on hours of work. We will shortly introduce the EC directive on the working hours of seafarers into UK law, and I assure him that the Government place great importance on safety and fatigue.

The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) made an engagingly short speech, on which I congratulate him. It was a model of how much one can say in a short period. It was so good that I will take up his kind offer of some time ago to visit the Shetland Isles and partake of some of the fine hospitality available in that part of the country. I may visit some time in August, and I should be delighted to see the hon. Gentleman if he is not holidaying in the Mediterranean. He raised the important issue of sea fishing safety. I agree that the problem is the lack of a safety culture. We support the call for fishermen to wear lifejackets, which can now be worn without hindering fishing and moving around on deck. The Maritime and Coastguard Agency is working with the industry to change the culture, and we are grateful for the support of the national fishing federations in that work. There is much to be done. The record of safety in the fishing industry is appalling. It has got worse rather than better in recent years, and is of great concern to us.

In the few minutes that are available to me, I want to make some general points and move to some of the important points that were raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East. It goes without saying that shipping is vital to world trade. It is a growing global and highly competitive business. We should be on our guard to ensure that healthy competition thrives, but not at the expense of safety, which should be our paramount concern. As has been said, bulk carriers have an unfortunate safety record. The Government deplore the loss of life suffered by seafarers serving on them, and acknowledge the contribution made by the Derbyshire Family Association.

The association is now at last witnessing progress as the IMO takes decisions stemming from Mr. Justice Colman's recommendations that will make a real difference to the safety of seafarers serving on such ships. In May, the maritime safety committee of the IMO agreed two new regulations. The first was to install water ingress alarms that can be monitored from the bridge in holds and forward spaces. That issue was raised earlier. The second was to fit pump systems in forward spaces so that they can be operated without the need to traverse exposed and treacherous decks, such as those on the Derbyshire when it went down.

The new regulations could not be more pertinent to the loss of the Derbyshire, which sank rapidly, without warning and without a distress signal. The installation of alarms warning of bow flooding would have given Captain Underhill, the master of the Derbyshire, a chance to take early action to protect his ship. Had pumping systems been accessible, he might have been able to save his ship, issue a distress signal or, failing all else, given his crew a chance to abandon ship. By implementing the regulations, we will afford protection to the masters and crews of bulk carriers that was not available to those on the Derbyshire.

These achievements do not give us cause to relax our efforts. At an IMO meeting next month, the United Kingdom will introduce proposals to update the hatch cover design criteria in the current revision of the 1988 load line protocol, which was mentioned by several hon. Members. That work draws heavily upon the results of model tests that were initiated following the reopened formal investigation into the loss of the Derbyshire, which found that the collapse of hatch covers subsequent to bow flooding had led to the loss.

The Government know that their ability to improve bulk carrier safety lies in reaching international agreement at the IMO. Such agreement is most readily reached when proposed safety measures have passed the test of formal safety assessment to show that they are cost effective. The UK is leading an international collaborative formal safety assessment study on bulk carriers, which will submit its report to the maritime safety committee in December. The study considers an array of safety measures, many of which build on Mr. Justice Colman's recommendations, for both new and existing bulk carriers of different sizes. Many of the measures are passing the test, and I assure hon. Members that the UK will vigorously pursue their implementation aboard bulk carriers.

I should add that the European directive on the safe loading and unloading of bulk carriers will be implemented shortly. It is relevant to my hon. Friends the Members for Dover and for Falmouth and Camborne, as it will ensure that bulk carriers calling at EU ports are loaded and unloaded correctly. That is vital, since stress and/or damage caused to the hull while the vessel is handled in port carries with it the risk of subsequent catastrophic failure at sea.

I should like to comment briefly on human factors, because they underlie much of what has been said today. The large majority of shipping accidents are caused by the human factor, not structural or equipment failures. That is not to say that seafarers should take the blame for the majority of shipping accidents. All too frequently accidents occur because the seafarers concerned are poorly trained or rewarded, badly motivated, or simply overworked with overlong shifts. Too much may have been expected from individual seafarers, and in such circumstances even the best-found ship in structural and equipment terms is a safety risk.

The need to improve the standards of training for seafarers has been recognised for some time. It might surprise many to learn that until fairly recently there was no international mandatory requirement for basic safety training, and nor were the necessary maritime skills specified. That has been addressed by the IMO in a revision of the international convention on standards of training, certification and watchkeeping for seafarers, which is now in force internationally. I hope that that covers the points made about that matter.

The problem of seafarer fatigue through overwork, which is a frequent contributor to marine accidents, has also been addressed. A European directive placing limits on seafarers' hours of work will come into force shortly.

Mr. Moss: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Jamieson: Several important matters were also raised in the debate, but little time—perhaps only 15 seconds—is available.

Mr. Moss: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Jamieson: If any hon. Members want further to raise any of those matters with me, I shall endeavour to provide an effective response.

Mr. Moss: I have a quick question.

Mr. Jimmy Hood (in the Chair): Order. The hon. Member for North-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Moss) should not heckle the Minister from a sedentary position.

Hospital Chaplaincy

12.30 pm

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): It is a pleasure to initiate this short debate this morning and I am grateful for the opportunity to do so. Only an hour and a half ago I sat down after winding up the debate on education in the cities, so I hope that the Minister will be generous if my thoughts are not quite as well collected as they should be.

This is an important subject, relating to an unintended consequence of the Data Protection Act 1998 for the work of hospital chaplains. My constituent, Rev. Graeme Skinner, the vicar of St. Mary Magdalene church in Sale, first raised the issue with me in March this year. He wrote to say that he was deeply concerned about the impact of the Data Protection Act on hospital chaplaincy. He described the Act as "a millstone" for the ministry and, since then, he has expressed the fear that hospital chaplaincy might be marginalized by the application of its provisions.

I should like to express my gratitude to several people in various churches who wrote to give me useful information and guidance in a complex area of law, especially Rev. Edward Lewis of the Hospital Chaplaincies Council.

In March this year I first raised my concerns on behalf of the Rev. Skinner with the Leader of the House, who kindly undertook to examine the matter further. He said that it was important that

> "a law that was intended to protect our people benefits them rather than detracts from their quality of life."—[*Official Report*, 21 March 2002; Vol. 382, c. 441.]

I wholeheartedly endorse that view which, if we can find our way through the current difficulties, should become part of the law.

I then pursued the matter with a letter to the Leader of the House, asking about the outcome of his further investigations. On Wednesday 24 April I received this response:

> "Where a patient is incapable of providing consent, perhaps through serious or terminal illness, it is possible for hospital staff to disclose religious affiliation, as this may in the circumstances be in the best interests of the patient . . . The Department of Health is currently considering the need to issue guidance on this matter."—[*Official Report*, 24 April 2002; Vol. 384, c. 293W.]

As the Minister knows, I pursued the matter more recently with her through questions to the Lord Chancellor's Department. On 11 June she said:

> "The Data Protection Act does not prevent hospitals from passing on information about a patient's religion, but it states that they can do so only with the patient's consent or, if the patient is unable to give that consent, if it is in their vital interest."—[*Official Report*, 11 June 2002; Vol. 386, c. 713.]

The question whether the law applies to hospital trusts in respect of whether they are permitted to pass information on to chaplaincies is complex. It is now causing difficulties for several trusts and they want to find a way through them.

I received a letter from a hospital chaplain who told me that in answer to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr. Cash), the Minister replied that

> "the Department of Health's patient empowerment team is working on new guidance for chaplains with the multi-faith joint national working group"—[*Official Report*, 11 June 2002; Vol. 386, c. 714.]

The letter continued that it was interesting to note that a member of the joint national working group knows nothing about such dialogue. There appears to be some confusion about the steps being taken, in good faith, by all parties to try to resolve the difficulties.

I hope that the debate will be an opportunity at least to begin to clear up the confusion that is impeding hospital chaplaincies in carrying out their ministry. I received a letter recently from the chairman of an NHS hospital trust in the north-west of England, which has encountered some difficulties in this regard, but has taken a clear stand that it will continue, as far as it is humanly possible, to pass on information about patients' religious affiliation or denomination to the hospital chaplaincies in whatever way it can. The letter states:

> "One must wonder why legislation from the start of the NHS has demanded that the NHS employs chaplains of many faiths within hospitals. If they are not there to assist people in their mental or physical healing, and in their spiritual needs at the time of death, and if it had not been considered to be a vital part of support in hospitals then legislation would not have demanded their existence. The same of course applies to their role in prisons and other institutions."

The current legal situation appears to be that, in ordinary circumstances, personal information, of which the religious affiliation or denomination of a patient may be an example, cannot be passed on to a third party without consent. In some interpretations of some aspects of the legislation, that requirement is qualified further, stating that explicit consent must be given. However, I understand that schedule 3 of the Data Protection Act 1998 provides the Secretary of State with powers to exclude the need for explicit consent which may, in itself, provide a way out of the problems that have arisen. The letter from the chairman of the NHS trust continued, compellingly:

> "Our view is that we have a first priority to do whatever we can for our patients and of course for their carers and relatives. In our view we believe we should continue to assist the chaplains by providing information. I am taking advice from our lawyers on this matter, and what steps we may need to take as a Board to record and minute this decision so that staff may act with proper authority and cover."

The Minister, having had experience in the Department of Health as well as in her current brief, will be aware that the need to clarify the situation could be an unwelcome and costly difficulty for NHS trusts. Hundreds of different bodies within the national health service may need to seek guidance and take legal advice on the circumstances in which prohibition from passing on the information might apply.

The picture so far appears to be patchy. It seems that some trusts are proceeding as if nothing had changed, some are taking guidance about the fact that the law has changed and now applies to their actions, and are taking it very seriously, and others are deeply concerned that they get it right, but do not yet know the answer and are in a state of confusion. One way of ensuring that proper legal permission is obtained for passing the information to chaplaincies is to seek consent when the patient arrives at the hospital and the information is logged in. Again, however, it appears that the technology has not facilitated that in some circumstances, especially where computer technology is involved. I have heard of at least one instance where the software for the patient administration system—I think it is called that, but the Minister will know better than I do—would need to be changed to accommodate this factor. There are clear cost and time implications for trusts if they want to take this action. It is important that the Government give clear guidance on whether they expect trusts to take this route.

Some trusts are being as co-operative as they can and are seeking to help the chaplains to fulfil what I am sure we would all agree is a vital function to support some of the most vulnerable people at a time of great need. However, other trusts are being less co-operative. A hospital chaplain who has been having considerable difficulties wrote to me:

> "Before February 2001 I did not have to worry too much about the Data Protection Act 1998. Until that time I had worked in an NHS Trust where Chaplaincy was well integrated and had a long and valued history. It was seen to be an indispensable part of the overall care team. I was designated chaplain to the oncology wards and participated fully in the inter-professional team meetings. There were no impediments to the flow of appropriate information to Chaplaincy. Then last year everything changed and I have been on a very steep learning curve!"

He goes on to point out that there are some remarkable discrepancies between categories of employees who may have access to the information. In some circumstances, the ward clerk or a receptionist may have access to information about a patient's religious affiliation, but the chaplain does not.

A key point arises about exemptions that can be applied under the Data Protection Act 1998. Two exemptions under paragraph 8 of schedule 3 cover the circumstances where

> "The processing is necessary for medical purposes and is undertaken by—
>
> (a) a health professional, or
>
> (b) a person who in the circumstances owes a duty of confidentiality which is equivalent to that which would arise if that person were a health professional."

One could argue that both limbs would allow exemption for information to be passed to hospital chaplaincies. It could also be argued that the first limb applies. In 1998, Lloyd determined that "medical purposes" could be defined broadly to include

> "preventative medicine, medical diagnosis, medical research"

and "the provision of care". Clearly, the chaplaincy provides spiritual care as part of a multidisciplinary team for someone undergoing treatment, and we need to be clear whether the first limb applies. There is a strong argument that the second limb of exemption applies.

There is a further complication that the restrictions imposed by the Act may conflict with the provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998, which gives patients the right, as enshrined in article 9 of the European convention on human rights, to manifest his or her religion in worship, teaching, practice and observance. The regulations may be in conflict with that right and may have serious consequences for minority faith groups such as Jews, Muslims and Roman Catholics. Many of those groups have particularly high expectations of chaplaincy support, not least the Roman Catholic community, especially in circumstances of serious illness.

I want to make sure that the Minister has adequate time to respond so I shall draw my remarks to a close. It is increasingly clear from the many representations that I have received—the Minister knows of such representations because she has told me in the House that several hon. Members have been in touch with the Department of Health or the Lord Chancellor's Department about such concerns—that there is a problem for hospital chaplaincies seeking to fulfil their ministry. The problem may arise from confusion or from a lack of clear, robust guidance from the Department of Health, the Lord Chancellor's Department or the data protection registrar. There is urgent need for such guidance, from all three sources. If it fails to resolve what is a problem that affects many people in serious need, I seek an undertaking from the Minister that she and her Department will consider amending the law to make proper provision.

12.47 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Yvette Cooper): I congratulate the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) on securing the debate on an issue that he has raised several times in the House and about which he has considerable concerns. As he said, it covers the areas of responsibility of two Departments. The Lord Chancellor's Department is responsible for data protection and the Department of Health for many issues involving hospital chaplains. Health Ministers are aware of the concerns that some hospital chaplains have raised about the effect of the Data Protection Act 1998 and I will ensure that today's debate is drawn to their attention.

I shall set out the background principles behind the 1998 Act. An important principle of consent underlies that Act and the policies in the area. The Act gives effect to the 1995 EC data protection directive, which is binding on the United Kingdom. Although the United Kingdom has had data protection law since 1984, changes were necessary in order to comply with the directive. The 1998 Act requires organisations processing personal data to comply with an enforceable set of rules known as the data protection principles, which cover requirements on the fair and lawful processing of personal data and the processing of data for specific purposes. Many of those principles applied under the 1984 Act, but the directive added some requirements, in particular, broad, statutory conditions, one of which has to be met before personal data may be processed. Those requirements are set out in schedule 2 to the 1998 Act.

Under the directive, certain information, including that on an individual's religious beliefs and health, has to be treated as particularly sensitive. More detailed conditions govern the processing of such data which are, as the hon. Member said, set out in schedule 3 of the Act. Meeting one of the conditions does not remove the need to comply with the broader data protection principles but it is a necessary prior requirement. In some circumstances, the common law duty of confidence may also apply to the information about religion provided to hospitals by patients. That means that the information may not be disclosed under those circumstances by the

[Yvette Cooper]

hospital, including to a hospital chaplain, unless the individual has consented or there is an overriding public interest.

The hon. Gentleman raised concerns about the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998 and the work of the hospital chaplains. The service provided by hospital chaplains to patients who want spiritual care and support can have a greatly beneficial effect, and we should support them in their work. Hospitals routinely ask people who are admitted for treatment about their religion. Certainly, in the past, much of that information was made available to hospital chaplains, although it is interesting that certain issues surrounding the duty of confidence are unchanged because they were not changed by the 1998 Act, so there are some complicated legal issues in that area.

Mr. Brady: Does the Minister accept that the underlying purpose of the duty of confidence and the convention is to protect a person from discrimination and persecution? It is not to prevent someone from being put in touch with another person who can minister to their spiritual needs, where religious affiliation implies that such a person's assistance would be welcome.

Yvette Cooper: I recognise that some people might welcome the support and care, but the issue is difficult because if people do not consent to information being passed on or explicitly withhold their consent, it is difficult to argue that their consent should be overridden, even for the sake of something that we would all consider to be worth while. Some people will not want to discuss their situation with the hospital chaplain and will not want information to be passed on, so we need to tread carefully around issues relating to consent and sensitive information.

Individuals should have some control over how their personal information is used. Although there may be circumstances in which information should be passed on, in that person's interest or the public interest, there may also be situations in which it is important to respect the principle of consent. Hospitals are permitted to disclose to hospital chaplains the religious affiliations of patients whose explicit consent has been obtained. Emergency cases, in which the patient is unconscious or unable to give explicit consent, are covered by the schedule 3 condition relating to an individual's vital interests.

Concern has been raised that, under the framework, with its explicit respect for consent, hospital chaplains may not be able to carry out their work. It is important that they should provide care for those who want it, and we must deal with the genuine concerns that have been raised and the confusion described by the hon. Gentleman. However, at this stage, I am not convinced that a case has been made for an additional condition to be laid down under the 1998 Act. The principle of consent is important, and a sufficiently strong case has not been made for why it should be overridden and why information should be passed on in normal circumstances where someone has not given, or has explicitly withheld, consent, particularly because it is possible for consent to be sought and given when the information is initially sought.

I have been told about trusts where consent is routinely sought and where hospital chaplains are working well, but I recognise the hon. Gentleman's concern that, in some places, that is not happening and difficulties are being faced. The Department of Health recognises the need for guidance with regard to confidentiality and data protection.

The patient information advisory group has been asked to consider the matter. It will shortly provide Health Ministers with advice. In addition, my Department is drawing up a code of practice on confidentiality and consent for people working in the NHS. The multi-faith joint national working group is working with officials of the Department of Health on advice and information for hospital chaplains. The hon. Gentleman asked what work has been going on and who is involved. I shall pass the question to the Department, which will reply directly to him.

Considerable work is being done. Where there is evidence that it is possible to work within the existing framework without overriding the important principle of consent, our first task should be to see what works successfully in some parts of the NHS and replicate that across the service. The Information Commissioner has also considered the matter. In her view, an adequate case has not been made for an additional condition, and it should be possible for hospitals to seek consent at the same time as they give—

Mr. Brady: The Minister makes the case that it might not be necessary to change the law. I accept that. It might be possible to arrive at a sensible accommodation. Can she give me the Government's view on whether the two exemptions in schedule 3 apply?

Yvette Cooper: I will come to that.

The hon. Gentleman raised the matter of whether chaplains are considered to be health professionals, or responsible for care. The interpretation of the Act is the responsibility of the Information Commissioner. She has set out her view that consent should be sought before information can be passed on to hospital chaplains, except in cases in which consent cannot be given.

Much wider questions about the definition of health professionals and the way in which they are classified arise. They cannot be answered purely in the context of data protection. In the first instance, they would have to be raised with the Department of Health and the Health Professions Council in terms of the nature of health professionals and the way in which hospital chaplains want to be regarded.

There are a number of ways in which the problem should be able to be addressed within the existing framework. I take the hon. Gentleman's concerns seriously and I shall follow the progress that is made in the development of the guidance. We want to ensure that people can conduct their work, which is beneficial to many patients. However, the case has not been made that that is not possible under the Act. Wherever possible, we must respect the important principle of consent, which the Government rightly placed at the core of the Data Protection Act, particularly where sensitive data is concerned. I hope that we shall be able to resolve people's concerns. Given that that has been achieved in many areas, I hope that it will also be possible right across the NHS.

Deep Vein Thrombosis

12.59 pm

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): Let me start by saying how much I welcome the opportunity to speak about the important subject of flight-related deep vein thrombosis. This is the first debate to be dedicated solely to the issue, although it follows on from an excellent debate in January 2001 on the health issues associated with flying. That debate was initiated by my hon. and distinguished Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson), and I am delighted that he is here today. Some considerable time has, however, elapsed since then.

My hon. Friend's debate followed on from a significant report by the House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology, which drew attention to several flight-related health issues, including, for the first time, deep vein thrombosis. The Committee made several sensible and important recommendations, and I am glad to say that the Government have taken up many of them. The most important was that they should commission a major epidemiological study into the incidence, causes and extent of flight-related deep vein thrombosis. We do not know for definite the full scale of the problem, although my view is that it is potentially a major public health hazard.

Since that distinguished report was published nearly two years ago, several significant, albeit small, research studies have been carried out. The Committee did not have them at its disposal when it considered the issue, and I believe that they prove beyond all doubt that there is a theoretical link between air travel and deep vein thrombosis. Indeed, all serious scientists working in this area around the world accept that, although they are not sure about the extent of the relationship or the exact cause of the problem.

The other findings from the key bits of research that have been undertaken since the report was published suggest that the problem is much bigger than we first imagined. For example, research by Gianni Belcaro suggests that as many as 5 per cent. of those who fly long haul contract blood clots in their lower limbs simply because they are sitting in cramped spaces for long periods. Their blood pools and stagnates in their lower limbs, feet and ankles, which, in cabin conditions, causes clotting. In the last year for which records are available, 133 million passengers flew abroad from Britain alone, so an enormous number of people might be affected if the 5 per cent. figure is right. I am not saying that it is right, but as an indication of the proportion of those who might be affected, it suggests that we are talking about more than 6 million people.

Since the publication of the distinguished House of Lords report, our own leading expert in Britain, Professor John Scurr, whom the report mentioned, has carried out further research. Although he used a small sample of slightly more than 200 people, his research shows that as many as one in 10 passengers who fly long haul develop blood clots in their lower limbs. If that is right, huge numbers of people may be affected by deep vein thrombosis. Professor Scurr's report also noted that no less than 40 per cent. of the 10 per cent. of people who develop blood clots went on to develop a deep vein thrombosis, which could, without treatment, cause a pulmonary embolism and, in many cases, death. That is the major problem that we have with this public health issue: we are dealing with a stealth disease.

The vast majority of cases of flight-related deep vein thrombosis in this country go undiagnosed, because it can take from four to nine days for the blood clots, which are often without symptoms, to develop into a deep vein thrombosis and then up to several weeks before the thrombosis moves from the lower leg to the heart or lungs and kills the person. That is a major problem, and because we do not, and possibly cannot, record the incidents of DVT that are related to air travel, we do not know the full extent of the problem.

My interest in the subject is well established. A constituent of mine died in tragic circumstances two years ago yesterday. John Anthony Thomas, a 30-year-old policeman in the prime of his life, was not just fit and healthy, but athletic. He returned from a once-in-a-lifetime honeymoon holiday in Hawaii, and in a couple of weeks he was dead. He was buried in the same church as he had been married in several weeks earlier, which is a tragedy in anyone's imagination. I went to see the family, but I must admit that my initial reaction was that it was just one of those tragedies. It was a very sad event, but I saw it just as a one-off act of God.

Before speaking to the Thomas family I had no reason to believe anything else. Mr. and Mrs. Thomas told me that they only made the connection by accident after the consultant pathologist asked them whether their son had recently been on a long air journey. It did not appear on the death certificate, but it was almost certainly the preventable cause of that boy's death, which makes this a real tragedy. If he had been more aware of the condition, as many people in this country now are after the Government's good work of the past 18 months, his unnecessary death could have been avoided.

That is what created my interest in the issue, which was strengthened when we discovered that one of the clinicians involved in the case expressed the view that as many as one in five of all deep vein thromboses treated in the national health service could be related to air travel. That was qualified as a personal opinion based on anecdotal evidence, but 25,000 people are treated for DVTs by the national health service in England alone. If that physician is even remotely right, we are talking about large numbers of people. Incidentally, that view has been reinforced since the House of Lords report by research carried out by Emile Ferrari, which suggests that as many as 25 per cent. of all DVTs treated by health services, not only in the UK, could be directly attributable to travellers' thrombosis. We are talking about very big numbers, and it is a matter of great public concern. It is a stealth disease, because we do not see it coming. People are dying or being seriously injured, but we have no idea how many are affected.

I must place on record that the Government have done an enormous amount of work. Indeed, I believe that they lead the world in taking up the travelling health risks related to deep vein thrombosis. They are the leading player in the World Health Organisation research and are offering up to 2 million euros towards the research funding that was agreed last year and commenced last month. They are the first Government in the world to issue health warnings to certain

[Mr. John Smith]

passengers of the risk of DVT. Our airlines now offer advice and issue warnings, but two years ago, when I had never heard of the problem—I heard about it only when it affected my constituent—that was unheard of.

Many strides have been made but, as I said, the most important recommendation from the House of Lords report 18 months or so ago was that we should commission a major epidemiological study of DVT. My fear, which I place on the record, is that we are probably no nearer to achieving that most important goal than we were when the Lords first reported, despite all the good work that has been and is being done. For example, following a recent meeting with the Minister responsible for aviation, it was indicated that, in the aviation White Paper to be published later this year, a Minister in the Department for Transport may well be given a clear responsibility for air passengers' health.

For those who do not know, let me explain that there is no protection as regards health for passengers who fly anywhere in the world, because under the Warsaw convention, there is liability only for their safety, not their health. However, as a result of my meeting, I believe that the Minister is considering—and the Government support—the recommendations of the Joint Aviation Authority on increasing seat spacing, not only to provide greater comfort and safety of egress in an emergency, but to look after the health and well-being of passengers, albeit under the auspices of the JAA. That means that all our European neighbours will introduce the same standards.

According to the reply to a question that I put to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister last November, it was decided to go for the World Health Organisation international research. That is perfectly understandable. I see where the Government are coming from in recommending that. The WHO is a distinguished body, and the world's leading experts will be involved. If the findings identify, as I am sure they will, the correlation between this condition and certain aspects of air travel, and discover its full extent, it will be much easier to make recommendations to the aviation industry worldwide, rather than perhaps penalising the British industry by introducing rules here alone.

That is all well and good, and I congratulate the Government on what they have done, but there is a problem. Sadly, the WHO has not raised adequate funding to carry out a major epidemiological study. Despite the support of the British Government and others, the study is likely to be quite limited. Indeed, just this week, one of the world's leading experts on air travel-related DVT, Professor Ross Baker of Griffith university in Australia, has said publicly that, although the limited studies to be carried out will be useful in their own right, we will be no nearer the truth at the end of them than we were at the beginning. The studies will be incomplete and inconclusive.

My concern is that, while we await the outcomes of the research, and the large randomised and epidemiological studies that we need to get to the bottom of the problem, people may die unnecessarily. That is the point. This public health issue is different from others that we have had to face, because we could take action now that might prevent those deaths. I am talking about action that is low-cost and, in some cases, involves no cost, but that would protect the British public while we wait to find out the definitive results on the full scale and nature of the problem.

In the past, we have failed to take such action. Going through the records recently, I noticed that the danger of BSE in cattle being transferred to humans and creating a major public health problem was flagged up in a debate in the House 10 years before any action was taken. Much of the argument at the time was that we should wait until we got the science right before we made any decisions.

Dr. Ian Gibson (Norwich, North): Can my hon. Friend say something about suing the airlines? Have there been any successful cases, or are there many going through the courts now?

Mr. Smith: The only successful case had nothing to do with the health of passengers, but involved the comfort and well-being of someone who paid to go on a holiday and found themselves cramped in the most unfortunate conditions on an aircraft.

One of the reasons why many airlines in this country give warnings and advice to their passengers is not to protect their health and well-being, but in case they are sued for negligence at some future date. They have a vested interest in providing warnings and advice as it could be used in evidence to protect them. It is difficult to sue a company because of the protection of the Warsaw convention. It is an area that needs re-examination for two reasons. First, far more people fly now and, secondly, far more people fly longer journeys to places abroad where they did not fly to before.

What action can we take now? My hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney) has a Bill before the House, which would place a legal requirement on all airlines to provide warnings and up-to-date and accurate information to passengers. Most importantly it would force them to co-operate with the sort of research that needs to be carried out to prevent any more injuries and deaths from this dreadful condition. I lay down a challenge to the UK-registered airlines. If they are so damn sure that there is no connection between air travel and deep vein thrombosis, let them sponsor the research to prove the case once and for all. That would be the end of the matter.

If the airlines are so confident that there is no problem, they should co-operate and provide the independent research that we need. They might perhaps make a contribution to the WHO to allow that to happen. I fear, however, that they will not. I fear that the airlines, not only in this country, but throughout the world, realise that there is far more to this than meets the eye. They have known about it for quite some time. My hon. Friend's Bill is before the House. The Government could look at it carefully and consider adopting it or introducing guidelines. They are looking at guidelines for the British airline carriers. They have set up a health committee with the airline carriers within the Department for Transport and it is working well. Again, those are great strides in the right direction.

When I met my constituents I gave them a solemn undertaking that I would do all in my power to prevent any other parent—I am the father of a child of a similar age—going through the same trauma as theirs. The debate today is part of meeting that commitment. I am doing what I can. Because of the progress that we have made over the past 18 months, I am convinced that the time will soon come when no air passenger will board a plane until they are satisfied that their health, welfare and well-being are the carriers' top priorities.

1.19 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): My hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Smith) has been a tireless campaigner on this issue. I congratulate him and all the members of the all-party group who have been campaigning on these issues for some time. They have helped to raise awareness of travel-related deep vein thrombosis. As my hon. Friend said, a couple of years ago the matter was not widely known. They have been instrumental in pushing the issue up the agenda quite dramatically.

I welcome my hon. Friend's comments in support of the Government's work on this issue. In responding, it may be helpful if I set out some of the background and some of our thinking about how these issues will develop. Deep vein thrombosis occurs in about one in 1,000 of the general population, leading to around 25,000 NHS admissions each year. A small proportion may be related to air travel, but DVT is associated with a number of factors, such as immobility after surgery, being over 40 years of age, pregnancy, hormone treatments, inherited clotting factors, a family or history of DVT, and cancer, whether treated or not.

My hon. Friend rightly said that in November 2000 the House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology published the findings of its inquiry into air travel and health. That comprehensive and, in many ways, ground-breaking work has set the agenda for aviation health, both here in the UK and internationally. My hon. Friend said that we are world leaders in this field. The inquiry paid particular attention to the issue of deep vein thrombosis. It identified the need to address the gaps in our scientific understanding and recommended that research be undertaken as a matter of priority.

In responding to the agenda established by the House of Lords inquiry, we recognised the need to have an integrated approach to the issue, so we set up the aviation health working group. The group is chaired by the Department for Transport, and the other permanent members include my Department, the Health and Safety Executive and the Civil Aviation Authority. In addition, industry, consumer and medical representatives are regularly invited to participate in the work of the group. It is a good example of joint working.

The Government's approach has been twofold. First, we have sought to ensure that passengers have access to the best available information to enable them to make an informed choice about air travel. Secondly, we have vigorously pursued the means to meet the gaps in our understanding of whether, and if so how, flying can increase the risk of deep vein thrombosis.

In November last year my Department issued information and advice to the airlines and the public on travel-related deep vein thrombosis. That included practical advice for passengers on long-haul flights on how to minimise the risk of DVT, including simple in-seat exercises. It also advised passengers, where it was safe to do so, to take regular walks out of their seats and to minimise their intake of alcohol, which can lead to immobility and dehydration. It also identified certain groups who may be at a higher risk and advised them to see their GPs before travelling so they could have a one-to-one consultation about the likely risks.

To maximise access for the public to that information it was distributed to health services and UK airlines, published on the internet and given to NHS Direct. Anyone seeking telephone advice from NHS Direct can be given that good, practical advice. Further information on travel-related health issues is available in two publications: the booklet T6, entitled "Health Advice to Travellers", is available free from the health literature line. It also contains form E111, which is helpful to passengers who might need to recover costs for treatment should anything go wrong when they are travelling in the European Union. The booklet "Health Information for Overseas Travellers" also offers practical advice. It is aimed mainly at providing travel information for doctors and health care workers so that they can advise their patients. It is important to ensure that the health service is fully up to date on the latest scientific developments in this area. The information is also available on Ceefax. People can get this information from many different outlets.

We have closely monitored the use the airlines have made of that material. It would be pointless for us to issue it if the airlines did nothing with it. The British Air Transport Association has made a statement that all UK long-haul airlines are providing health information on DVT. We want to monitor that to check that it is happening. In my limited experience it is. The information is provided in a number of ways including in-flight magazines, leaflets, videos and announcements. My hon. Friend said that there is much more widespread knowledge of these issues than there was just a couple of years ago.

As far as we know, the UK is the only country that has published this kind of advice. Despite that, we recognise that more research is needed. That is why the UK Government agreed to fund up to £1.2 million towards the World Health Organisation's research into air travel and DVT. The WHO announced the launch of the study, which is also receiving funding from the European Commission, just a few weeks ago on 14 May.

The research involves the collaboration of several European universities and will be the first large-scale study to focus on the issue. The proposals include research aiming to determine the frequency and causes of travellers' thrombosis, analysis to identify those at greatest risk and, most importantly, studies to examine the effectiveness of preventive strategies. The question is not only why it is caused and what happens, but what can be done to maximise prevention. As the lead funding body, the UK Government will closely monitor the work as it progresses.

As my hon. Friend suggested, it is disappointing that other countries have not committed resources to this valuable work, but with the UK and European Commission funding, at least the first phase of the research can now get under way. I am pleased to confirm that negotiations are continuing with other member states, Governments and the Commission to attempt to secure funding for the second phase. My hon. Friend is

[Ms Hazel Blears]

right to say that a wide-ranging epidemiological study is needed, as well as studies on preventive strategies and on what factors inside airline cabins might lead to increased risk of DVT. We intend to continue rigorous negotiations with other Governments to bring them on board for this research. Public awareness might well be greater in the UK than in other member states, but the research could act as a catalyst for raising awareness in other countries. I hope that that will put further pressure on Governments to participate in the studies in the second phase.

The first phase will address the critical issues, including the possible link to air travel and analysis of risk factors. As I said, we intend to use the launch to encourage others to participate. We will be actively involved in examining all phases of the research. As my hon. Friend rightly said, we must spread the knowledge that comes out of the research. I understand that the WRIGHT forum, dealing with World Health Organisation research into global hazards of travel, will be established. It will be an annual meeting at which the project's progress will be reported and new data emerging from the research will be discussed and disseminated across all member states. A scientific executive committee will attempt to assess information strategies and ensure that, as the research emerges, the widest possible group of people will gain knowledge and take practical steps to minimise the effects on families. My hon. Friend has described the tragic consequences of deep vein thrombosis and my sympathies go out to all families that have lost a loved one as a result of DVT. I know that my hon. Friend has maintained close contact with many of those affected.

In concluding this debate I would like to pay tribute to these families' hard work in campaigning on this issue. Families and parliamentarians have been equally active. Genuine progress has been made since the House of Lords inquiry. It is fair to point to the now widespread public awareness of the disease. The public now has much greater access to advice, which should enable them to make well-informed judgments about minimising risks. For the vast majority of passengers, travel by air has no effect on their health. Although no human activity can be made entirely risk free, by using easy-to-follow advice and taking sensible precautions, all passengers can minimise their level of risk.

Deep vein thrombosis is not just an issue for the UK. In taking forward the recommendations of the House of Lords inquiry, we can claim to be leading the way internationally. All involved, including my Department, the Department for Transport, the Civil Aviation Authority, the Health and Safety Executive, industry and groups such as the all-party committee, have come a long way. We must keep up the momentum, and the World Health Organisation's research will help to provide the impetus. I am sure that my hon. Friend will continue to press the Government to do even more to ensure that we avoid the sorts of tragedies that he highlighted today.

Export Controls (Tanzania)

1.29 pm

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk): It is appropriate to offer my condolences to the families of all those who died in the tragic rail crash in Tanzania that was reported yesterday. That is the last thing the country needs.

I shall set out in detail the results of my research into the extraordinary story of how a British arms manufacturer came to sell a totally inappropriate military air traffic control system to Tanzania. I shall give the history of the scandal, before dealing with the role of Barclays bank in facilitating the deal, and with the case for reforming Government procedures, which is long overdue.

Tanzania is one of the world's poorest countries. In 1998, its per capita gross national product was $220. In the same year, its external debt was $7,603 million. It became eligible for, and received, debt relief amounting to some $3 billion under the heavily indebted poor countries initiative. It first made enquiries about purchasing an air traffic control system in 1993, when it invited tenders, but it was not until 1997 that a part-owned subsidiary of BAE Systems made a slightly adjusted application through the preliminary advice process—the F680 procedure—for an export licence, to be agreed by the United Kingdom, for a military-capable system to be designed and manufactured by BAE Systems.

F680 is a preliminary advisory process for companies that want to export military equipment that requires an export licence. It is a Ministry of Defence procedure, despite the fact that a different Department—the Department of Trade and Industry—will consider the export licence application. According to the House of Commons Library, it seems that all sides consider a positive indication under this procedure to be "preliminary clearance". The Ministry of Defence gave advice and preliminary clearance on the BAE system in August 1997. The Department for International Development was not consulted, and did not even know about it. In effect, that gave the green light for the whole deal to proceed, despite the fact that the export licence application was not considered until December 2001. Tanzania and BAE Systems entered into a binding contract for the purchase of the military system, and the Tanzanian Government confirmed the financial package to the International Monetary Fund. In a communication to the IMF dated 18 July 2000, the Tanzanian Government claims that

> "we were unable to finance it through bilateral or multilateral aid. We nonetheless were able to obtain bank and supplier financing of US $35 million on concessional terms that comply with the performance criterion on external borrowing".

I shall return to those criteria.

As we now know, a loan from Barclays bank facilitated the purchase. Despite the Tanzanian Government's claim in the letter of intent to the IMF that financing came from "bank and supplier", BAE Systems claimed to me that it was not party to the financing arrangements

> "which were entered into between Barclays Bank and the Government of Tanzania."

However, it is worth noting that, as at 12 September last year, Barclays bank plc held an interest in 93,632,529 ordinary shares in BAE Systems.

In a letter to me, the IMF confirmed that the 1999 financing package

> "yielded a weighted average grant element of 35.9%."

Barclays bank has not explained why, as a commercial lender, it has seen fit to subsidise heavily an arms sale to a highly indebted developing country. Tanzania accepts that the system is designed, in part, for military purposes. In their letter of intent to the IMF dated 18 July 2000, the Tanzanian Government state:

> "For safety reasons, we have acquired a new radar system to strengthen air traffic control in Tanzania . . . the system will also be used for military purposes".

It is the military dimension of the air traffic control system that has been the cause of its considerable expense. David Rider of *Jane's Air Traffic Control* told the BBC that the BAE system was an air defence system under another name and was "far too expensive" for a civilian system. I have now been told that even the military capability of the system is inadequate. It covers only about one third of the country, and two more systems would be needed to cover the whole country. The civilian capability covers only the area around Dar Es Salaam and Mount Kilimanjaro airport.

In a preliminary report responding to questions from the World Bank dated 29 October 2001, the International Civil Aviation Organisation stated that

> "these systems have been designed for military purposes . . . The high cost of these systems are related to the military components and sub-systems inherent in the design."

The report also indicated that the system used ageing technology and was

> "not adequate and too expensive"

to be used primarily for civil air traffic control purposes. I understand that the further report prepared by ICAO following an in-depth study of the system will not contradict those conclusions. Indeed, it seems worse than that, as someone at the World Bank described it to me as a bombshell. It seems as if a modern civilian system could have been purchased for as little as $5 million, compared with the actual cost of this useless system of about $40 million. It is a white elephant, and there is no point attempting to adapt it because it would be cheaper to start again.

On the deal's finance, Barclays bank claimed in a letter to me on 8 April 2002 that

> "Barclays support for defence related exports is dependent on the appropriate export licence being granted".

However, the Department of Trade and Industry Minister responsible for export control revealed that the Government only approved the export licences in December 2001, which was two years after Barclays had agreed subsidised financing, as reported to the IMF. In a further letter of 3 May 2002, the bank suggested that it had received "Government approval in principle" at an early stage, presumably under the F680 procedure. However, it refused to discuss details of the Tanzania deal.

Tanzania is part of the debt initiative for heavily indebted poor countries, so it had to satisfy the International Monetary Fund that the loan from Barclays was at concessional rates. A heavily indebted poor country that is receiving debt relief cannot secure a commercial loan for military equipment, so it had to show that the rates were concessional to fulfil its obligations under the HIPC initiative. The IMF confirms that it accepted that the loan was at concessional rather than commercial rates. It said that

> "the terms of the financing package obtained by Tanzania in 1999 for its air traffic control system yielded a weighted average grant element of 35.9 per cent., which is consistent with the definition of concessionality under the terms of the IMF's concessional loan facility, the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility".

I have written to Barclays twice to find out why it got involved in the deal, but have so far received no explanation. Someone at the World Bank told me last week that he had never before come across a commercial organisation subsidising the purchase of military equipment by a heavily indebted poor country. It does not make sense. In the absence of a proper explanation from Barclays, others are inevitably trying to establish the truth. Various theories have been put forward. Barclays might simply have had a fit of generosity, but that seems unlikely. Perhaps it had something to do with the fact that, on 11 October 2000, Barclays secured a banking licence to operate in Tanzania. Was that the payback for subsidising the deal? The other more sinister explanation is that the contract price was fiddled and artificially inflated so that it looked to the outside world as if Barclays was providing a concessional loan, which was necessary to get the deal past the IMF.

Perhaps Barclays provided a commercial loan on a lower sum, which seems to be the view of the Secretary of State for International Development. On 15 May, she said in Parliament:

> "Somehow, a loan from Barclays bank, which is funding the project—there is no way that Barclays can provide concessional funding—has been reported to the IMF as being concessional, so the project squeaked through, which is very odd."—[*Official Report*, 15 May 2002; Vol. 385, c. 763.]

If that is correct, then it seems that there has been fraud. When a Secretary of State alludes to corruption, surely it is time thoroughly to investigate the financing of the deal. I have also been told that bungs were paid to oil the wheels of the deal.

Did the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry know of those bizarre financing arrangements when she decided to grant the export licence in December last year? If so, what inquiries did she make, and what did she discover? Furthermore, did she know about the allegations that bungs or bribes were being paid? I challenge Barclays to clear the matter up once and for all. The longer that it remains silent, the more suspicion will grow about the propriety of the deal.

The latest development is that the full ICAO report on the system has been completed and sent to the Tanzanian and UK Governments. I understand that the World Bank wanted Tanzania to publish the report, but so far it has failed to do so. It now appears that BAE Systems has produced six pages of comment on the report. The Tanzanian President has also questioned some of the technical details. Apparently, nothing will be published until those issues have been considered. I also understand that the president of the World Bank will visit Tanzania soon to discuss the deal.

[Norman Lamb]

Furthermore, the Tanzanian President has written to the Prime Minister to ask for help in extricating Tanzania from that disaster.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien (Eddisbury): As chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on Tanzania, I offer my sincere condolences to the Tanzanian people for the deaths of more than 200 people near Igandu.

We are aware of the privity of the contract between the Government and Barclays, and the procedures that the hon. Gentleman has so strenuously outlined. Given that, is he aware that a solution might have been for the Tanzanian Government to be responsible for, say, £9 million of the contract, which would have sorted out the Dar Es Salaam domestic air traffic control requirements, and on the back of the Dar Es Salaam bombing and particularly in the light of 11 September—

Mr. Jimmy Hood (in the Chair): Order. The hon. Gentleman should only be making an intervention.

Norman Lamb: In response to what I understand the hon. Gentleman's question to be, the Tanzanian people must not be punished as a result of that disaster. The finger must be pointed at the Government and the role of Barclays bank and BAE Systems.

The Ministry of Defence's F680 application procedure must be re-examined. In response to every question that I put to the Ministry on the matter, I have been told that it provides guidance only at the marketing stage and that it in no way compromises the consideration by the Department of Trade and Industry of a subsequent application for an export licence. That is clearly not true in the BAE Systems case. The F680 clearance led to the signing of a binding contract, the finalising of a subsidised loan from Barclays, the building of most of the equipment and the payment of at least $15 million to BAE Systems before the application for an export licence was considered. Is that really how the system is supposed to work? Is the Secretary of State happy with being presented with a fait accompli in that way? If the F680 application process is not to undermine proper consideration of export licence applications, all relevant Departments must be consulted in such cases. Companies must surely be advised that, should they win the tender, they should apply for the export licence before entering a binding contract.

With regard to the rules on the granting of export licences, the Government's response to the Lords amendments to the Export Control Bill has weakened the sustainability test. Although the Bill is a step in the right direction, crucially, after its passage through Parliament, it will still be possible for that scandal to be repeated. The Secretary of State is supposed to have regard for the so-called consolidated criteria, no. 8 of which addresses development concerns. That criterion was clearly ignored in the case of BAE Systems. I understand that jobs and the interests of BAE Systems were the decisive factors. That means that we continue to have inconsistent Government policy across Departments. The International Development Act 2002 contains at its core the test of sustainable development. The Export Credits Guarantee Department has now built sustainability into its procedures.

In a speech made by the Chancellor in 1997 in Mauritius, he said:

> "We need to make sure that poor countries never again become saddled with insupportable debt burdens. The UK will ensure that export credits for poor, highly-indebted countries will only support productive expenditure."

If only that were the case with this scandal. We have a much more relaxed approach to arms sales. The lobbying of the arms industry has presumably paid off. That needs to change.

It also worries me that there is such a close relationship between the Government and BAE Systems. First, we know that BAE provided £12 million in sponsorship for the mind zone at the dome, presumably not long after preliminary clearance was given by the Ministry of Defence. Secondly, on 16 May 2002, it was announced that Sir Richard Evans, chairman of BAE Systems, was to lead the new aerospace innovation and growth team, a joint Government-industry group, the purpose of which is to

> "secure agreement between government and the industry on a shared vision and strategy."

Thirdly, I understand that BAE had eight staff working for free, on secondment, at the Ministry of Defence. Although I would not necessarily object to any of those initiatives on its own, a picture develops of an over-close, unhealthy relationship. I would like the Minister to respond to that concern.

I hope that the Minister will respond directly to the detailed points and questions that I have raised today. There is a real need for proper parliamentary scrutiny of the whole saga, which, so far, we have not had. I hope that the Minister will, at least, provide straightforward answers, so that we can start to understand how that outrage occurred and find a way of preventing its repetition. I hope that he will not be tempted to suggest that my concerns about wrongdoing are in any way irresponsible. It is clear from several parliamentary exchanges that the Secretary of State for International Development shares our concerns, and I urge the Minister to accept that to give debt relief and millions of pounds in aid to Tanzania while foisting a useless military system on that country makes absolute nonsense of Government policy.

1.47 pm

The Minister for Employment Relations, Industry and the Regions (Alan Johnson): I congratulate the hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) on securing the debate, and I add my condolences to the families of those who died in yesterday's tragic rail crash in Tanzania.

The Foreign Secretary made it clear in his oral evidence to the Quadripartite Committee on 21 March that the Government's decision to issue two export licences in December 2001 in no way obliged the Tanzanian Government to proceed with the purchase of an air traffic control system. That decision has always been for the Tanzanian Government. The question for our Government was whether the licence applications contravened the consolidated criteria announced to Parliament in October 2000, and whether the proposed export would seriously undermine Tanzania's economy or seriously hamper its sustainable development, contrary to criterion 8 mentioned by the hon.

Gentleman. The decision to issue the licences stands, and the Government have no intention of revoking them.

I now turn to the issues raised in the recent International Civil Aviation Organisation report and the allegation that the system is a waste of money. I reiterate that our decision to issue the licences did not oblige the Tanzanian Government to proceed with the purchase of an air traffic control system. It is essentially a commercial transaction between Tanzania and a British company. The Tanzanian Government must decide which system best meets their needs, and the ICAO report raises several issues to be dealt with by them.

The UK Government have been at the forefront of international efforts to strengthen the regulation of the arms trade and to deal with proliferation. We were instrumental in obtaining agreement for an EU code of conduct on arms exports, including the sustainable development criterion, which is at the heart of this debate. As Ministers have made clear on numerous occasions, the Government will listen and respond to the concerns of the public and Parliament. With that in mind, the Government have put beyond doubt their continuing commitment to sustainable development by amending the Export Control Bill. During the recent debate on the Export Control Bill in the other place, my noble Friend Lord Sainsbury of Turville announced that the Government had also recognised the need to consider how criterion 8 can most effectively be applied in assessing relevant export licence applications, and had agreed that there was a need for clearer procedures within Whitehall for reaching decisions when sustainable development is an issue.

The Cabinet Office was asked to facilitate an interdepartmental discussion of the issue, involving all Departments with an interest. That discussion is under way and a statement will be made to the House as soon as possible.

The Government have opposed damaging Opposition changes to our amendment. Those changes would impose an unnecessary straitjacket on the administrative regime, forcing consideration of issues that are of no relevance to an export. They would have significant resource implications, are completely unnecessary and mechanistic, and would destroy our targeted case-by-case approach to export licensing. They would risk distracting advisers away from consideration of issues that really matter.

I would like to deal with the issue of corruption raised by the hon. Member for North Norfolk, not just today but in the House on 19 June 2002. As there has been an allegation of wrongdoing and criminal activity on the part of BAE Systems and Barclays bank, I want to put it clearly on the record that the Government have no evidence that the deal was in any way corrupt. We are committed to combating bribery and corruption in whatever sector of the economy it may occur. This is why we are working with our international partners and the business community to ensure that there is effective action both here and abroad to tackle the problem of corruption across industry, as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development convention on combating bribery of foreign public officials and the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 make clear.

I turn to development aid to Tanzania. Since 1997, no Government have done more to increase international aid or ensure that the debts of the poorest countries are cancelled. We increased overseas aid to £3.376 billion in 2001–02, and we are working with our partners to cancel £100 billion of debt of the world's 42 most heavily indebted poor countries. The Government remain committed to supporting Tanzania's poverty reduction strategy. Our bilateral development assistance stands at some £80 million a year. Such assistance goes towards strengthening economic and political governance; improving public services, including health and education; and helping to provide key infrastructure, such as water and roads, in rural areas. That said, we and other donors want to be satisfied that mechanisms are in place to ensure that the resources provided are used effectively for the purposes intended and that they produce results. Tanzania has made impressive progress in many areas, and we want to build on that. We urge the Government of Tanzania to engage fully with the international community on wider issues of policy, prioritisation and the efficient use of resources. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development is going to Tanzania to discuss the way forward.

There has also been a suggestion that the Government's lack of objection to the marketing of the BAE Systems air traffic control system, recorded through the Ministry of Defence F680 process, in some way forced their hand to issue the export licences relating to the eventual supply of equipment. That is simply not the case. I shall quickly explain the process in the hope that that will address such concerns once and for all.

The Ministry of Defence F680 process gives exporters advice on their proposals to market goods overseas. It is made clear when F680 advice is given that it emphatically does not constitute an export licence, nor does it prejudge a decision on the eventual consideration of an export licence application. That is made clear to exporters because, as in the case of the Tanzanian deal, several years can pass between the marketing stage and receipt of application. Obviously, the circumstances can change radically during that period. It is entirely feasible that, even when the Government advise no objection to a company marketing its product, when the time comes to sign the contract, an export licence may not be granted.

I understand that the Ministry of Defence has arranged for a copy of the guidance provided to industry on the F680 process form to be placed in the Library. It has been remarked that the company's decision to start production before an export licence was issued had a bearing on the Government's decision. That is simply not the case. Whether the company had started production or the fact that equipment had been part-manufactured was not remotely relevant to the application that came before Ministers. The assessment was made on the basis of the criteria announced in Parliament, not on how close the company was to exporting the system. It is a company's commercial decision whether to start production without an export

[Alan Johnson]

licence. However, the Department of Trade and Industry's export control organisation advises exporters against entering into special production or a binding contract until an export licence has been granted in case the Government decide against issuing a licence or there is a delay.

Many critics have insisted that the decision on BAE Systems highlights the need for prior parliamentary scrutiny of export licence applications. The Government take great care when making such licensing decisions in the full knowledge that those decisions will be examined closely and that Ministers will properly be held accountable for them by Parliament through the annual reports on strategic export controls.

Norman Lamb: Is it not true that, prior to the export licence being granted, BAE Systems made the case to the Government that there would be potential job losses if the licence were refused? Can the Minister categorically state that BAE Systems did not make that representation?

Alan Johnson: I have no knowledge of any such representation being made. However, I can respond to one of the hon. Member's earlier points about whether the Department was aware of the terms of the loan between Barclays bank and the Tanzanian Government. We seek all the information that we need from an applicant to enable us to take a reliable export licensing decision against the criteria. The details of the information sought and provided in that case, as in others, is commercially confidential.

Many critics have insisted that that decision highlights the need for prior parliamentary scrutiny. We are very careful. The Quadripartite Committee has acknowledged that few other EU member states approach the UK's level of transparency and that our annual reports are

"the most transparent reports of their sort in Europe".

In their response last July to the Quadripartite Committee report of 14 March 2001, the Government rejected prior parliamentary scrutiny of export licence applications on practical grounds and as a matter of principle. We believed that a system of prior scrutiny could not be made to work without having a materially adverse impact on the efficiency and effectiveness of the licensing process and without causing significant damage to the competitiveness of UK exports.

During the passage of the Export Control Bill in another place, Lord Campbell-Savours proposed a defence exports scrutiny committee to scrutinise export licence applications. On Third Reading of the Bill in the House of Lords on 20 May, my noble Friend, Lord Sainsbury made it clear that the Government were still concerned about several aspects of that proposal. However, Lord Sainsbury made it clear that Ministers intend for examination of the proposal to continue.

The hon. Gentleman has taken a great interest in the matter for some time, and at no stage have I suggested that that is in any way irresponsible. I assure him that decisions on export licence applications continue to be assessed on a case-by-case basis against the consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria announced in Parliament.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at Two o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 26 June 2002

[SYLVIA HEAL *in the Chair*]

Transport (London)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—[*Mr. Kemp.*]

9.30 am

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): London is booming. More people are living and working in our city, yet our transport infrastructure is inadequate and overcrowded. Trains are unpleasant. They operate at massively overcrowded capacity. Our roads are congested. There are road works and delays. Badly planned junctions and badly phased traffic lights are causing serious problems for people who commute into this city.

It is not all bad news, however, because improvements are being made in some parts of London. I draw attention to the work of the Thames Gateway local authorities. Their document "Transport Agenda" sets out proposals to extend the docklands light railway from City airport to connect with the north Kent line and the tunnel connection between Silvertown and the Greenwich peninsular, and the shared use of the Thames Gateway bridge. They are also supporting crossrail, as are many other organisations. There is currently a stakeholder consultation on the crossrail 1 option.

I want to add my voice strongly to the call that was made some months ago by the Corporation of London for the classic crossrail route—the route from Liverpool Street station to Stratford through Ilford and on to Shenfield. That will be the best option in the early stages for ensuring that pressure eases on the Central line, making conditions far better for my constituents and many others who commute from east London and Essex to work in central London. Hopefully, the channel tunnel rail link will connect at Stratford with crossrail and the Central and Jubilee lines. It is vital that the first development of that beyond Ebbsfleet should go to Stratford, not St. Pancras, because of ease of communications and its ability to take people around London, not through the centre.

Some problems have been caused by a lack of leadership, sensitivity and focus. I shall not concentrate today on congestion charging. We dealt with that in this Chamber about four months ago. I shall not deal with London Underground and the public-private partnership because that will be debated tomorrow. I shall focus today on the problems of Transport for London, an organisation that should be at the forefront of improving matters in partnership with the 32 London boroughs, the Association of London Government and central Government.

Sections 142 to 144 of the Greater London Authority Act 1999 require the Mayor to prepare a transport strategy for London and to encompass all forms of transport, including movement of goods as well as people. Section 154 of the Act established Transport for London and its powers. The Mayor is given wide powers of control over TFL. Members of the Greater London Authority have limited powers to scrutinise and challenge, but the Labour group and others on the GLA have challenged TFL for its lack of openness and on its ability to deliver on its programme—unfortunately, not with great success.

What, then, are the problems with TFL, and why do they occur? Let me quote from a column in *The Independent* on 10 June 1998:

> "Unfortunately, Gordon's economic misjudgements are the major factor threatening our chance of gaining a second term in office . . . An insight into Gordon's subservience to the City comes from an examination of the credentials of those he has chosen to appoint to the monetary policy committee of the Bank of England. How on earth a Labour chancellor could feel that a former CIA agent would be of value in pursuing Labour's wider agenda on the MPC is a matter that 'passeth all understanding'."

I was a member of the Committee that considered the Greater London Authority Bill, as was the author of that column, the then Member for Brent, East, Mr. Ken Livingstone, who was elected in May 2000 as the independent Mayor of London.

On Saturday 13 January 2001, BBC Online reported:

> "Former CIA agent Bob Kiley has been drafted in to try to save London's ailing Tube network. His four-year contract started on Monday.
>
> It is the most unlikely of alliances: the left-wing rebel, scourge of the Establishment, and the former CIA man and one-time union basher, united against the plans of Big Government.
>
> Now ensconced in a £2m house in Belgravia and on a £2m four-year contract, Kiley is rising to meet the challenge before him. He is said to want to bring 100 of his former American colleagues to manage London's transport"—

Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mike Gapes: May I finish the quote? I shall then certainly give way. It continues:

> "currently run by what Ken Livingstone has cuttingly described as 'dullards'."

Richard Ottaway: The hon. Gentleman is making a strong point. He will recall that I served on the Committee, too. The Opposition pointed out that this is exactly what would happen. The then Minister was asked what would happen if the Mayor were not of the same party as the Government. We were told, "That can't happen." The hon. Gentleman's party set the authority up that way, and his party must take responsibility for it.

Mike Gapes: My recollection of the Committee—and if we were to read the transcript, we would find that I am right—is that those words were not used, although we may certainly debate what happened all those years ago. I will deal with that matter as I go on.

Mr. Kiley came with an impressive CV. *The Sunday Telegraph*'s City editor, Neil Bennett, wrote last August:

> "Ever since he was appointed by Ken Livingstone last year, Kiley has paraded himself as the answer to all the capital's transport needs. He has been regarded as a near-messianic businessman by adoring journalists, who credit him with the transformation of New York's subway from a graffiti-sprayed crack den into a space age neural network.
>
> Kiley's track record in New York deserves closer examination. By the time he quit in 1990, the subway was an altogether more dangerous place than when he had taken over seven years earlier, with a sharp increase in muggings and fires.

[Mike Gapes]

> Only months after he departed, the subway suffered one of its worst-ever disasters at Lexington Avenue that caused five deaths and 150 injuries.
>
> Kiley has an unfortunate habit of taking the credit for other people's successes. Much of the improvement in the subway during his tenure should be credited to Richard Ravitch, his predecessor, who won approval for a $6.6bn capital improvement programme. This provided the new trains Kiley likes to talk about so much.
>
> Kiley says less about his consistent failure to hit targets for passenger growth on the network—numbers actually fell in his last year in charge—and his bungling financial management that drove the authority ever-deeper into the red."

TFL recently appointed RMT leader Bob Crow to its board. However, the unions should be wary. In New York, there were no strikes during the changes that took place under Kiley, due no doubt to the state's punitive laws against strikes. Leaders could lose their homes, and for every day of strike action, an employee would lose two days' pay.

Mr. Kiley has little experience of running a modern and complex bus service and comes from a city in which buses are still in the dark ages, with no advanced technology, few bus lanes, no effective route co-ordination and half the ridership of London. There are 4 million passengers in London, and slightly more than 2 million passengers in New York.

Mr. Kiley's career has been dogged by continual accusations of cronyism and fat cat pay. In New York, he and his sidekick, David Gunn, both earned substantially more than the mayor. In London, he has assembled more or less the same team as was with him in New York, all funded by the London taxpayer.

Another article in *The Sunday Telegraph*, by Jonathan Petre and Sonia Purnell last August, pointed out that several of the specifically recruited team were paid grossly inflated salaries. An independent report commissioned by Mario Cuomo, then governor of New York, found that some posts had been filled by Mr. Kiley's right-hand man, David Gunn, without having been advertised and that normal job requirements had been waived.

In 1985, a report by the inspector general of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, of which Kiley was then chairman, said that there was "clear salary favouritism". The 1985 investigation by the inspector general, Sanford Russell, found that several staff taken on after Mr. Kiley took over the New York subway had received excessive salaries and expenses. The salaries of a group hired from Pennsylvania, formerly headed by Mr. Gunn,

> "increased approximately 80 per cent on average over the previous salaries".

Mr. Gunn, who was president of the New York Transit Authority under Kiley, is one of the consultants on the payroll of Transport for London. Last year, he was said to be Mr. Kiley's first choice to run the tube. However, he is now president of the troubled Amtrak, which is under investigation by the US Senate because its "general state is dire", and faces closure. I am therefore not sure whether Mr. Gunn will be coming over after all. He clearly has more pressing matters with which to deal in the United States.

Bob Kiley has appointed a large number of Americans to TFL in long-term consultancy positions. Most have worked before with Bob Kiley or Jay Walder in the United States.

Jay Walder is an interesting man. He is the finance and planning managing director, and now calls himself chief executive, of TFL. He is a former professor at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government. According to a document that I acquired from within TFL, he was

> "employed on a consultancy basis while working at Harvard University".

From November 2000 until the end of January 2001, he provided advice to the commissioner on the PPP proposals and congestion charging—that is, before and immediately after Kiley officially started work for TFL. The fees paid were £18,662. From 5 February 2001, he was hired on a four-year contract worth £200,000 a year as TFL's managing director of finance and performance, although he seems to have time to lecture in the United States. Last week, he gave a lecture on

> "Transport for London: A Discussion of Modern Transportation"

at New York City technical college.

I found that information on the internet. It was widely advertised several months ago. I do not know how many other lectures Mr. Walder has given during the period and how much time he has spent in the United States. Those are relevant questions that need to be investigated.

Maggie Boepple, a New York lobbyist who worked on the MTA in New York, was employed from February to August 2001 on a consultancy basis and was involved in early work on the PPP and TFL's alternative investment programme. She was later appointed on a fixed-term contract until 30 October 2002 to manage the transition of London Underground into TFL.

Steve Polan, a senior legal adviser on the MTA, works for a firm called Kalkines, Arky, Zall and Bernstein, which is engaged on a consultancy basis to provide specialist legal advice to the commissioner on financial contracts. The total fees paid to Kalkines, Arky, Zall and Bernstein for work done by Steve Polan to the end of August 2001 amounted to £183,112.

Tom Amenta worked in the finance group of the MTA. He advises on the PPP, focusing on the integration of London Underground. His salary is about £90,000 to £100,000. The total fee paid between November 2000 and the beginning of February 2001 was £28,859. From February 2001, Tom Amenta was employed as a senior projects manager reporting to Jay Walder. His contract ended in March 2002.

Drew Hyde worked for TFL on a consultancy basis between October 2000 and May 2001, and drew fees of £58,540. Charles Monheim has worked on ticketing and the smart card project, and Eric Rothman works for Jay Walder on approval of business plans

In total, about 20 Americans do regular consultancy work for TFL, and they have been given that work through Bob Kiley. The consultants can earn around £1,000 per day, which is all paid for by Londoners through Ken Livingstone's precept on the boroughs and other income generated by TFL.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): In the interests of balance, will the hon. Gentleman set out with similar detail tomorrow the consultancy fees that have been charged by the various consortia that work for the Government on PPP? Alternatively, will he mention Cap Gemini Ernst and Young, which is working on Railtrack in administration? I understand that its fees are £700,000 a week.

Mike Gapes: No doubt the hon. Gentleman will have the opportunity to make his own speech if he catches your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker. I shall continue with my speech.

Bill Bratton is the ex-commissioner of police in New York city. Previously, he was chief of New York's transit police. TFL paid to bring him to London. He spent lots of his time meeting the Home Secretary, other political figures and people in the Metropolitan police. Bill Bratton runs The Bratton Group in New York city. A TFL document states that the group

> "were engaged by TFL to inventory the issues surrounding congestion, bus movement and security".

The group published a report entitled "Adopting a Modern Enforcement Strategy for London's Buses" in September 2001. It is known in London Assembly circles as the Wasserman report, after its principal author and Bratton employee, Bob Wasserman. He is an adviser to TFL and is well known in the American police for his work on the broken window theory: if one deals with the small crimes, the big ones will sort themselves out.

Bob Kiley has made at least 30 key appointments throughout the organisation. As far as I understand, they have not been advertised externally. Some of the appointments are new, and some are major promotions. They include a senior communications position that was advertised at a salary of around £50,000 and appointed at £70,000. Kiley's own speech writer, Sarah Moule, is on around £400 per day plus an agency fee. Jeroen Weimar recently moved from being Kiley's chief of staff to director of corporate services. The sum effect of that is that Kiley and Jay Walder have introduced a regime with centralised power. Kiley's Americans are rewriting the transport strategy at this moment with no consultation whatever, and frequently recommending things that people are querying and saying do not fit into British law or experience.

Kiley and his team are not following correct procedure. They are insensitive and, in the opinion of many people working in TFL, totally ruthless in the way in which they operate. New US staff are being sought all the time. For example, there is an ad on the alumni news and information website of Northwestern university for the transport planning opportunity of the decade: the post of transport planning director in London. It says that the post will be appointed by Transport Commissioner Bob Kiley and Jay Walder, and adds that this is a unique opportunity. That is being advertised on US university websites. I understand that it is not being promoted via human resources at TFL; it is being done directly by the Kiley operation.

Mr. Kiley recently sent someone to Harvard to investigate direct recruitment from there. As I speak, well-paid US consultants and contract-holders are sitting together on the 14th floor of Windsor house, where the American colony has been established, watching CNN and Bloomberg TV over coffee, gossiping about baseball, discussing old times together in the CIA and FBI and their operations in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, reading specially delivered copies of *The Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post* and *The New York Times* and planning their next first-class trip back to the big apple. It seems that we have a big problem if an organisation is created and run by an abrasive, autocratic and aloof group of people, who appears to believe that all British employees of TFL who were there before they arrived are not to be trusted.

There is clearly a culture of fear within TFL, and I understand that at least 10 senior British managers earning £70,000 and above have been asked to leave the organisation. On the whole, they appear to have signed gagging orders, and they no doubt received substantial pay-offs in the region of one year's salary. Recent departures include Richard Smith, director of integration, and Mike Swiggs, who was acting chief executive in the pre-Kiley era, and who left his post as corporate director two weeks ago.

Ken Livingstone is chair of TFL, but what has he done? He seems to have some kind of pact with Bob Kiley not to interfere in the management of TFL as long as Kiley gives him good political cover and support on the PPP. There is now no one left in TFL with senior management experience of London Underground. One of the only senior British staff left there is Peter Hendy, managing director of London Buses, who is an extremely wealthy man from buying out his bus company during the Thatcher era, and the improvement in bus services is about the only visible achievement made during the two years of TFL. Then there is Derek Turner, the managing director of street management, who is the only senior manager left from the start of TFL. He will presumably be there as the fall guy when Ken's foolish congestion charging scheme ends in disaster.

It was not meant to be like this. The essence of the Greater London Authority Act was for partnership with the ALG, the boroughs and the Government. However, the Kiley team has acted more unilaterally than in partnership. It has not consulted the boroughs. For example, last year, Jay Walder proposed to change the system for paying the boroughs the intermediate transport programme grant from quarterly in advance to monthly in arrears. That led to very sharp exchanges with the director of the ALG transport and environment committee, Nick Lester, and the boroughs were incandescent. They protested, but nothing changed. The Kiley model is going ahead regardless.

Kiley and his American team seem to believe that London boroughs ought to be in the same weak relationship to the city government as the boroughs in New York are to the New York city government. They do not understand that this is the United Kingdom and that London has a very valuable tradition of strong borough-based local authorities. It is essential, if things are to work effectively in London, that the London administration co-operates and does not ride roughshod over local authorities in our capital.

Richard Ottaway: May I gently remind the hon. Gentleman that that was exactly the Opposition's argument in the Committee stage, when he voted against it?

Mike Gapes: If the hon. Gentleman reads the Act, he will see that it makes it absolutely clear that there should be partnership between the Greater London Authority and the Mayor, and the boroughs. That is what I am calling for.

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mike Gapes: No, I do not have time. I need to make a few more points and then conclude. I understand that other hon. Members want to make contributions. I should be happy to carry on talking but they might not like it.

Recently, London Buses entered into a joint arrangement with the Metropolitan police service for a contract worth £25 million a year. The Met's lead on that project is Commander Alan Shave, and the money is coming from Transport for London to pay for policing relating to bus routes. I gather that that has been introduced rather quickly, without considering whether it will necessarily be value for money. It was not piloted. The contract between TFL and the Metropolitan police service was signed without the business case having been approved. I understand that, as part of the project, a group of 10 TFL and Metropolitan police staff were taken first class to New York to meet police there and to see how they were operating.

Before the GLA came into existence, there was a London bus initiative with the boroughs. Recently, London bus initiative 1 has been developed into London bus initiative 2. Initially, the boroughs played the leading role in the initiative, but now they are being excluded and there is no partnership with them. That was, again, brought in without any consultation or discussion with the boroughs. Centralisation of control is damaging to effective government in London. It is also damaging to the way in which TFL is operated.

It takes, on average, eight months to get basic business cases within the organisation approved. Kiley's team in charge of business cases, run by Jay Walder, decided recently to recruit 10 additional staff to try to clear the backlog of cases that has built up because no one makes a decision, rather than devolving the powers to the managing directors. Everything has to be taken through the centre. The result is that projects are delayed and cannot proceed unless they are Bob Kiley's own pet projects.

TFL was established with optimism. There was much new money to be invested and it seemed that transport in London was at last going to get the work and investment that it needed. Sadly, since the publication of the flawed transport strategy, things have gone from bad to worse. Serious questions need to be asked about why there are so many staff on sick leave, why people believe that stress in the organisation is leading to chaos, why meetings of the chief officer group and its decisions are not minuted, why people get decisions made by talking to Jay Walder in corridors rather than through formal meetings and why there is a culture of a lack of trust of the British employees in TFL by the American management team that has come in and colonised the 14th floor of Windsor house. Serious questions must be asked about the money being spent outside. Fishburn Hedges is being paid £60,000 to £80,000 a month to run media relations, despite the fact that there are 11 staff in TFL's media office.

Other issues need to be examined. Questions must be asked, and I call today on the district auditor and the Audit Commission urgently to investigate employment practices. Were posts correctly advertised and filled? How much has been spent on headhunters and consultants here and in the United States? How much has TFL spent on transatlantic flights and hotels for its consultants and employees? Has the equal opportunities policy on recruitment been followed? How much has been paid to experienced staff who have resigned or been dismissed, and how much extra was paid to buy their silence in gagging orders and deals?

Have the various appointments and consultancies been value for money? Was the £1.5 million on legal work, including legal challenges to the PPP and the costs of losing the last judicial review, correctly spent? Was TFL right to spend £37,000 during the 2002 London borough elections on the "last chance for Londoners to say no to the PPP" campaign? Is it appropriate that TFL spent £3 million last year and will spend £7 million this year on matters related to the underground and PPP? Is all that money being spent correctly?

Londoners deserve and need a modern transport system. As chairman of TFL, the Mayor bears ultimate responsibility for the actions and regime of his appointed Transport Commissioner, Bob Kiley. Londoners deserve better, and we want answers.

10 am

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): I will deal with issues relating to transport in the capital, particularly the underground. I congratulate the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mike Gapes) on securing the debate, which is very important to Londoners and the significant number of people who live outside the confines of the M25 but work in London and rely on transport in London.

When the hon. Gentleman says that the situation was not meant to be like this, I am inclined to say, although I was not in the House at the time, that Conservatives warned the Government about it. The idea that Londoners would elect a London Mayor with a huge personal mandate and that that Mayor, whoever the person was, would not take to himself many centralised powers was unrealistic, to put it mildly.

I shall discuss issues that specifically relate to central London, such as the congestion charge, which I shall mention shortly. Tomorrow, we shall debate on the Floor of the House the report on the PPP by the Select Committee on Transport, Local Government and the Regions. The current state of affairs in London Underground is nothing short of a national disgrace. There is little doubt that if animals were subject to the conditions that many underground passengers have to put up with, it would immediately become a national scandal. The problems occur not just in the rush hour but for much of the working day.

Clearly, the massive strategic problem with funding the underground must be addressed. Unfortunately, a case is going to court. The only thing that we can safely say is what the Mayor has said: there will be scratchy public transport for the next 10 years. There is little doubt that the London Underground situation will get worse before it gets better, irrespective of the resolution of the court case in the next few months.

The Mayor has significant powers, and I appreciate that the hon. Member for Ilford, South has great concerns about the execution of those powers within the confines of Transport for London. All the bickering will not get us anywhere. It is important that London MPs play their part in facilitating matters. For our part, Conservatives have spent much of the past year encouraging Ken Livingstone and Bob Kiley to ensure that the right thing is done in the interests of Londoners. We have done our best to be constructive in the matter.

However, politicians and, more importantly, our constituents are running out of patience because of the mess that is being created in Transport for London and the poor relationship between the Mayor of London and central Government. At the heart of the PPP issue is the funding of the programmes that we have in place. It is easy for all of us to blame the Mayor or Transport for London, but the Treasury has deliberately held on to the purse strings not just for transport and crucial day-to-day issues concerning transport, which is specifically within the confines of this debate, but for public services as a whole. London gets an appallingly bad deal from central Government.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that when looking at transport problems in London, all roads lead to the Treasury? On the PPP, London Underground could be wholly privatised—I would not support that, but it could be done and would have intellectual consistency—or it could remain in the public sector. However, the Government's chosen course of PPP is the worst of all possible worlds.

Mr. Field: I suspect that I shall not utter these words too often in my parliamentary career, but I entirely agree with the hon. Lady's sentiments. PPP is absolutely the worst of the available options. The Select Committee knows considerably more about the details, but it is clear even from a cursory look at the PPP document that the Government are saying that transport in London will get worse for at least the first seven and a half years of PPP's operation, assuming that it can be got under way.

It strikes me that the whole fiasco of Railtrack and the oft-repeated phrase that there would be an integrated transport policy under the Deputy Prime Minister, the former Secretary of State who now has responsibility for the regions, point to a lack of central Government credibility. The Government's transport policy for London and where it is going is greatly worrying.

On congestion charging, the big idea of the Mayor was predicated on the fact that there would be great improvements in public transport prior to the introduction of the congestion charge. Indeed, that is self-evidently necessary because, if the congestion charge is to be effective, it will take some 15 to 20 per cent. of capacity from central London's roads. That capacity must go somewhere and the obvious idea was that it would go into the public transport system.

We have seen a lot of publicity from the Mayor about improvement with the buses. There has been an improvement and there is clearly a long-term investment structure for buses in central London. However, the great worry—the reality is undeniable—is that the buses can make only a very small difference in capacity. However much they are improved with bus lanes and so on they will not be able to make the necessary difference. The flag that has been run up by the Mayor and Transport for London that buses are the answer to all the problems prior to the introduction of congestion charging is a political red herring. Things will get worse before they get better, and it is now incumbent on the Mayor of London to postpone congestion charging for the foreseeable future until those improvements are in place.

As many hon. Members know, my local council—Westminster city council—is taking the matter to the High Court in the middle of July. It is regrettable that it has been forced so to do, but it is understandable given the concerns of many local residents.

Mike Gapes: Does the hon. Gentleman suspect, as I do, that the Mayor might secretly welcome Westminster city council's legal challenge because a delay in introducing the congestion charge might avoid a political fiasco and disaster for him?

Mr. Mark Field: I had suspected that and I pacify a number of my local residents associations and constituents on that basis. My only caveat to that theory, which goes back to funding, is that the one significant benefit of congestion charging for Mr. Livingstone, over and above the environmental advantages and other political aspects that have driven the policy forward, is the prospect of £130 million to £150 million a year that he can securitise for transport and other projects in the years ahead. So little money is coming through from central Government that he may find it difficult to resist such a prospect, notwithstanding the potential political fiasco, to which the hon. Gentleman referred, of introducing a congestion charge in that way.

London needs a strong and credible Mayor with the legal authority to drive through an agenda. Unfortunately, over the past two years, we have had little more than a media personality using his celebrity to proclaim a vision without any idea of how to deliver it.

Central Government need to understand that the devolution of power in London must at the same time ensure that the city is suitably rewarded for being the economic powerhouse of the country. It is little short of a disgrace that the Government have largely ignored the quality of life of so many Londoners. They are happy to take the taxes, the increased stamp duty and inheritance tax that flow from the wealth created by Londoners, but do not invest in the basic transport infrastructure that is so necessary.

10.10 am

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): Transport is one of the most fundamental issues for all Londoners, whether rich like some of the voters in the constituency of the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field), or poor like many of my constituents in Hackney. It is a crucial issue for people who use public transport, but also for those who do not. There are no more passionate advocates of

[Ms Diane Abbott]

investment in public transport than London taxi drivers, who know that in order to make a living travelling around London, it is essential to ease the congestion, which requires state-of-the-art 21st century public transport.

Transport was a key issue in the last mayoral campaign. Let me remind my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South (Mike Gapes) and Conservative Members that my party brought the whole weight of the Labour machine to bear in the last mayoral campaign in support of policies such as PPP—and it was humiliatingly smashed. A good man whom I personally like and admire, the then Member for Holborn and St. Pancras ended his national career in a regrettable way.

It amazes me that colleagues such as my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South are still trying to re-fight the mayoral campaign. Too many of my Labour colleagues are like Japanese soldiers in the jungle, still fighting the second world war. They cannot acknowledge that Ken Livingstone won on a policy that is directly contrary to those that my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South and others are still trying to peddle. Londoners were opposed to PPP. Ken beat the Labour party on PPP in the mayoral election. Londoners remain opposed to PPP. By the time the next mayoral election comes around, Londoners will not have seen any gains from PPP. Colleagues arguing that PPP is the way to get things done will have to eat their words.

On behalf of Londoners, I urge my colleagues to put an end to this petty and personal sniping at the Mayor, which is based on the ignominious failure of the Labour candidate at the last mayoral election, and to work constructively with him. When it comes to the big political issues, such as PPP, the importance of investment in transport, and the need to put pressure on the Treasury to make the money available, the people of London are solidly behind their Mayor. Parties and people who are seen to be involved in petty, personal sniping and retaining tittle-tattle about TFL—

Mike Gapes: Is my hon. Friend saying that she does not care about the way in which Londoners' money is spent? Is it right for the Mayor to appoint a Transport Commissioner and allow him to do what the hell he likes, with no one allowed to query or challenge it? Is my hon. Friend really saying that?

Ms Abbott *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. John McWilliam): Order. Before the hon. Lady resumes, may I remind her that the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) is still a Member of Parliament?

Ms Abbott: I am grateful.

In response to my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South, of course I care about Londoners' money. He is as knowledgeable about the legislation and construction of the Assembly as I am, so he will be aware that a detailed structure of scrutiny, appraisal and report ensures that the Mayor and TFL have to account for the money penny by penny and year on year through the committees, the Assembly and the reporting systems. The structures exist for scrutiny and to make the Mayor accountable. For my hon. Friend to imply otherwise suggests that he has not read the legislation or has not been to Romney house recently.

Mike Gapes: It is vital.

Ms Abbott: Yes, it is vital. This is where my hon. Friend swept up the tittle-tattle with which he has been detaining the Chamber. Of course it is vital that there is scrutiny and accountability. Fewer public officials in this country have more statutory scrutiny and accountability structures and requirements than the Mayor. Londoners may set their minds at rest. If there is any problem about scrutiny and accountability in relation to the Mayor, I suggest that my hon. Friend takes it to members of the Assembly. The responsibility for scrutiny rests fairly and squarely with the Assembly. Let us kill this notion here and now that there is no scrutiny or accountability where the Mayor is concerned. If anything, the legislation and institutional arrangements provide for an excess of scrutiny and accountability.

On the questions raised about TFL, the people of Ilford are as dependent on transport as anyone else. They will therefore be surprised to read that my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South seeks to detain the Chamber this morning with all sorts of whinges and tittle-tattle from nameless people at TFL, rather than to call for more money for transport and an end to the misbegotten public-private partnership, or to work more constructively with the Mayor.

I know that there are many hard-working and pleasant people at TFL, who are no doubt kind to their grandparents, small children and animals. However, as my hon. Friend will be aware, there has been a long-standing issue at TFL about the overall quality of management. I have heard colleagues make the same point about project management, although not everyone at TFL has been lacking. It would be surprising if the new Transport Commissioner did not bring in new people to address the systemic failures in management. Indeed, it would be remiss of him not to. My hon. Friend has gone sweeping the corridors of Romney house for tittle-tattle about complaints about the new management structure, and brought it to the Chamber as if it constituted a substantive critique. The sort of whinges and complaints about Americans with which my hon. Friend has sought to detain the Chamber are inevitable when one is trying to strengthen a management structure that is notoriously weak, with all due respect to individuals. They are inevitable when one is trying to put in place international expertise, to fill the gaps and to make TFL an institution that can manage a 21st century transport system for a 21st century city.

The people of Ilford would prefer a Member who seeks to work positively with someone who is, after all, the elected Mayor. When you sneer at the notion that Ken Livingstone was elected Mayor, you sneer not at the individual, but at the thousands of your Ilford constituents who came out and voted for you. You need to take the views of the people of London more seriously.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the hon. Lady that she is supposed to address the occupant of the Chair, not the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes).

Mike Gapes: I do not want to get into a personal argument with my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), but my constituents may judge me on my record and, no doubt, my hon. Friend's constituents will have things to say about her record in due course. It is important that hon. Members are prepared to represent the concerns that are brought to us. Just because someone has been elected does not mean that they can do what on earth they like for the period of their mandate. We have a duty as London MPs to ensure that public money—our money—is spent properly.

Ms Abbott: As I said, there is no question of the Mayor being able to do what he likes. The law does not allow that. Nor does the Assembly or, if I might say so, the *Evening Standard*. If there were no Assembly or institutional structures, the *Evening Standard* would keep any Mayor on his or her toes. The notion that I am saying that the Mayor should be able to do what he likes is nonsense.

To return to the points raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South on Transport for London, there are bound to be stresses and strains as TFL modernises and as the type of international management expertise that it needs is introduced. It would be highly surprising if none of the people who had to leave or modify their working practices had complaints. As I have said, it is surprising that an hon. Member, rather than raise substantive issues, has brought such tittle-tattle before the Chamber.

I want to comment on the congestion charge as a London Member who does not drive and therefore does not perhaps have the same heartfelt feelings about it as other hon. Members. Although I do not drive, I am well aware that in the 14 years that I have represented Hackney, increased congestion has meant that it has taken longer and longer to make the journey to Westminster. A journey that took 30 minutes in the rush hour when I was first elected in 1987 now takes between 45 minutes and an hour. Considering that London is the economic heartland and motor of this country, especially with the financial services in the City, something must be done.

People in other cities in Britain and around the world will examine how the congestion charge works in London. The Mayor has no choice but to see whether it can work. Something must be done because the congestion is an economic and social problem with potential health effects.

The congestion charge is a weapon, but I am mindful of the fact that in a borough such as Hackney many poor people have to drive. A single mother who works shifts as an office cleaner and has to get her child to nursery has to have an old banger to get around. I stand at bus stops and see those ladies. They are not rich, or even middle class, but because of the transport deficiencies in Hackney and other parts of London, they have to own a car.

In principle, the congestion charge is right, but as I have told the Mayor in private and now say in public, it must be thought through properly. He must ensure that it will not have an unnecessary detrimental effect while dealing with congestion. Some of the potential inequities must be thought through.

Mr. Mark Field: Speaking for myself rather than my party, I have no objection to the principle of a congestion charge. Ultimately, if we believe in free markets, road pricing is a potential element. However, there is a clear crisis in the public transport system, and the only viable alternative is for people to use their cars, so does the hon. Lady agree that now cannot be the right time to introduce such charges? The Opposition have also raised ongoing concerns about the fact that congestion has become worse with TFL's policy of reducing three-lane roads to two-lane roads and altering traffic light sequencing. When the charge is introduced, some of those changes may be reversed and prove that the congestion charge has improved the situation from very bad to not quite as bad.

Ms Abbott: I understand the hon. Gentleman's comments, and there is a sense in which the congestion charge is a gamble. It has never been done in a city of the size and density of London, so it must be carefully thought through, but I suspect that there will never be a right time to introduce the charge. It would have been better to see a step change in the quality of public transport before we introduced the congestion charge. However, if my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South had spent some of the energy that he spent on petty personal sniping against the Mayor on trying to get the Chancellor of Exchequer to provide the funding and support needed to give Londoners the public transport that they deserve, his constituents would have reason to be grateful.

I do not want to detain the Chamber, because I know that many hon. Members want to speak. However, it would be wrong for this debate to pass without reminding the Chamber that London's elected Mayor retains the support of most Londoners for his transport policies. In particular, all the polls show that he retains the support of most Londoners for his opposition to PPP, and that Londoners are grateful to TFL and the GLA for the improvements that have been made to bus services.

Londoners are looking to hon. Members on both sides of the House to stop engaging in the petty warfare that stems from the mayoral campaign, to look forward and to work constructively with the Mayor. No one can say that he has not attempted to run an inclusive administration, and to work with people. The time is long overdue for some of my colleagues to put their anger and bitterness about the mayoral campaign behind them and to seek to work constructively with the Mayor. The people of London deserve no less.

10.25 am

Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): The hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) hopes that this debate will be the end of

[Richard Ottaway]

petty warfare. I suspect that it is very much the opening salvo of what will become a sustained campaign over the next 22 months, and that it will be entrenched rather than petty warfare.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mike Gapes) on securing this debate on an important subject. In truth, however, he missed his opportunity. As we look around the Chamber, we see the Minister, who has given up a morning to be here, his officials, the people who run the building, and members of the public who have come to listen. In fact, we have witnessed internal warfare between the various factions of the Labour party. It is a shame that such debates are used in that way.

To respond to the speech by the hon. Member for Ilford, South, if ever there were an endorsement of the Opposition's position during the passage of the Greater London Authority Act 1999, that was it. Most of the things that he complained about were things that we said would happen. He is right to raise those issues, but he must accept that that is what devolution means. His party is committed to devolution in a way that my party is not, but that is what democracy is all about. As the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington said, Mr. Livingstone was democratically elected—he got his mandate. If the hon. Member for Ilford, South does not like the way that the Mayor is running the show, tough. That is what politics is all about.

The hon. Gentleman made some quite serious allegations about the conduct of a number of officials at the Greater London Authority. *[Interruption.]* I am prepared to give way to him if he says that he will repeat those allegations outside the Palace of Westminster.

Mike Gapes: Many of the things that I said were quotes from press articles published in August last year. Other quotes were from the internet. They are already public information

Richard Ottaway: That is a slight fudge of an answer. Will the hon. Gentleman repeat his allegations outside this Chamber?

Mike Gapes: I see no need to do so. I am happy that my information is based on reliable sources.

Richard Ottaway: That sounds like a waiver of privilege to me.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. No hon. Member can waive their privilege.

Richard Ottaway: I hesitate to disagree, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I think that the courts have found that there can be a waiver of privilege. Anyway, I do not want to dwell on the point and I am sure that you are right. I shall move on because we have limited time.

The hon. Member for Ilford, South said that the boroughs were not being properly consulted and their views were being overridden. The Opposition tabled an amendment to allow the boroughs more powers and more involvement, but the hon. Gentleman voted against it in Committee and on the Floor of the House.

The hon. Gentleman complained about the precept. In Committee, he and I were given assurances that the precept would be capped. However, the cap was lifted in the House of Lords. Two hundred amendments came back and were debated in four hours on the Floor of the House. Among them was the removal of the cap on the precept. That is what happened. The way in which the hon. Gentleman's party took the legislation through the House led to all the things that he has complained about. If he continues with this line over the next 22 months, we will consistently remind him and his party that they are completely responsible for this state of affairs.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman on one point. The Mayor has been profligate. He has hired too many special advisers and he has achieved little. There are more pigeons in Trafalgar square than when he started. He has done absolutely nothing as Mayor. We will feel the impact of his policies when he introduces road-user charging. There are two sides to that debate. I happen to be against it. Of all the places in Britain to introduce the pilot scheme for congestion charging, central London is not it. It will lead to a lacuna in the middle. The constituents of the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington will be able to drive with ease through the centre of London, oblivious to the complete chaos that will surround the area. It is a disastrous policy, but again the Labour party gave the Mayor the power to do this. It has to live with the consequences. It voted for and welcomed road-user charging. We will hold the Government to account.

There are many more policies that we could talk about for a long time. It is so sad that London has such potential on the transport side. There is a huge underground network, which, if it were run properly and if this disastrous PPP were scrapped, could be the best metro system in the world. We have taxis. We have buses running through the night. The buses have been a success story, but as they have been given an £800 million subsidy, it would be a scandal if they were not. If there is good will on all sides, proper funding and commitment, things can be achieved. The Government are responsible for the present state of affairs and they must answer for it.

10.31 am

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): I congratulate the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mike Gapes) on securing the debate. He heaped praise on the Government for their role in transport and castigated Transport for London. I hope to be a little more balanced. He should perhaps have called the debate "Get Kiley". We would then have known what notes to prepare. I take it that he is against the use of consultants in any capacity, and will object to the Government's use of consultants in relation to PPP and Railtrack in administration and to the £36 million paid in success fees to tube lines. I will listen to tomorrow's proceedings with interest.

What is interesting about the figures that the hon. Gentleman produced on spending on different consultants is that he managed to obtain them. Can the Minister provide hon. Members with a similar level of detail about the spending on PPP and on Railtrack in administration, so that we can see precisely how much the individual consultants who have been working on those jobs have received over the past four to five years? I bet the hon. Gentleman that the Minister will tell us that it will cost too much money to produce that information.

The hon. Gentleman was lucky in securing his information. Many of his final questions about the way in which TFL has operated could be addressed to the Government in relation to PPP and Railtrack in administration. I am perhaps disappointed that he did not do that this morning. He said that it was not supposed to be this way. Of course it was not. A compliant Labour Mayor was supposed to be elected. That did not happen and now he is partly to blame for the mess that we are in.

I will not make the tube the focus of my comments this morning because I want to keep my powder dry for tomorrow's debate. There are clearly many unresolved matters to which the hon. Member for Ilford, South did not refer such as the funding gap, whether the financiers now have partial responsibility for safety, success fees and the conflict between what Londoners expect and the reality, in view of the headline figures and the billions that will allegedly be invested as a result of PPP.

Many matters could and should be raised today. Crossrail is an important project, which is vital for the sustainability of London. As regards phase two of the channel tunnel rail link, I hope that the Minister can confirm that the ongoing discussions about Network Rail have not caused problems.

Ms Abbott: Another project, the Chelsea-Hackney line, is vital to my constituents, and my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South (Mike Gapes) should lobby the Treasury for money for it.

Tom Brake: Indeed, it is a vital project for a part of London that has no access to the tube, as I well know from my time as a councillor there.

Congestion charges were the subject of a debate several months ago. If time had allowed, we could have mentioned a positive development at Connex, which has allowed its staff to train as specials. That is a useful development, which I hope other train companies will take up. We could have considered commuter rail services and the franchise negotiations. What is happening to South Central, where is it going in terms of a new franchise, and will it deliver what commuters want?

We could have talked about cycling, and it is a pity that the Mayor is scaling down the plans for the cycle network. We could have talked about road safety. I am concerned about the way in which TFL is operating in that regard. I know of a pedestrian crossing that is desperately needed in my constituency, but we have been told that it will take six months to consider the matter. Work must be done on such issues.

There are problems with consultation. TFL recognises that it is perceived as seeking views on schemes after they have been drawn up, rather than at the formative stage. It is belatedly undertaking to provide clear and accessible information, to consult on schemes at the formative stage and not to refuse to attend local meetings to which it is invited, which is clearly important. Minicabs are a significant issue in London, but what progress has been made on licensing? There is the issue of co-ordination between train-operating companies and those that run the Croydon tram. Information about connections with the tram system is, for instance, not available to people who buy tickets at Connex stations.

Those are some of the issues, but, in the few minutes that remain, I want to concentrate on buses, to which the hon. Member for Ilford, South referred. TFL must significantly improve the information that it provides and, more specifically, the countdown system. For the benefit of those who do not use the buses, that system tells passengers, in theory, when the next bus is due. Some 4,000 displays are to be installed by 2005, but that is not ambitious enough. We must ensure that information about the arrival of buses is available throughout the network, because that is the only way to get people on to the system. In future years, any significant sums that we raise through congestion charging could be used to achieve that.

The accessibility of buses is a significant problem in London and, I suspect, elsewhere. Ramps may not work, or drivers may not be trained to use them. Those who have been trained may feel unable to use the ramps because they are worried that they will not be able to pull them back in. The bus would then have to stop, everyone would have to be thrown off, and a replacement bus would have to be found. I hope that TFL and the Government will tackle those significant issues, which may also require action elsewhere.

I think that all hon. Members agree that London is not moving, and the Minister must accept that he shares responsibility for the crisis. His Government were responsible for drafting the legislation, his party was responsible for creating Ken the martyr and for underfunding London's transport infrastructure for many years.

10.39 am

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): I quote:

> "The capital is bogged down with funding arguments, planning arguments, congestion charging scheme arguments, endless roadworks and projects that are already facing ballooning costs. London needs investment and delivery of significant improvements to keep it on the move. Political infighting over the past two years has let London down at the very time swift, decisive action has been required."

So concluded Tourism Alliance in its report published in April 2002. That influential body, led by Digby Jones, brings together all the tourism interests in the United Kingdom, but it concentrates on London, where tourism represents economic activity worth about £10 billion each year, about 8 per cent. of gross domestic product. It is London's second largest industry.

Tourism Alliance homed in on the issue of political in-fighting. If anyone doubted that that was happening, those doubts were removed today. I cannot understand the motive of the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mike Gapes) in introducing the debate in the way in which he did. I congratulate him on his success in the ballot, but it is regrettable that he chose to spend half an hour laying into people who are in no position to defend themselves in this Chamber, instead of concentrating on the real issues that affect Londoners, such as the appalling state of transport in London. I do not know

[Mr. Christopher Chope]

whether he has been put up to it by the Government, who are worried about what may happen in the High Court in July—

Mike Gapes: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that I have not been put up to it by anyone.

Mr. Chope: I accept that. The hon. Gentleman takes full responsibility for what he said, but this is part of a pattern, whereby Labour Members are more interested in political in-fighting and point scoring than in delivering services to Londoners.

Let us remind ourselves of the awful nightmare in which Londoners currently live. Traffic crawls at 9.9 mph, the lowest speed since the era of the horse and cart. The Mayor of London has taken down his red flag from County hall and now carries it before him on the streets of London. In any 24-hour period, almost the same number of vehicles enter London now—1.6 million in 2001—as in 1987, when the figure was 1.59 million, yet as the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) said, her journey has increased during that time from 30 to 45 minutes because of congestion. That congestion is not caused by an increase in vehicles, because there is hardly any increase in the number of vehicles entering London; it is caused by other factors, such as road works, manipulation of traffic lights and ill-designed traffic-calming schemes.

Back in the days of the Greater London council, I remember a half-baked scheme to try to close off most of the roads in London. Fortunately, that scheme did not go ahead because of central Government intervention, but we now have an independent Mayor, who seems to be able to achieve now what he was unable to achieve before.

Significantly, road safety is deteriorating fast. In spite of the lowering of traffic speeds, we are witnessing totally unacceptable carnage on London roads. Some 357 people were killed on London's roads in 2001, an increase of 73, or 25 per cent., on the previous year's figure. Almost one in 10 of the people killed on Britain's roads are killed in London, where the traffic is travelling relatively slowly. That is a major indictment of Transport for London and the Labour party.

Ms Abbott: Briefly on the point about road safety, there are particular concerns about children. The sad fact is that children in poor areas are far more likely to die on the road than other children. That is a serious issue.

Mr. Chope: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. When I was the Minister responsible for road safety, I was conscious of that. I am disappointed that the road safety statistics are now going in the wrong direction and that the most disadvantaged and vulnerable members of society are suffering most.

London has the most disrupted, overcrowded and costly underground network in the world. We shall debate that tomorrow, so I will not pursue the matter now. Perhaps the hon. Member for Ilford, South would have been better employed dealing with London Underground rather than attacking the personalities involved in the debate.

What is the prospect for the future? It is for more litigation, more political in-fighting, higher fares and charges, more congestion and pollution and the nightmare of congestion charging—40 or 50 per cent. of it to be paid for by the people living by the gateway at which the charges will impact. That will create diversion of traffic, distortions in the market, additional journeys and a nightmare for Londoners. We have the prospect of higher tube fares or much higher precepts in order to deal with the enormous funding gap that has been identified in the papers for London Transport, particularly for London Underground. There might have been some improvements on the buses, but overall the costs have shot up, investment has fallen and service is deteriorating. It is a nightmare, yet the hon. Member for Ilford, South spent hardly any time talking about that.

In contrast, my hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) made some constructive comments, based on his experience and that of his constituents in facing up to what is happening in London. My hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Richard Ottaway) rightly drew attention to the extent to which the hon. Member for Ilford, South must share responsibility for what has happened: he is the joint author of the situation that he described so vividly. He introduced us to superb political theatre. The fantasy was enhanced by clear evidence of his short-term memory loss: he had been involved in the wrong side of the argument when Conservative Members were warning Londoners of the consequences of what the Government were doing.

The Government's attitude seems to be to say, "Hands off. It's nowt to do with us guv. The congestion charging scheme is a matter for the Mayor. We are not involved in it." There was an amazing response in the other place whenViscount Astor asked whether the Government endorsed the Mayor of London's proposals on inner-London congestion charging. He was told by the Minister responsible, Lord Macdonald of Tradeston:

> "The particular scheme that the Mayor of London is planning to introduce is his responsibility, not the Government's."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 18 June 2002; Vol. 626, c. WA81.]

Today, the Chancellor of the Exchequer has briefed us on what he will say at the Mansion house dinner tonight. He has said how important it is to increase productivity. At the same time, the Government are saying that they are not interested in actions taken by the Mayor of London that will result in higher costs and lower productivity, more congestion and less competitiveness for London. That is a disastrous situation. It has been brought about by the folly of the Government's policies over the past few years. It is incumbent on the Government to own up and accept responsibility, apologise and do something to help Londoners to get out of the jam that they are in.

10.48 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Jamieson): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South (Mike Gapes) on securing this important debate. I often sit in debates, listen to Back Benchers on both sides of the Chamber, and to Liberal and Conservative Front Benchers. I have long given up on hearing a policy proposal from the Liberals. Today, we heard a former Minister with responsibility for transport, speaking for the Opposition, who gave us little insight as to what his policies would be. I always take note. As a regular contributor to the Chamber, I live in hope that one day a box will open and we will see some of the policies that the Opposition have to offer.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South spoke forcefully and eloquently, as always. He raised some important matters. I cannot comment too extensively on the issues to do with the Mayor, but I was interested to hear what my hon. Friend said, and I am sure that it will be noted in other quarters. As we speak, the process of accountability is taking place in the London Assembly itself. The Mayor is answering questions at this very moment.

My hon. Friend raised several important points in his well-researched manner. Transport for London is a best value authority, and it must therefore demonstrate best value for money and services. It is answerable to the district auditor for its plans. The actions of TFL are subject to the scrutiny of the Assembly, and decisions require the approval of the TFL board. Accountability for many of the matters that he raised is down to other sources, and properly so.

My hon. Friend spoke at some length about appointments that the Mayor has made to his management team. That is a matter for the Mayor. If the voters do not like what he has done, or are concerned about the matters that my hon. Friend has raised forcefully today—I am sure that they will be mentioned at any future election—it is for the people of London to hold the Mayor to account. I am sure that they will.

My hon. Friend gave an outline of how things were in London. If we are to sustain a vibrant and flourishing economy across Britain, and particularly in London, we need to reform and to invest in our transport infrastructure. Our transport system has suffered not years but decades of under-investment. Wherever we look, whether at rail, road or air, there are tremendous strains and stresses. However, we are the world's fourth largest economy. I am pleased to say that in recent years our economy has grown and improved.

London is important not just in Britain but as a world city. It is a major financial and business centre. I note that the latest Healey and Baker European cities monitor rates London as the best European city for external links and the second best for internal travel. It is worth putting London in the context of the rest of Europe. However, we should not be complacent.The scale of London and the complexity of the transport system, coupled with the enormously high demand, mean that the city's transport problems are of a considerably different magnitude to those in other parts of the country. London's successful economy has placed great strains on roads, rail and the underground network, especially at peak times. I am sure that the pressures of demand will increase.

It is worth giving a statistic: since 1989, London's population has increased by 600,000. That is roughly the population of a city such as Sheffield. In the next few years, London's population will further increase substantially. It is probable that something like the population of Leeds will be added to it, although I am not saying that everyone will move from the north to London. There are many more people now in work. There is more economic activity, and so more strain on London's transport system.

The 10-year plan that we published two years ago set out our vision and objectives, and the means by which we will achieve real change this decade.

Ms Abbott: The Minister mentioned the importance of transport to people who work. However, I remind him that there are big pockets of unemployment in London, and developing the transport infrastructure has an important role to play in regenerating areas such as my constituency.

Mr. Jamieson: My hon. Friend has raised an important point, and what she said applies throughout the country. It is necessary to improve transport, especially bus services, for people who are not in work or who live in areas of long-term high unemployment. There are certainly large pockets of wealth in London, as there are large pockets of poverty; that is the position in many other cities. Improving transport links, particularly to enable people to enjoy some of the benefits of the improvement in the economy, are important.

Tom Brake: Can the Minister confirm that there has been no threat to the channel tunnel rail link phase two, and that that is not the reason why the negotiations about Railtrack in administration and Network Rail seemed to have been prolonged?

Mr. Jamieson: I am hoping to cover such matters later.

The plan takes a long-term approach to the problems that face us. It is a working document. We want to see it develop. We have put in place the funding to carry out many schemes. I am pleased that the stop-go funding that characterised previous Governments has now come to an end.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South and others mentioned the crossrail development, in which much interest has been shown. The Government will support viable proposals for a new east-west rail link across London. The project is highlighted in the transport plan as potentially contributing a 15 per cent. increase in seating capacity on the rail and underground network in central London during the morning peak. I know that my hon. Friend has particular ambitions and the actual detail of the project will come to pass shortly.

We are debating London Underground tomorrow on the Floor of the House, but it would be remiss of me not to refer to it today. Through the PPP, the modernisation of the tube is almost ready to begin. The plans are designed to unlock unprecedented sums for investment—some £16 billion over the next 15 years, including £4 billion from the private sector.

We know that London Underground's old procurement methods have let down passengers. The Jubilee line extension was a prime example, being late

[Mr. Jamieson]

and with a 76 per cent. cost overrun. By contrast, the modernisation plans under the PPP provide the right incentives to contractors and give them the freedom to innovate, to seek efficiencies and to satisfy customers. We have great confidence in the PPP. We want it to work. We want the extra investment that is so needed in our transport system.

The hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) and others drew attention to congestion charging. I cannot comment on the legal challenge that has been made by Westminster. That is a matter for Westminster and the Mayor to sort out between themselves. We are keeping a close eye on the development of congestion charging. We provided such powers under the Greater London Authority Act, and other Acts have given local authorities throughout the country the ability to introduce congestion charging. Enabling powers have been given to the GLA and local authorities. It is for those authorities to make sure that they account democratically to their local population for schemes, whether they work or whether they do not. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that improvements to public transport must go hand in hand with the congestion charging policy. My hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) made a similar point.

Whenever I speak at meetings outside London, all I hear is that the south-east and London are getting all the money, so it is interesting to hear those who represent constituencies in and near London saying that the money is not being spent in London. The hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) will know that, under the 10-year plan, £182 billion will be spent—a massive 44 per cent. increase on the previous decade—and that £25 billion of that sum will be allocated to London in the next 10 years. That is a substantial amount of money.

As always, I have not had time to respond to all the points that have made in the debate, which at times was more like a London Assembly debate than a debate in the House of Commons. None the less, I have enjoyed it and many valuable points have been made. If hon. Members wish to pursue points that were not answered, I shall be delighted to do that through correspondence.

Political Party Funding

11 am

Matthew Taylor (Truro and St. Austell): I start by saying that I welcome the debate. Given the interest of several hon. Members who hope to participate, I know that the subject is a matter of considerable interest and concern throughout the House. That is indicated also by previous debates on ten-minute rule Bills and Adjournment debates on the subject. Those debates had one thing in common; they were serious efforts to address the real issues that surround state funding of political parties, the problems of the present system and the public's perception that the emphasis is on scrabbling around for large amounts from a few individuals which raises worries about undue influence or access being offered or asked for in return.

It was notable from those debates that although political warfare outside the debates is often concentrated on individual examples and criticism of the Government of the time—we can all think of allegations and scandals of possible sleaze and corruption—the debates themselves did not focus on that, but on solutions. I plan to do the same today.

This debate is being held at an important time, because we are clearly entering a process in which there is great focus on major changes that might take place to the basis on which political parties are funded. Research has been undertaken by organisations such as the Institute for Public Policy Research. The Electoral Commission is about to embark on a serious piece of research on both the overall spend of political parties during elections and how parties raise the money. There will be lengthy deliberations, but the process is starting to kick off and the commission will reach its conclusions toward the end of next year. This is an appropriate time for the House to consider the issue.

The reason to hold the debate is perfectly apparent. At a time of declining membership, political parties' fundraising efforts are increasingly focused on small numbers of individuals who are able to pay large amounts. In the past, fundraising was focused on businesses and trade unions, but all parties—especially the major parties—are now focused on encouraging a tiny number of personally wealthy individuals to make very large donations.

At the time of the last election—to give a sense of scale—some individuals made single donations that were more than my party could spend in total; £5 million. That raises worries that affect us all, including my party. Such donations raise the question of what individuals want and might be given in return. That adds to a general reputation that politicians are corrupt and that favours are offered in return for money. I suspect that most members of the population do not draw a great distinction between donations to political organisations and the thought that the party might be in someone's back pocket, although I do not believe that that is the case.

Previous work on the issue was essentially about greater transparency and exposing donations to the light of day. The Neill committee report recommendation to put all donations on the record has not delivered the solution that was expected. It made the process more public, which means that criticisms are there to be made. The major reason that the present Government have suffered so much is not that they are any different from any other Government, but simply that they are the first Government to have put the information so publicly on record. Future Governments will suffer in exactly the same way—

Mr. Jim Murphy (Eastwood): More.

Matthew Taylor: Possibly more, as the hon. Gentleman suggests. All political parties raise donations. Opposition parties raise less, because they are in opposition, and, perhaps more importantly, because they are less liable to be asked what favour is involved, as Opposition parties can, by definition, offer less. Nevertheless, the process corrupts the reputation of all political parties, and it is time to bring it to an end.

I believe that partly because I believe that those questions are real. It is hard to understand how a party treasurer or leadership that is desperate for funds does not leave at least a crack open for someone to push for something that is in their interests. At the very least, they will have a level of access that no other person is likely to have; a seat at the top table or personal meetings with Ministers, who undoubtedly—indeed, overwhelmingly—intend to do no more than perhaps say, "Thank you."

An even more important reason for tackling the issue is the creeping process of state funding for political parties. The proportion of funding of political parties undertaken by the state is rising rapidly, but by the back door, and not with public support, a Bill in the House or in a way that has been properly open to public scrutiny. I am not suggesting that the process is secret, but funding is happening in ways that do not involve an announcement that we are moving to a formal system of restricting big donations and replacing them with state support. It is happening with an increase in Short money; huge increases in the case of the Opposition parties. There has been a huge increase in taxpayer-funded political advisers for Ministers, so it is not only Opposition parties that are benefiting; the Government are too.

Research funding has been introduced, and I hear that there may be further increases relating to the introduction of information technology by political parties and the training of activists and officials. All those ways of funding avoid having to make the big announcement that we are going to change the political system, and they do not make the big and necessary change which is to stop the whiff of corruption that surrounds the desperate search for a small number of multi-millionaire donors.

The system is highly undemocratic. It rewards the establishment, of which all of us present are part, in one form or another. It rewards the status quo and penalises those who might try to challenge it. It is extraordinary that the research money explicitly relates to the work of political parties in developing European manifestos and manifestos for Scotland and Wales, but is tied to representation in this place. Organisations such as the Green party or the UK Independence party are excluded, even though the money will help us develop manifesto policies for elections to bodies to which they are elected and in relation to which they compete.

The current system is the worst of all worlds. The whiff of corruption and the desperate search for multi-millionaire donors remain. The current development of central state funding rewards the status quo and is unattached to proper democratic developments and the wishes of the electorate and does not prevent any emerging problems.

What could and should be done? I strongly believe that—as others in the House, from all parts of the party spectrum have argued—we need to end donations of such a size as to suggest that they might influence party or Government policy. That means keeping them relatively small; to thousands of pounds, not tens of thousands, and certainly not hundreds of thousands or millions. I believe that the public are looking for a situation where donations are on a small enough scale that there can be no suggestion or belief that they could possibly influence Government, or the policy of Opposition parties, or that sums of money can buy one's way to the top table of influence; they will be insufficient to do so.

If we are to make that change, it is equally apparent that in a vibrant, functioning democracy, political parties need to be able to raise sufficient funds to do all the work of a democracy. Incidentally, that includes campaigning. The idea that we should fund political parties for everything except the campaign seems to be nonsense. Ultimately, the campaign itself is the most vital ingredient of democracy. The counter-arguments between the political parties, and their ability to communicate those arguments allow the electorate to take their decision. A manifesto of which no one has ever heard, or a policy of which no one is aware, is not part of the process that delivers democratic government.

The campaigning process is important. Therefore, we need a system that will bring in the necessary funding to allow that. If we cut donations to very small levels and do nothing else, I believe that we will not achieve such a vibrant, functioning democracy. The latest figures from the Conservative party show that of their funding of £20 million in a general election year, £1.4 million came from small donations from individual figures. Similar figures could be given for any of the political parties. I use those figures because they are the ones that have recently been analysed.

I believe that we need a system of match funding in which the state links any funding it gives to the individual small-scale donations that are raised. I do not suggest that the rate should necessarily be £1 for £1, 30p for £1 or £3 for £1. The rate will be determined by proper debate about what we need to raise and spend so that political parties can work. That debate has to be tied to the work of the Electoral Commission on the capping of spending by political parties. We need to look at what they can reasonably raise, and what they reasonably need to spend. Clearly, there should be a limit on how much can be raised. If we are going to cap how much parties can spend, there is a limit to how far state funding will go.

Equally, it is important that the funding is tied to legitimate political parties, in the sense that they genuinely contest elections. It may be that, whether it relates to the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly or this place, there is a minimum requirement to contest seats and attain a minimum level of support. I am not trying to exclude groups because they have an extreme

[Matthew Taylor]

view. I am simply saying that we do not want people to set up pseudo-parties, as we have seen in some parts of the world, to access funds to buy themselves a holiday home, a pensioners' rest home or one of the other examples that we have seen.

I have heard an argument that the proposal might help some extreme groups; I would say that we have to contest with them democratically. I would point out that the present system has the potential for one multi-millionaire to fund the British National party, the National Front or any other party at higher levels than the existing political mainstream parties. It is just a matter of chance whether someone comes along with sufficient money to do so.

Under the system that I propose, it is a question of whether they can recruit sufficient individual members willing to put themselves up publicly as party donors, in order to win match funding. I do not believe that the extremists in this country can win that membership support. All the evidence is quite to the contrary. If a group such as the Greens, which has developed in relatively recent decades, could build up membership and a measure of electoral success, why should it not be able to obtain funding in the same way as those of us who are already privileged to be here already? It should be all about the ability to find people who will join, support and make small donations to groups that reflect their political beliefs.

So far, I have made arguments very similar to those of other hon. Members, but the reason, above all, why I wanted to take the opportunity to make my argument was to highlight another issue, on which I shall finish. It is my belief that there have been a couple of major drivers affecting turnout that have tended to be under-stressed. One is a loss of belief in the political system itself. That loss of belief is very closely tied to the feeling that all political parties are much the same and, above all, that they are all in it for themselves; they are all scrabbling around with multi-millionaires and are not really interested in the concerns of ordinary people. All of us here know that that is generally far from true and that we all deal with individual cases all the time, which is our primary job. However, that is the perception and it has gone a long way towards distancing the electorate from the political parties.

The second factor relates to the fact that people are less involved in community groups. That has affected not only political parties, but everything from the Women's Institute to the local parish council. People are less willing to get involved in the community because they can make other choices; through television, through video and through the ability to get in the car and travel much longer distances to join friends and relatives. They no longer have to be involved in the local community in the same way. Because of that, we have seen a huge decline in political membership and in activity on the doorstop. As a response, political parties have increasingly moved their smaller and smaller numbers of troops to a handful of political seats that they think can be won in any election. In a safe seat, people are unlikely to see anyone knocking on the door or much in the way of literature because the activists there will have been asked to go to the next-door seat, which might be more easily won or lost.

We see that happening as a strategy in all the political parties. We know that where there are the highest levels of political activity, there are the highest election turnouts. Where there are the lowest levels of political activity, there are the lowest turnouts. A process of refocusing the political parties so that they move away from a large number of people concentrating on a small number of individual donors—the high donation unit—and concentrate instead on building individual membership will in itself not only deliver a sleaze-free political funding system, but generate a much higher level of political activity on the ground. Parties will then be forced to concentrate on building membership in order to fund their activities, rather than on a few dinners with multi-millionaires, which is what happens with much of the effort at the present time.

I have some figures, which, again, by chance, relate to the Conservative party. However, I make no particular criticism of the Conservative party. Figures recently released on the breakdown of staff show that, in 1997, the Conservative party employed 59 regional and 147 central staff, but that that has now changed to 18 regional and 172 central staff. That centralisation process is happening across the board.

If we are to have a genuinely vibrant democracy, we need not only to move away from tying funding to very wealthy individuals who inevitably seek some return, but to rebuild the membership on the ground to deliver the electoral message in the conventional way. We should never forget that the original reason for the development of mass-membership parties was the extension of the franchise and the need to get the vote out. It is not simply the case that, somehow, people today are massively less willing to vote. It is also true that political parties spend much less time persuading large numbers of people on the ground to become involved in getting people out to vote. That has made a very significant difference.

Mr. Andrew Love (Edmonton): I apologise to the hon. Gentleman for missing the start of his speech. I understand his concern about the very large donations that have caused difficulty across the political spectrum, but how can we move towards a system of state funding, as he suggests, at a time when the standing of politics and politicians is so low? Surely he recognises the considerable difficulties with public opinion in moving in that direction.

Matthew Taylor: I am well aware of the concerns expressed by the hon. Gentleman and, not least, the Government. We have a chicken-and-egg situation; if we are not prepared to tackle the reasons for the decline in public standing, one of which is the issue of funding, we will never solve the problem. Therefore, the issue must be faced head on. In the scale of things, we are talking about tiny amounts of money. All in, £10 million or £20 million might be needed to achieve the process.

Crucially, it is exactly that concern that is leading to the development of state funding in a much less upfront way. Back-door funding does not tie in with building membership on the ground or developing dynamic, active political parties. It leads to the freezing of the existing system and the development of central funding of political parties, which is exactly what has led to the near-death of active memberships in other countries in which parties have such funding. If hon. Members want a lot of money to go to central headquarters—untied to membership and freezing the success of existing political structures—they should allow development to continue as it is. It does not confront the electorate, and the *Daily Mail* and *The Daily Telegraph* are less likely to run attacking editorials on politicians because we have introduced state funding. But the truth is that we are introducing state funding, although we are doing it in the worst possible way.

It is time that the House said no to that and developed a system that is about making parties concentrate again on attracting and involving ordinary members. That is how we will deliver a vibrant democracy. We have to take it on the chin, because people would far prefer the results of that system to the present accumulation of sleaze that affects every Government, no matter how principled their intentions may be.

11.22 am

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): One thing is certainly true; democracy is not cheap. I have been a member of the Labour party since 1979 and have always been a grassroots activist. I cannot speak for the Liberal Democrats, but we in the Labour party value our grassroots activists. I see my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, the Member for Doncaster, Central (Ms Winterton), in her place; I can assure the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Matthew Taylor) that, in Doncaster, we canvass and campaign, even though we are in a safe Labour area. That is probably why the Liberal Democrats have not had much success in Doncaster.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell on securing the debate today. We need a debate in which we can explore several different options, because the subject is complex. Let us have an honest debate about the different ways in which the state funds parties, whether through Short money, MPs' salaries or, at local government level, time off for councillors to carry out their civic responsibilities and allowances for councillors to do their job.

Perhaps we should consider an audit of what is currently provided to allow democracy to flourish. It could be the starting point for further exploration across the party divide of how we can address some of the issues that the hon. Gentleman raised. There is no doubt that we will have a job in achieving public support and confidence in any such moves. Even an audit might cause certain negative reactions. It would be interesting to see how the press and broadcasting media respond to it.

As I said at the outset, democracy is not cheap. In 1997, I had the opportunity to visit America as part of an all-party delegation. We met representatives from Congress and state legislatures. I asked some of them about funding in America, why so much had to be spent and why a reasonable cap was not put on the amount of money allowed to be raised and spent. I was told that a price could not be put on democracy; my response was that if the price were the same for everyone, we would all have an equal chance within the framework.

I am conscious that other hon. Members want to speak, but I want to make a few points about some of the areas that could be looked at. The cap on election spending could be revisited to see whether it should be reduced.

In the debate and in the language we use, it is easy to play to an agenda of defending our position as politicians. Dare I say it, but most of the people I meet from all parties in this House try to do a decent job and represent their constituents well. Across the party divide, we may have different ideas of what we want and how to get it, but we generally have a set of beliefs that drives our politics. Many of those beliefs are tied into how we believe communities can better be represented and served by appropriate laws, depending on where we come from. We should not allow ourselves to fall into the trap of always defending ourselves against the negative backlash against politicians. Whatever we do, politicians will not top a poll of people's favourite profession. Such polls, even on the august "Today" programme, are rather flimsy in their contribution to the general debate about politics.

We should use language that can be branded—perhaps that is not the right word—democracy-building and explain how we can achieve that. I have a couple of ideas to throw into the pot. I believe that individuals who want to make a contribution to a political party should be served in the same way as those who give to charity through the gift aid programme. People often say they are not interested in politics and do not want to take part, but we do not encourage activity and involvement in politics by suggesting that giving to a political party is not as nice as giving to a charity. I fully support charitable giving, but we could consider whether individual donations of up to, for example, £5,000 should be tax-free.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): Does the hon. Lady remember that the Neill committee suggested in 1998 that there should be tax relief for donations? I am not trying to cause her difficulty—I am sure that I could not even if I tried—but the proposal was turned down by the Labour Government.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): As I have said, today we are debating how to move forward. I am making my contribution to that debate and I believe that such matters are up for discussion again. The Labour party never thought, having had openness and transparency in our funding rules before 1997, that when we came into government and proposed legislation to make political funding more transparent, that would not calm or reassure people, but would lead to negative press comment so that everyone who gives money is scrutinised. That is not good for democracy.

The debate is open again and we should revisit areas against which political parties, including my own, may have set their face. I am referring to relatively small donations that people may want to make because they feel it is their civic duty; those people are interested in politics and want to be part of it.

Another area that is worth considering is the establishment of what I would call a democracy fund. By that, I mean that individual donors or companies that are interested in supporting politics or a political party could donate to a democracy fund, which could be administered by the Electoral Commission and would be like a blind trust. Donors would use the commission as a third party and could designate that they want the money to go to the Liberal Democrats, Labour or the

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Conservatives. That would then be sent via the Electoral Commission and, as far as possible, it would not be in the public domain.

Companies or individuals might wish to give money to support democracy or political parties in general, so a formula could be devised to decide how the commission should divide such money between the political parties. That could be based on the number of MPs or councillors, or on their share of the vote. That is one way in which the larger donations could be channelled to move us away from the present publicity, which does none of us any good.

Although I believe that we should do an audit of how the state supports democracy to help inform the debate, I am not sure if state funding could totally provide for political parties. I am also unsure about whether we could win the argument on what matters parties need to fund but that the public may not want to fund. There will need to be a mixture of state funding that should, if possible, be agreed across the party divide, as well as a framework in which people can support their party's activities.

We should support the people who, individually and in small ways, support their parties of choice through the tax system, and establishing a democracy fund that allows the Electoral Commission to act as a broker for large donations might be a way of overcoming the negative publicity that has been continually fed to us for what seems like a very long time.

11.31 am

Mr. Robert Syms (Poole): I also welcome the debate, which was intelligently introduced by the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Matthew Taylor). The subject needs a wide public debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) will be the Conservative's official spokesman, but I am vice-chairman of the party and will say something about our position.

We are opposed to the principle of state funding. Why should taxpayers who do not subscribe to the views and values of my party be forced to contribute towards it? Do we think that people's priorities—which may include the national health service, the police and schools—should be displaced by taking money from taxpayers, many of whom may not be particularly well off, and contributing it towards political parties? There may be less hostility towards giving to a mainstream party, but such a funding system always includes the possibility of extremists—whether they are the British National party or Sinn Fein—benefiting from state funding. When listening to the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell, I wondered whether the contribution to the parties would come out of the 1p rise in income tax advocated by the Liberal Democrats. I am not convinced by any of the arguments.

I fear that a major state contribution would dissuade many people from making smaller contributions in the constituencies; they would not want to contribute because the state was supporting the parties. There is that danger, although how the scheme is designed would be relevant. We have heard a great deal about how it would make politics rather more honest. People talk about purifying the system, but there is a danger that state funding could ossify the system. State funding would tend to go to political party headquarters, which would inevitably build up power at central office, the Labour office in Millbank and other major centres. That would not be good for a political party's diversity and grass roots.

Looking abroad, we can see that whether political systems are corrupt has much to do with the culture of the country. Germany has heavy state funding and yet, recently, Chancellor Kohl and many others within the German system have had problems because of illegal funding. Even today Kohl is in difficulty because he will not give up certain donors to the CDU because of the problems of funding in the past.

There have just been presidential and Assembly elections in France, and there has been some comment about the French President, some of the funding arrangements and the use of that money in France. The French system is funded fairly heavily by taxpayers. Indeed, one of the driving forces behind the centre-right coalition to support the President in the recent Assembly elections was that for every seat won, there would be a matching contribution from the state. Culture has a lot to do with it. Despite what one reads in the papers, I believe that the culture of British politics is honest. There is not a vast number of former colleagues or former party treasurers in jail at the moment. The reason is that although sometimes a party's activities do not smell as good as they could, no one has been convicted of any wrongdoing. By and large, we have pretty high standards in the United Kingdom.

As has been mentioned, we have Short money and Cranbourne money. The reason for that is simple. We have an over-mighty Government system, backed by the full power of intelligent civil servants. If one believes in a democracy of Government and robust Opposition, there should be some contribution towards the policy making of the parties that may form today's Opposition and tomorrow's Government. That has been our tradition of recent years and is not unreasonable. My party is also fairly relaxed about funding some degree of foreign travel for politicians so that they can look at the alternative systems abroad, moving forward the e-democracy agenda and modernising things.

There may be a logic, which the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell has mentioned, in training councillors. They fulfil important roles in a large corporate structure that delivers many important services. There is always a balance to be struck and it is a matter of where one draws the boundaries. I do not think that the case has yet been made for saying that money should be given to political parties for overtly campaigning purposes. I tend to take a different view about large donors. People have given to all political parties; even the Liberal Democrats have been the beneficiaries of large donors in the past. People give their hard-earned money to a cause in which they believe and are often vilified, possibly unjustly.

If one tells people who may well have deep pockets that they cannot contribute, one must also question whether trade unions should be able to contribute. If we put caps on individuals, what do we do about political action committees or pressure groups? A group that wished to ban hunting could easily raise a lot of money to give to a political party. There are many issues here and I do not see why wealthy individuals should be excluded from spending their money in the way that they want. Some people would want to buy villas; others will want to give to political parties. We have been pretty well governed over the last 50 to 100 years—one need only look at Argentina to see a state that is very badly governed—and we have a lot to be proud of within the UK.

I do not think that the case for state funding has been made, although there are different ways to deliver a particular outcome. The point my hon. Friend the Member for Stone made about the Neill committee's reference to tax advantages might be a means of putting money through to small individual contributors, rather than centrally through the parties. By and large my party does not think that the argument has been made. As the hon. Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) said, supporting political parties would not be popular. However, political movements should be sufficiently vibrant and successful to be able to raise the money needed to run political campaigns.

In any case, we all have a limited budget to spend on general elections. I know of no party that could not put up some 600 candidates at the general election. I do not know whether there have always been sufficient funds for an essential national campaign. However, all political parties have been able to fund at least their local campaigns by selling jam, cheese, wines and so on. In Poole, there are endless raffle tickets from my association. This is an interesting debate, but I do not think that the case has yet been made. We should be cautious before we go down this road, because the consequences may adversely affect the vibrant grassroots politics that we need.

11.40 am

Dr. Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test): I hope that my contribution will at least be interesting in terms of the sociology of Parliament. I replied as a Minister to an Adjournment debate on 22 May, which the hon. Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie) proposed. Hon. Members may be interested to hear what I have to say a month later as a non-Minister on what is, in essence, the same subject. As I said at the time, the hon. Gentleman's contribution to that debate was thoughtful and substantially right. If he contributes this morning, he may want to add to his comment that there is a crisis, with which I concur.

We must be clear that there is a crisis in the future funding of political parties. Funding for political parties, as established in recent years, will not dry up overnight. That crisis will not suddenly appear upon us tomorrow, but the rules on disclosure and all the paraphernalia that goes with them mean that eventually it will. Some parties may believe that they can buck the trend; the remarks made by the hon. Member for Poole (Mr. Syms) seem to suggest that that is in the mind of the Conservative party. However, a substantial donor to that party recently said that the Government had made it almost impossible for companies to give money without appearing corrupt and that they now had to justify it to their shareholders. However, with all the allegations about sleaze, they could not say that it helped to gain access to, or keep up their profile with, the Government. It was a bureaucratic nightmare, and not worth the hassle.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) that the arrangements that our party made before legislation was enacted in 1997 are a good thing, and shed much light on the question of donations. It is true that the public do not want companies or individuals buying their way to political influence. Nor do they believe that large donations are given just because the donor felt like it. We are in this conundrum for honourable reasons. Donations have largely been cleaned up and made more transparent, so the problems surrounding them will largely disappear. Does that matter? Yes, it does. In his previous contribution, the hon. Member for Chichester pointed out that politics in general is alive and well as a public activity, but that party politics is not. We should ask ourselves why politics in general is alive and well.

The hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Matthew Taylor) suggested that participation in communities has dropped off. That is true of communities of place, but all the evidence suggests that that is not true of the activities that relate to social capital more generally. People are engaging in different activities that are nevertheless substantial and vibrant. They are active in what one might call participative politics; making representations and petitions, and engaging in campaigns for organisations. The question that we must ask is to whom are those people making representations when they are acting in their role as participative politicians. The answer is political parties; local government, the Opposition in Parliament, the Government or whatever. In other words, they make representations to the agencies whereby the representative process is determined.

If we believe that this country can have a representative process without political parties, we are bucking the trend of every representative or democratic process throughout history. Even in the Athenian agora, two parties were represented to try to organise different ideas for representation in the democratic debating processes of the Athenian body politic.

The politics of a body that seeks representation must be different from the politics of a pressure group that participates in the democratic process, but it will incorporate many features of the politics of such a group. The hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell mentioned that one activity of a political party is campaigning. In many ways, that goes alongside the processes undertaken by participative political organisations, but it is only part of the process that culminates in the seeking of representation and political power nationally or locally.

A body that seeks representation must have an overall programme that mediates between the concerns of the various participative political groups. Communities and pressure groups cannot run towns and cities, or indeed national Governments. The process of deciding on the priorities of various participative groups must be undertaken through the representative process. However, there seems to be a crisis not only of funding, but in the imbalance between the participative and representative processes.

Mr. Cash: Is the hon. Gentleman perhaps falling into a slight trap in his argument, in that part of the problem is the overwhipping of decision making in the parliamentary system? A great deal of disillusionment is

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caused when the electorate know the reason why, for example, he is taking a slightly divergent view now from the position that he took in government; that is part and parcel of that problem. I am not criticising the hon. Gentleman. I am simply saying that the question of why there is low turnout and cynicism is somewhat deeper than that of where the money comes from.

Dr. Whitehead: The hon. Gentleman is certainly right to say that there is a deeper issue. We need to discuss a number of issues, but the position that I am taking this morning is not fundamentally different from what I was saying just a month ago. Perhaps I am expressing it in rather clearer terms. The hon. Gentleman talked about overwhipping, but he needs to relate that to the ideas that I have advanced.

The hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Dr. Taylor) achieved election as a result of a participative democratic campaign, but the idea of 600-odd people representing something similar in the Chamber and organising anything like the representative process is absurd. That would not happen. Instead, various people would coalesce to form parties to decide how a representative programme should be undertaken. We should not spend too much time considering the idea that loose whipping or, in some people's ideal world, the removal of political parties would somehow solve the crisis of representation, because that simply would not happen. It would not produce anything like a satisfactory representative process.

The result of the crisis is that most members of the public treat political parties as fixtures of the landscape, with mysterious people who are lobbied, pilloried or asked to do certain things, depending on how the public view their position at any particular time. Why they are there or how they have got there is not usually asked.

What can we do about the problem? How do we ensure that the process of representation is kept alive? Some hon. Members suggested a block grant, which I agree might well ossify political parties. A political party in Sweden receives block grant funding from the state but, because of the way in which the block grant system operates, it has not contested two general elections.

It is not a question of whether the state funds political parties, but of the circumstances under which it does. The hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell pointed out that, by accretion, we are funding—according to the hon. Member for Chichester—about 40 per cent. of the activities of political parties between elections and about 60 per cent. at elections. However, we are doing so under an unaccountable and ineffective block grant system, which replicates many of the problems in other countries that hon. Members criticised.

Clearly, the idea that participative democracy should be "of the people" and a representative democracy "of the state" is deemed inappropriate, yet surprisingly many voluntary organisations are effectively funded by the state—by the local authority, Home Office grants, project funding and so forth—without becoming clients of the state in the process.

The hon. Member for Chichester suggested matching funding on money raised through the activities of political parties, which is one way of looking at the problem. My hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien), now the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, has suggested a tick-box on tax returns, whereby people could tick a box that would give money either to a particular political party or to none. That strongly counters the hon. Member for Poole, who said that taxpayers would object to blocks of money being given to political parties with which they disagree. If taxpayers can play an active role in deciding whether their bit of tax should go to a particular party or to no party, it overcomes the objection. Furthermore, if political parties were incompetent in engaging the public in support for the political process, people would not tick any boxes and political parties generally would not secure large amounts of funding.

After this morning's debate, I am confident of drawing out two principles and one prediction. First, it is widely acknowledged that funding must relate to the effect of party activity; otherwise we will have a ghost system. Secondly, there must be a consensus; otherwise the temptations to free-ride on the initiative of a particular party while actually doing it down will be enormous. A unilateral decision by a party in government would be seen simply as a party in power voting money for itself. It is essential that the political community—inside and outside the House—debates the issues and that the debate ranges more widely than considerations of party advantage. Finally, my prediction is that it will happen, so we should take care to do it well.

11.53 am

Mr. Andrew Tyrie (Chichester): I have already participated in an Adjournment debate on this subject, so I shall not delay Westminster Hall for long today. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Dr. Whitehead) for his comments. I agree with virtually everything that he said.

I should like to make a few quick points. First, we cannot go on with the public perceiving political parties to be inherently corrupt. It is not just the short-term issue of Mittal, Ecclestone, Hinduja, Enron or PowderJect: it goes much deeper and is infecting respect for our entire polity. Whatever the reality, the perception is corroding trust in politicians generally. In any case, the public is partly right. Does anyone seriously believe that these donors never bend an ear and never have any influence? Of course not. One way or another, they manage to get privileged access to those with power and influence.

Secondly, everybody knows that honours are trafficked. Peerages can be bought and parties fund themselves partly from those donations. That is wholly unacceptable. Mass parties are dying—they are 10 per cent. of the size that they were 50 years ago—so the parties alone cannot finance themselves. It is not possible to fund political parties through individual subscriptions and no major democracy tries to do so any longer.

Thirdly, recent attempts to clean up politics where party donations are concerned have failed; with the best of intentions, they have made the situation worse. As the hon. Member for Southampton, Test said, the shareholder declaration rules have destroyed the broad base of small donations from companies. While there is a broad base, people do not believe that parties are dependent on each individual firm. Once that has gone, they do believe that the small number of large donations confers influence. The individual declaration rule's £5,000 threshold has swept away a range of people who would be prepared to donate money but are not willing to take the public flak for having done so. As a result, all parties have been thrown into the hands of a small number of large donors and the public perception of corruption has worsened. I am in favour of the transparency rules, but we should be under no illusion about the crisis that they have generated.

Point four is that the unacceptable practices that take place in order to fund political parties infect public perception of other issues—the standing of politicians and the credibility of the Government—and respect for all those in public life. We cannot carry on in that way.

What can be done? First, we must acknowledge the scale of the problem. That is what we are all trying to do today. Secondly, we must discard the myth that we would be crossing a Rubicon if we introduced state funding. I tried to show in an article in *The Times*, and I have shown elsewhere, that 40 per cent. of funding of political parties between elections and 60 per cent. of the campaigning costs of parties already comes in cash or kind from state sources.

Thirdly, we must work towards a system that encourages the recruitment of grassroots members; we must try to stabilise our party structure at that level in the course of introducing a state funding system. That is why I am in favour of match funding and I was delighted to hear that the Liberal Democrat party is too. Our view is shared by many in my party and, I suspect, by a large number in the Labour party. There is scope for agreement.

Fourthly, whatever we end up having to introduce, we must do it on the basis of firm caps on overall spending. We must not allow the perception to get about that very rich people can buy political parties. That will happen if there are no such caps.

The hon. Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) referred to what we can learn from the experience of the United States. She might like to read an interesting passage in the Neill committee report. The US has very firm caps on funding of political parties and political activity. However, those are circumvented under the first amendment, which has led to the proliferation of political action committees. I am deeply concerned about that matter; the Neill committee, although it addressed it, did not analyse it correctly. In addition, the introduction of the Human Rights Act into our law has worrying implications. In the 1998 Bowman case, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that in certain circumstances the UK's existing caps are illegal. That may set a precedent for erosion of the existing caps.

In the Bowman case, the defence of margin of appreciation was used. I shall not go into that, but we could not go much further if all our caps were illegal. I merely make the point that there is a danger in applying the Human Rights Act. Similarly, American attempts to place caps on spending have been destroyed or circumvented by reference to the first amendment in the Supreme Court.

Mr. Cash: Perhaps I could help my hon. Friend with respect to the Human Rights Act. Lord Hoffmann made it clear in an important case—Secretary of State for the Home Department ex parte Simms and O'Brien—that the British Parliament is still able to amend that Act, provided that any amendment is clear and unambiguous. My hon. Friend said that we would have to accept the political cost, although I do not necessarily think that that applies, but we could ensure that we would not be trapped, were we subsequently to table amendments to remove the difficulties that he described.

Mr. Tyrie: I thought that something of a legal nature might draw my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) to his feet. I urge him to read the exchanges that took place on the matter in the Neill committee, which are extremely detailed and deal with the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Poole (Mr. Syms). The extent to which the Human Rights Act may impinge on our ability to impose caps is a matter of considerable controversy among experts, and many leading political scientists and lawyers think that there is cause for concern; I put it no higher than that at the moment, because it is not yet a cause for alarm.

I shall just make one or two more points, because I have already had a good innings on this subject on other occasions. I strongly agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Poole that state funding is no elixir for curing the sickness of political corruption in any political system. He is right to say that there is corruption in many countries that already have state funding. He is right that the origins of corruption are much deeper than a country's structure and lie in its culture. There is no doubt, however, that the perception of corruption is deepening in this country. Action might assuage it, and we should act urgently. We cannot allow the impression to deepen that influence is for sale, and that political parties can be bought.

The Government already know that, and it is interesting that the hon. Member for Southampton, Test came to the Chamber to make another speech today. Why are they not acting? I suspect that it is because they do not want to take the political flak for introducing state funding. They want a coalition, so that they can share the political flak. I see that Labour Members are nodding; in agreement, I think. Of course, the public do not like politicians voting themselves money in any shape or form. Whoever takes the lead in introducing state funding will take the flak. Governments have to give a lead on such issues. There is no avoiding the flak; the governing party must take it on the nose. Whenever there is a row, for example about sleaze in the House, the governing party always ends up being hit harder than anyone else. The governing party must govern.

Martin Linton (Battersea): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Tyrie: I will not, because I am about to conclude.

If the Government propose a fair system, such as a system of match funding—I think the Liberal Democrats would agree with that, and many Conservative Members would go along with it—they will find that they have a huge amount of support and win the argument. Already, the pass has been sold on

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that by the increasing acceptance of the need for some tax relief on donations to political parties. If a fair hearing is given to the argument, I am confident that we can win it. If we win it, we will make the British political system less corrupt and better respected.

Mr. John Cummings (in the Chair): In calling the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann), I remind hon. Members that we are moving towards the closing speeches.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): On a point of order, Mr. Cummings. Is it not the custom that the last half-hour is allocated to the three Front Benchers? It is already four minutes past 12. Would not the Liberal Democrat spokesman normally be called by noon at the latest?

Mr. John Cummings (in the Chair): I am mindful of the fact that hon. Members have been waiting a considerable time to make contributions. If they adhere to my request, I am sure that everyone will be allocated time.

12.5 pm

John Mann (Bassetlaw): I will be extremely brief, even though people in the villages of Bassetlaw speak of nothing but the state funding of political parties.

Let me demonstrate my point by proposing that representatives of the three parties stick their election leaflets through people's letterboxes in the villages of Bassetlaw, and then ask voters, "Would you care to pay for the leaflet that we have chosen to give you? That will be your contribution to removing sleaze from British political life." I suspect that even I would have problems persuading the good people of Bassetlaw to pay, and I certainly would not envy Conservative colleagues who attempted to persuade them. That highlights the fundamental difference between electioneering and other forms of political activity. Any suggestion that the state should fund electioneering and political campaigning is fundamentally wrong and has no popular support.

There is a certain irony in hon. Members talking about the low standing of politicians, when those same hon. Members are the most enthusiastic about increasing the number of politicians by means of elected regional assemblies, elected mayors and an elected House of Lords. That irony will hit home, because the general public are somewhat cynical about the numbers of politicians and about attempts to increase them.

The examples of France and Germany have been well illustrated and demonstrate that state funding does not remove sleaze. However, the United States example is even more powerful. Changes were made before the 1996 presidential elections; I visited the country at the time to study state funding. The result of those changes was that the different political parties and politicians found different ways to get additional money. The new, tighter rules came in, but the amount of money doubled. Whatever rules are introduced on state funding, people will find other ways to give money, such as by using outside bodies.

It has been said that the size of political parties is declining, but that is wrong; there is a short-term problem. The Labour party did not contest the majority of seats in the country until 1935, and the Liberal Democrat party did not contest all national seats until 1970. My family has been active in the Labour party since 1901, so I know that the "halcyon days of large party membership" is a myth. There have been periods of large membership and periods of small membership. In the 1950s, when all sides fiddled the figures, levels of active membership were extremely low. Hon. Members who look at the records at Warwick university and elsewhere, and at the membership books of constituency and branch Labour parties, will see how low the levels of active membership have sometimes been.

There is an alternative, which has been tried and tested for 100 years. There is a cap of about £10,000 on what we can spend in elections at constituency level, and that system works well. If we increased the amount to £30,000 or £40,000, people would start to spend that much. Setting the level at £10,000 creates fairness at the local level, but we have failed to impose a sufficiently low cap at the national level.

I would like party political broadcasts and billboards to be banned, and I have tabled an early-day motion on billboards, which has been signed by more than 30 hon. Members. I would also like paid advertising in newspapers to be banned. The most effective way to do that would be significantly to lower the national expenditure limit at elections. The present level of fundraising would then not be required, and politics would be much healthier.

12.8 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Truro and St. Austell (Matthew Taylor) for introducing a thoughtful and interesting debate, which is one of several that we have had on the subject. It should be encouraging that a remarkable degree of consensus is developing.

The hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) is probably the only person in the country who personally delivers his election address with his colleagues in his constituency. There is a huge amount of state funding, both in kind and in cash, and we deny that at our peril, because, as my hon. Friend said, we are conning the electorate.

The hon. Member for Poole (Mr. Syms) struck a rather discordant note when he suggested that the Conservative party is "opposed to the principle of state funding". Let me remind him that Short money in the current year to the Conservative party was £3,459,536. Cranborne money in the House of Lords came to £230,556. The Leader of the Opposition's office and all the other bits and pieces around it cost £765,394. The policy development fund is a new fund of £438,890. If the electorate knew that the so-called official Opposition was taking some £5 million, not counting the amount in kind, they might very well react in the way that the hon. Member for Bassetlaw suggests.

It is an absolute hypocritical illusion to pretend that we do not already have state funding. What my hon. Friend the Member for Truro and St. Austell said is absolutely true; people do not know it. That is what I think is so critical. I shall not quote the hon. Member for

Chichester at length; he has already taken up so much of my time that it would be unfair. On several occasions he has pointed out, very fairly and accurately, that there is a real concept of a sleaze operation in this place, and that is not fair. We are bringing upon ourselves the opprobrium of the electorate for totally absurd reasons. However, we are doing so because people think that there must be some good reason for people donating to political parties.

I have several quotes from people of all parties on this issue, who feel that the time has come to bring out into the open some effective linkage between state funding and the actual membership of the political parties, as my hon. Friend said. Let me quote two who think that the present system does not work. On the occasion of the award of a peerage to Michael Ashcroft, a major donor to the Conservative party, Lord Cranborne, former leader of the Conservatives in the Lords, said it was

> "an affront to the dignity and the standing of the party".

Sir Edward Heath, in robust form, went even further:

> "It has lowered the whole standing of our political institutions throughout the world".

He pointed out that clearly the £3 million donation to the Conservative party must have been for some purpose, and he said:

> "and now we see what the purpose was."

I am not going to quote the chairman of the Labour party, but I am going to quote the Leader of the House of Commons, who said a fortnight ago:

> "It is my personal view—I do not claim to speak for the Government collectively—that the credibility of Parliament is being undermined by the current argument over the funding of political parties. We cannot have parliamentary democracy without political parties, and we cannot have political parties unless they are funded."—[*Official Report*, 13 June 2002; Vol. 386, c. 1005.]

From all sides—a former Minister, a very distinguished member of the Conservative party who has done a great deal of work on the subject, the hon. Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) and my hon. Friend the Member for Truro and St. Austell—there is a great gathering consensus.

In the past the Government have taken the view that unless there is a centre of gravity—a view that all parties can subscribe to—they cannot move. I endorse precisely what the hon. Member for Chichester said. It is up to the Government to lead on this—not just in the interests of the present Parliament or in order to deal with the problems of Enron and Andersen and all the other controversies that have been taking place—but for the health of our democracy. We have to re-engage the actual commitment to the political process with the way in which the political process is funded. That is why I think that the suggestion that my hon. Friend the Member for Truro and St. Austell has made that funding has to be related to the membership of the party, and what it gives to that party, is critical.

If I may say so, the tax issue—the use of some tax credit arrangement—is a bit of a red herring because a large number of people do not fill in tax returns. Many people do not pay tax. To exclude them from the ability and the opportunity to contribute to the political process would be utterly wrong. The way to proceed is precisely the way in which my hon. Friend has suggested.

Mr. Cummings, I want to give maximum time for the Minister to respond because I look forward with great interest to see the extent to which her text, from the new Department responsible, differs from the previous text of the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Dr. Whitehead).

As a final comment, I would say that I cannot go back as far as the Athenians, but I know that every single party during the time of parliamentary democracy in this country has suffered from this problem. My party, in its previous incarnation as the Liberal party, suffered from it. As we all know, Lloyd George abused the system disastrously and did great harm to the political process and Parliament, but why did he do it? He did it because he became detached from the political party that he had previously led. He was no longer the leader of the Liberal party when he became Prime Minister. So, the political process was detached from the real people who mattered; the electorate. We have got to reattach it.

We must make sure that there is a consensus on the way in which the funding of political parties takes place, whether or not that is direct funding. I have already quoted examples of the way in which the Conservative party is funded, and the Government are also very substantially funded to undertake their political duties. We need a consensus on being open and honest about funding, but we should also recognise that that is simply not enough. We must find ways of ensuring that party members' commitment to political parties is translated into cash support for the democratic system.

12.16 pm

Mr. William Cash (Stone): I have found the debate interesting. It is an important debate, and I am grateful to the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Matthew Taylor) for having introduced it. It is an ongoing debate, as my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie) has made clear. The hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Dr. Whitehead) has also participated in the debate, and I have no doubt that we shall go on discussing the matter for some time.

At this juncture, I do not need to add more than was said by my hon. Friend the Member for Poole (Mr. Syms). The view that he has expressed on the subject is his, mine and that of the Conservative party. In the limited time left, it would be unnecessary for me to repeat word for word what he said. That is the line that our party takes. However, I have some observations to make on the reasons why we are engaging in this debate at the present time. I have already said that I do not believe that low turnout and some of the problems attributed to such things as sleaze are going to be solved by the state funding solution proposed.

I agree entirely that an element of state funding is already available through the Short money and the Cranbourne money. That is clear. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Poole said, that is really for technical objectives rather than for broader democratic aims. If we look at what is going on in Germany, we can see that in 1998, £180 million was made available for the party-political system, the biggest state funding of which I am aware in Europe. However, no one could say that the German system is free of corruption and sleaze. The perceptions of politics in Germany, and the criticisms heaped on politicians at the top, in a country

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that receives such vast sums of state funding, in my view contradict the whole basis of the argument for state funding. We in the Conservative party believe, as my hon. Friend the Member for Poole suggested, that it would be better for the money to go on other priorities such as schools, transport and health. We are opposed to the taxpayer funding political parties and do not think that the case has been made for state funding.

I have touched on the question of over-whipping. There is some cynicism. Before I was appointed to my present position, I spoke from the Back Benches in the debate on the strengthening of Parliament on what I believe are the real reasons why there is so much cynicism in the electorate today and why low turnouts are so prevalent. The real answer is that the fault lies, as I said in a Committee yesterday, in the increase of money, from £1.5 million to £7.5 million, being made available to the Electoral Commission for so-called public awareness on democracy and the electoral systems. Such things are seeping into the system. People think that the problems of cynicism and low turnout can be solved by throwing money at them. That is just not true. The whole question of spin and lack of trust, about which we have heard much in the past few days—broken promises and so on—has much more to do with the problem.

I shall be interested to hear what the Minister has to say. Therefore, I do not intend to go on much longer, as she will not have a chance to say anything. However, the then Home Secretary—now the Foreign Secretary—the right hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), summed up the matter well in the debate on the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 when he said that

> "rather than underpinning representative democracy, over-reliance on state funding could in the end undermine it.
>
> Political parties should be the champions of the people, ensuring that the state is their servant and not their master. An over-reliance on state funding could absorb parties into the fabric of the state, thereby putting their own institutional needs and those of the state above the needs of those whom they are elected to represent. The health of our democracy is far better served if parties are principally reliant on their own efforts to secure adequate funding. Such an approach compels parties to engage with their members and supporters."—[*Official Report*, 10 January 2000; Vol. 342, c. 34.]

The Prime Minister himself stated two years ago that he was unequivocally against state aid.

The words of the then Home Secretary are eloquent. I happen to agree with him and think that he addressed the real problem. Powerful arguments against state funding were also put forward in the Neill committee report, and I would have liked an opportunity to go through them. However, as they are on the record, it is as well that I simply refer to them.

The question of compulsion to contribute to the support of political parties even if people strongly disagree with one or other of the parties is extremely important. The Neill committee report stated:

> "The strength of this argument of principle would be all the greater if, for example, racist or explicitly anti-democratic parties became eligible for state funding."

We had a vigorous Communist party in this country that, some would say, was essentially undemocratic. Other parties could appear. Serious questions arise, irrespective of how repugnant the policies of such parties may be, if, through a system of state funding, we were to impose censorship.

12.22 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Ms Rosie Winterton): First, I congratulate the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Matthew Taylor) on securing a debate on what is clearly a topical issue. Judging from the contributions that have been made today, it is of great interest to the House. I know that this debate is one of a series that have taken place. I thought that the response of my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Dr. Whitehead) was extremely clear, and I reassure the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) that my text may be slightly different; he will not be able to draw the comparison that he wants to draw.

We have heard much today about consensus. The consensus that came through in the debate was that we all agree that political parties are at the root of our democracy and provide an opportunity for grassroots involvement, a forum for debate and a means of engaging with the electorate. More than a million people in Britain are members of political parties, and we would all wish to pay tribute to them, as my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) did so eloquently. Such people in our constituencies spend their lives encouraging others to use their right to vote, helping on polling day, delivering leaflets and canvassing. Obviously, the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell has some difficulties in motivating his party members, but I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley would be happy to give him some tips on how she does it so successfully in Doncaster.

However, party political activities cannot just be supported by voluntary labour. They need funding, and that is what we are discussing today. There is nothing inherently wrong with parties seeking donations and funding from supporters. Many hon. Members made the point that it is a right of individuals to support a political party as they choose. Members of Parliament should not be embarrassed about that, and we should make the point more often.The hon. Member for Poole (Mr. Syms) made an interesting contribution on that matter. We must safeguard that right against possible abuse by parties or donors.

The hon. Member for North Cornwall touched on the fact that perception of abuse is important and the hon. Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie) said last month:

> "During my five years as an MP, I have come to the conclusion that, contrary to public perception, it would be difficult to find a group of 659 people more dedicated and less corrupt than my fellow MPs."—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 22 May 2002; Vol. 386, c. 115WH.]

We should make that point more often.

There is a desire that we take steps to provide a framework in which we ensure openness and transparency in political fund raising. The Labour Government implemented the recommendations of the Neill committee. I intended to go through some of those recommendations, but that is not possible in the time available.

I turn to the work that is being done by the Electoral Commission because I know that hon. Members are interested in hearing more about that. The commission has begun a review of the issues concerning state funding. Many hon. Members referred to international comparisons, and the commission's preliminary work is to make a comparison of international systems. It will also examine the main methods of supporting political parties by making an assessment of their benefits and disbenefits. My hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley asked whether it would look at the audit of existing support. That is obviously something that the commission will need to do.

The commission's preparatory work will be used to test public opinion with a series of public hearings to take evidence. The scope of the study will include, among other things, the link between state funding and donations, and the relationship between parties and their supporters. It will also examine the case for change. From its findings will emerge recommendations to the Government.

The review is intended to be comprehensive and wide-ranging, and I shall outline the timetable. The initial research should be ready by the end of the year and submissions will be invited during the first quarter of 2003 with an options paper being ready for the summer. We can expect to see a final report early in 2004. Many contributions have been made today and I hope that hon. Members will use the opportunity of the commission's work to make their views known to it.

On the point made by the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell about support being available at the moment to political parties, he suggested that that was in some way secret. Such matters are discussed in Parliament, so his sense of creeping state funding by the back door or as an excuse should be challenged. Parliament has an input into that debate and the whole issue of Short money. It is important to examine closely all the issues that have been raised today. As we have heard, there are many differences of opinion among Members of Parliament, but I am sure that today's debate will make an important contribution to those ongoing discussions, and that hon. Members have benefited from the contributions that have been made.

East Coast Main Line

12.30 pm

Mr. Iain Luke (Dundee, East): I am glad to have the chance to raise the issue of the electrification of the east coast main line rail link north of Edinburgh. As a member of the all-party rail group, I am aware that electrification is an investment priority across the United Kingdom rail network. I hope to show why the north-east of Scotland north of Edinburgh should be given serious consideration for the earliest possible upgrading.

One of the most liberating features of the modern world is the opportunity to travel—to transport oneself, either for business or leisure purposes, from the ordinary, humdrum realities of domestic existence to fantastic and mind-expanding distant destinations. As someone from a far distant part of the UK—Dundee—I know that it is good to travel and see the world.

The key that opened the lock of limitation on movement was the expansion of the railways in the 19th century, an era often referred to as the age of steam. The building of the famous Tay rail bridge crossing the silvery Tay caught the nation's attention, following the initial botched efforts and the rail disaster of 1879. The construction of that bridge, which spans the two-mile breadth of Scotland's longest river, was part of a dynamic process—the revolutionary industrial communications and transport transformation that changed the world.

The building of that immense structure, which predated the Forth rail bridge, was specifically promoted by Dundee's city fathers and business men, who wanted to reduce rail travel times from Dundee to the south and link Dundee and its hinterland to the rest of Britain. The bridge also excited the passions and poetry of a famous Dundonian, William McGonagall, the 100th anniversary of whose death we are currently commemorating. A poem will be placed by the Tay rail bridge addressed to the

"Beautiful railway bridge of the silvery Tay!
With your numerous arches and pillars in so grand array".

That is clear testimony to the excitement of rail travel in McGonagall's day.

The epoch of steam was encroached upon first by the motor car and then by the aeroplane, but rail still has great relevance today, with the railways continuing to provide an important and popular mode of travel in the 21st century. Railways give direct, frequent and usually trouble-free access to major centres of population, business and leisure destinations across the UK and—with the advent of the channel tunnel, in which I have had the pleasure of travelling several times—to destinations further afield in continental Europe.

The competitiveness of the railways, despite pressure from 20th-century transportation innovations, is a lasting tribute to the appeal of rail travel and the benefits it offers. The relative comfort, safety and cheapness of rail compared to the aeroplane, and the extent of the network—despite the cuts of the 1960s—have ensured the railways a niche in the travel market that allowed the network to carry 958,000 million passenger journeys in the UK last year. My colleagues from Scotland and I travel by plane weekly, and our journeys to the House

[Mr. Iain Luke]

from other Scottish airports cannot be completed without catching a train, whether it be the Paddington or Gatwick express or, in my case, the Jubilee tube line.

I cannot fail to acknowledge the troubles that rail travel has experienced lately. The spate of tragic derailments, signal failures and collisions has contributed to general public concern about the safety of that mode of transport. That concern has only partly been assuaged by the plans of the Government and the Strategic Rail Authority to make long-term improvements to the track, which will improve safety aspects and, hopefully, enable the railway system to regain its standing as a viable and reliable transport network.

Whatever the proposals, we have a long way to go before we fulfil the famous slogan "Let the train take the strain", which was coined in a marketing effort to encourage motorists to abandon their cars and switch to rail in the 1980s. A side effect of disenchantment with rail travel has been to force more people on to the roads, which has created a chaotic and frustrating situation on Britain's motorway system, further impeding the ability of road users safely and freely to reach their destinations. I shall return to that point in connection with the north-east of Scotland.

I welcome the Government's 10-year transport plan and the SRA's proposal for improvements to the rail network. They will create a balance in the travel options open to us and reduce the problems currently being encountered by users of the road and rail network. The plans, along with the Government's White Paper on aviation and regional airports that is to be issued later in the year, will go a long way to set the context in which the needs of travel in the United Kingdom will be met for the next 50 years. My fervent hope as an MP for a distant constituency is that all the Government's policies will be given a priority that puts investment and accessibility at the heart of the solutions that are needed to satisfy the transport needs of all Britain's regions and communities in the years ahead.

I am grateful to have the opportunity to focus on the electrification of the east coast main line. I want to bring to the Government's attention issues of investment in the railway infrastructure that need to be addressed. The goal of electrification has been shared by all communities north of Edinburgh for some time. It is a goal that has transcended the political divide and brought the often diverse and sometimes conflicting urban and rural communities that make up the north-east of Scotland together in a joint campaign. I am happy to acknowledge the work done by Create, the promoter of the campaign. I have been a long-standing member of the organisation since being involved in local government in the area. I hope that the campaign will be successful and that the benefits that flow from electrification of the rail line south of Edinburgh will be extended north from Edinburgh up the east coast main line.

Mr. Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith): Does my hon. Friend agree that if electrification of the east coast main line north of Edinburgh and any improvements to the route north of Edinburgh are to be utilised to the full, it will be necessary to clear some of the bottlenecks on the network? I am thinking particularly of the need to transfer freight to the Alloa and Stirling line to take passenger services off the Forth rail bridge and to improve the tunnel capacity east of Edinburgh. Does he agree that such matters need to be part of the package of electrification or any other improvement, and that it would be helpful if the Minister looked into such matters?

Mr. Luke: I bow to my hon. Friend's detailed knowledge of the railway system in Scotland and his constant advocacy of improvements to that system. He is right. The SRA's current policy is, as a first step, to smooth out bottlenecks and tackle problems on the line. He is right about that first step, but to achieve the end result and ensure faster journey times involves electrification.

The part of Scotland to which my hon. Friend refers—the central belt into Fife and the north-east—has long suffered from its peripheral position and relatively low population density compared with other centres of population in Scotland and the UK. Many who, like me, hail from that area, whether they are involved in politics or business or must travel frequently for other reasons, feel that they have been at a transport disadvantage for some time. That is what we want tackled.

Although the recently published SRA rail investment strategy will tackle that to some extent, it falls short of satisfying what, in terms of railway development, is the ideal solution. It does not go far enough in the medium and long terms to create parity of opportunity in relation to rail haulage and rail travel accessibility. The proposals to improve and straighten the line where possible will make rail travel marginally quicker and improve travel times in the long term, but such improvements should be only the first step towards allowing electrification to proceed eventually. It is therefore essential that we elected Members of Parliament, the Government and consumers are not fobbed off by the halfway house proffered by the SRA's investment plan.

The proposed improvements are short-term solutions. However acceptable they are as a means of improving travel times, they do not secure the improvement in travel time required to ensure the heightening of business competitiveness that is necessary to counter cut-throat competition in producing goods and promoting sales in far-off markets; nor will the proposals achieve the travel times required to encourage business travellers and other commuters who are unable to meet the higher cost of air fares to abandon the roads and take to a more environmentally friendly form of travel.

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): Does the hon. Gentleman agree with the chair of the UK passenger transport forum that the SRA's plan is a plan for London and the south-east of England? Does he agree with the growing consensus in Scotland that the best solution for the investment required in Scotland would probably be the full devolution of railway powers to the Scottish Parliament?

Mr. Luke: I am aware of comments made and a recent debate in the Scottish Parliament sponsored by the

Scottish National party. The national rail network is a national issue, and I think that, given its connections to the UK, its integrity should remain the responsibility of the UK Parliament, especially as I am keen to ensure that Dundee, Scotland and the UK remain closely linked to Europe. Issues raised in that debate deserve attention. They include possible new branch lines and the lines north of Aberdeen to Fraserburgh and Peterhead. We Members of Parliament need to continue to put the case. I hope that we shall have time at the end of the debate to make the case for what to do next.

The SRA's improvement plans for north-east Scotland are based on the presumption that diesel-powered engines will remain the main form of traction, debarring that part of Scotland from the benefits that will accrue to Edinburgh and its passengers going south. By any comparison, electric trains would provide improved passenger environments and more pleasant journeys, and they are less polluting, cheaper to run and faster. Electrification is the only option that deserves to be considered.

I am reading Lord Jenkins' recently published and excellent biography of Sir Winston Churchill, who was for 14 years a Member of Parliament for Dundee. In that account I was interested to read that, after Churchill's electoral success as a Liberal candidate in 1908, he settled down for the 10-and-a-half-hour journey between London and Dundee to take up his seat in Parliament. One hundred years later, the journey time for the 460 miles between Dundee and London has been cut to about six hours; however, it takes an hour and a half to get from Dundee to Edinburgh—a quarter of the time that it takes to get from Dundee to London even though the distance is much less than a quarter of the distance between Dundee and London. One of the major bottlenecks on the line is between the Forth and Tay rail bridges. The severity of the delay is amplified if one travels south from Aberdeen.

We need only look at the French network to see the real improvements that could be achieved. For example, a train left the Gare du Lyon at 12 o'clock today. It will cover the 228 miles between Paris and Lyon in a staggering 1 hour 55 minutes. If we had the same system in Scotland and the United Kingdom as a whole, we could hope for a travel time between Dundee and London of far less than four hours. That would be a difference that we could really applaud.

Let us take a further step north on the east coast main line. Any improvements that we could make would be of great significance to many rail stops north of Aberdeen that often recede into the very real mists of rail improvement policy. Such rail stops are Inverurie, Huntly, Keith and Elgin. They have rail links to Aberdeen, but no direct link to London. They need speedier access to Aberdeen as a staging post to the south and south-east of the UK. Electrifying the line all the way to Inverness would be of immense benefit to us all, and especially to those rail stops.

It is sad that some people in the north-east of Scotland have no rail link at all. Towns such as Peterhead and Fraserburgh suffer a double dose of distancing, from vital access to rail services, and consequently from vital access to markets and visitor destinations. Those places might not be familiar to the Minister. On a map they might look fairly accessible to the nodal point of the east coast main line in Aberdeen, but in reality, the distances are great. I have travelled occasionally by car up there and I know that many of the roads are of a secondary nature.

The reinstatement of a rail service to these areas, which were deprived of access to the east coast main line due to the infamous Beeching cuts of the 1960s, is the responsibility of the Scottish Executive under the devolved powers of the Scotland Act 1998. However, I believe that the UK Government have reserved powers and the requirement and duty to ensure that the Strategic Rail Authority does all it can to improve that major trans-Britain railway line. That is doubly true given the very difficult journey that one can have when travelling by road for either business or for the pleasure of gaining access to the delights of our capital city.

On two occasions since my election last year, I have had the dubious pleasure of making a 12-hour car journey from Dundee to London. That is a course of action that I would not recommend to my worst enemy. The journey can be embarked upon with minimum disruption, but travel times can be considerably lengthened if one encounters the worst of the hold-ups—luckily, I avoided them—that can be experienced on what is without doubt the worst stretch of road in the UK: the M6 around Birmingham. That major west coast highway is the most heavily used motorway in the country, due to lack of investment in the A1/M1 corridor, which would be the shorter east coast trip.

I believe that if a quicker east coast rail alternative were available, many people who currently use the road might reassess their travel arrangements and switch to rail. Better still—given improvements south of Edinburgh and electrification north of Edinburgh—would be the reintroduction of the train services on which one can put one's car, as can be done in Europe. The journey to London and abroad could then be made causing less pollution.

I know that electrification is expensive, but I firmly believe that we must pursue it strongly. I am conscious that Members of Parliament use Adjournment debates to ask for attention to be given to problems that affect their constituencies, but this topic extends wider than the boundaries of Dundee, East. I am sorry that no Conservative or Liberal Democrat Member is present to take note of my concerns, although I note the presence of the hon. Member for North Tayside (Pete Wishart), a constituency neighbour of mine.

The east coast main line impacts on a wide geographical area that is home to urban and rural communities. As I said, the north-east of Scotland is at a disadvantage in relation to transport because of its peripheral location in the UK and the wider European Union. I was once the chair of economic development on Dundee city council, and I know how much a company's decision to locate to a particular area can be affected by transport costs and the accessibility of towns such as Dundee to major markets and financial decision-making centres of the UK.

Recently discussions have taken place between the Scotland Office and the SRA on the proposals for improvements in the north-east of Scotland, and I wrote to the new Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Mrs. McGuire), asking her to let me know what progress was made. On behalf of all MPs for the area, I am also writing to

[Mr. Luke]

Richard Bowker, chairman of the SRA, to ask for an early meeting to discuss the current proposals for the north-east of Scotland, and to seek to review with him and his officials the details of those improvements and the priority that the SRA is giving to electrification.

As an MP, I am committed to continuing to campaign for Dundee, East and the north-east of Scotland, and I work with the support of my fellow MPs for that area, whatever their political persuasion. With the assistance of the Minister and his colleagues at the Scotland Office, we will succeed in our worthwhile endeavour to ensure that electrification stretches northward from Edinburgh as far as Inverness, or at least to Aberdeen as our first option.

12.51 pm

The Minister for Transport (Mr. John Spellar): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East (Mr. Luke) on securing the debate and providing an opportunity for the House to discuss the possible electrification of the east coast main line north of Edinburgh. He rightly raised related issues that are of importance to his constituency and to Scotland as a whole, and asked whether some of the names of the stations to which he drew attention were familiar to me. As I recall, many of those stations had branches of the old EETPU—the Electrical, Electronic, Telecommunications and Plumbing Union—with which I used to deal.

I was interested to hear about my hon. Friend's road journey to London. He will welcome my announcement yesterday of £263 million that will provide motorway-standard roads through Yorkshire and improve links between the south and the midlands to Scotland. That is of interest to Scotland, especially to the north-east.

As my hon. Friend said, the east coast main line is the high-speed link carrying Britain's fastest train service between London, Yorkshire, the north-east and Edinburgh. It also links into Scotland's prime routes to Glasgow, Aberdeen and Inverness. It handles cross-country, commuter and local passenger services and carries considerable freight and mail traffic. The route is primarily a two-track railway, with four tracks in certain sections, mainly at the southern end of the route. Line speeds on part of the route between Newcastle and Edinburgh range between 80 mph and 125 mph, and between Edinburgh and Aberdeen speeds are about 90 mph. On an average day, 1,900 passenger trains carry 200,000 passengers and there are 250 freight services with a loading of approximately 200,000 tonnes.

By any measure, the route is vital to the economic health of many regions of Great Britain. All parties have long accepted that upgrading the east coast main line is a priority. It would provide additional capacity for both passenger and freight demand, and improve the network to enable train operators to deliver significant improvements in the quality and reliability of their services that customers rightly expect. A substantial Railtrack design team has worked on the scheme for nearly three years to enable the route to carry more passenger trains, faster trains and more freight services. A fundamental part of the scheme is the use of parallel routes to provide extra capacity and, in effect, a four-track railway from London to Newcastle.

Railtrack informed the SRA of an increase in its cost estimates for the upgrade, and the SRA recently examined the details of the cost increases with Railtrack. As a result, a two-year extension was agreed with GNER to secure some early benefits for passengers. The extension will give the SRA more time to formulate the requirements for this important section of the railway before going out to tender for a long-term replacement franchise.

That gives the general picture on the line, so let me deal with the case for electrification. Our concern is much more with outputs than with inputs. We intend to ensure that passengers get an appropriate level of service, but we are less concerned about how train operators achieve that. In the 1970s, electrification brought undoubted and numerous advantages, such as reduced fuel and maintenance costs, rail vehicles with better acceleration, higher top speeds and quieter operation, but in the current climate that is no longer true. Diesel fuel is now much cheaper, so the fuel cost differences have been largely eliminated. The performance characteristics of modern diesel trains have improved considerably and they are now at least as good as equivalent electric units. Although the maintenance costs of electric trains are slightly less than those of diesel trains, when the cost of maintaining overhead line equipment is included, the balance shifts in favour of diesel.

The so-called "sparks effect" was well known in the 70s. It was the name given to the tendency of electrification to increase patronage on train routes compared with when they were operated by other forms of motive power. The effect is less prevalent now—indeed, recent studies detect a "nose cone effect", whereby if trains have an aerodynamic front and appearance, there seems to be an increase in the number of passengers. Interestingly enough, a similar phenomenon is found in connection with light rail and buses.

Mr. Luke: Does my right hon. Friend accept that for those trains that stop more frequently, electric-powered engines have a quicker start-up time and gain swifter speeds earlier?

Mr. Spellar: I am happy to write to my hon. Friend about that. There has been a considerable closing of the performance gap between modern diesel trains and electric trains.

The Edinburgh to Aberdeen line is in need of some improvement. We are anxious to secure greater capacity, better signalling and increased line speeds, but electrification is not required to provide that. It is extremely expensive and would not eliminate the problems caused by lack of track capacity, the winding nature of the line as it hugs the shoreline and various other factors associated with the physical shape of various sections of the line, together with the single track section at Usan, which restricts capacity.

We already have plans for improvements on that route. An extra signalling section is proposed on the Forth bridge to increase track capacity. The Waverley station scheme, as well as enhancing that station, will increase track capacity. A scheme to re-open the route from Stirling to Longannet, which was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz), will increase track capacity by diverting freight trains to avoid the Forth bridge. We are anxious to improve the route from Edinburgh to Aberdeen, but do not regard electrification as the most effective solution in the short to medium term. We have a number of projects in hand to assist with that, and the SRA and the Scottish Executive are commissioning a study to investigate the most effective ways of improving capacity in the Aberdeen area.

New trains have already been introduced on the route. Scotrail's new Turbostar trains and Virgin's new Voyager trains are part of the dramatic change that is taking place in the cross-country system. They both have characteristics similar to those of electric trains. The recent two-year extension of the GNER franchise, which I mentioned earlier, included a commitment by the company completely to refurbish the high-speed trains that operate to Aberdeen and Inverness. Incidentally, all those types of diesel trains are already exceedingly popular with passengers and have created a step change in travel and in perceptions.

The Strategic Rail Authority is working with the Scottish Executive—

Mr. John Cummings (in the Chair): Order. We have to move on.

Yarl's Wood

1 pm

Alistair Burt (North-East Bedfordshire): I am grateful for the opportunity to debate the report recently published by Bedfordshire county council on the incident on 14 February at the Yarl's Wood detention centre. I welcome the Minister for Citizenship and Immigration to her new position. We have known each other for some time and I understand that she is in a difficult but interesting ministerial post. We all wish her well.

I have three aims in today's short debate—to call attention to the report, to highlight some of the outstanding issues and to call attention to the lack of interest from the Home Office, which is causing my constituents real anger and frustration. Shortly after the fire on 14 February at Yarl's Wood detention and removal centre, the county council, led by Councillor Philip Hendry, resolved to conduct its own inquiry. It had three guiding reasons for doing so: it recognised its position in giving leadership to the local community that felt most concerned about the construction, operation and destruction of Yarl's Wood; it wished to give the community a public voice; and it recognised the cost of the national policy to the whole of Bedfordshire. The council understood that the local position had national resonance.

The council has succeeded in its aims, and I pay tribute to Councillor Hendry, Councillor David Thompson who chaired the inquiry, the cross-party councillors who sat on it and the county council's administrative staff who worked over and above the call of duty to make it a success. The inquiry team publicly interviewed many witnesses ranging from Group 4 and the emergency services to community groups and refugee support workers. It has been thorough, and within the constraints imposed by concurrent police and Home Office inquiries—not to mention the possibilities of criminal or civil proceedings—it found its way to sound conclusions. The shadow of other inquiries is real—I shall return to the problem—as the spotlight now switches to the Government's response.

The product of seven hearings, other visits and deliberations was set out in a report published on 18 June,and a copy was dispatched to the Home Secretary forthwith. It raised considerable interest and attention in the county, and I am pleased to see in attendance this morning my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) and the hon. Member for Bedford (Mr. Hall).

The key recommendations of the report include the creation of an independent inspectorate for detention centres and similar establishments; the removal of both Crown immunity and the ability to use special planning procedures from Government developments, except those needed for defence or national security; and the engagement to a far greater extent of local communities in the planning process. Other recommendations include supporting the local police authority in its defence of the insurance claim brought against it by the insurers of those running Yarl's Wood; ensuring that no

[Alistair Burt]

costs fall on the local community as a result of such actions; and reviewing the practice and policy of insuring this and similar establishments.

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): Does my hon. Friend agree that Bedfordshire's council tax payers would appreciate an assurance from the Minister that they will not have to pay the costs of the Yarl's Wood fire through their council tax? Furthermore, the county would appreciate a reassurance that the Government will put in place measures to ensure that similar events centering on national facilities do not fall on the shoulders of local council tax payers.

Alistair Burt: My hon. Friend makes a firm point on behalf of his constituents and all people living in Bedfordshire. The Minister is likely to deal with the point. The insurance issue has yet to be resolved in the courts, but it has caused national concern. If my understanding is correct, the date to insure a variety of privately run facilities around the country is rapidly approaching. What is the current position? My hon. Friend is right to call for those assurances.

The fifth aim of the report is to ensure the use of sprinklers against fire and to improve fire drills and fire safety at detention centres and similar establishments. The sixth is to improve detainee access to third-party advice to resolve disputes, and to improve record keeping and back-up record keeping of detainee information. The last, but locally by no means least, aim is to establish an independent process to determine the need for alternative access to Yarl's Wood rather than having to use Twinwoods road alone. That would accommodate the interests of many local people, and it should be carried forward as a matter of urgency.

I endorse all those recommendations and will return later to one or two of the issues raised. The report also makes special mention of the extraordinary work of the emergency services, which I strongly endorse, and of Group 4 staff at the site, who were put under severe pressure. It also mentions the action of certain detainees who took effective action to secure their safety and that of their friends.

As I mentioned, the inquiry process raised issues that could not be resolved because of the limitations imposed by other inquiries. It is essential for the local community that the Minister addresses the problem of how these matters will finally be determined to public satisfaction. She should also reconsider the instruction, which must have been given by her Department, to tell Home Office official Stephen Moore of the Prison Service, who is conducting the inquiry, not to hold hearings in public. There is a stark contrast between the openness of the county council procedure and the closed nature of the Home Office's inquiry. That is not acceptable.

We should consider two issues that appear in the report. It is known that, contrary to the strong advice of Bedfordshire fire brigade, no fire sprinklers were in place at Yarl's Wood. Why was a substantial timber-framed building, which it was known would go up in flames quickly, allowed to be built as it was, to house 450 people being held against their will, several miles from a fire station and with fairly poor water supplies? Home Office evidence submitted to the inquiry through Paul Quibell, which appears on pages 208 and 209 of the transcripts, says that the costs of fitting sprinklers

"wasn't really a factor for us at the time."

However, I introduced in evidence a letter from Jeff Goddard, who was acting chief fire officer of Bedfordshire at the time of negotiations with the Home Office about sprinklers. He is now the CFO of Buckinghamshire and was prepared to state unequivocally:

> "There was a meeting early in 2001 at Bedfordshire Fire Headquarters attended by myself, officers of Bedfordshire and Luton Fire and Rescue Service, the Head of the Immigration Service and a representative of the H.M. Fire Service Inspectorate, when the fitting of sprinklers was a single topic of debate. The Fire Service's stance being to strongly recommend sprinklers, this recommendation being resisted by the Head of the Immigration Service on grounds of cost."

That is a clear and serious contradiction, and I would have expected the Home Office inquiry to want to address it, but when I telephoned Mr. Goddard yesterday, I was astonished to learn that Stephen Moore had not contacted him. Why was he not contacted? Is Mr. Moore, a Home Office official, not hopelessly compromised in the search for the truth by his lack of independence?

Mr. Quibell went on to say that, because of conflicting advice, the Home Office commissioned a study before Yarl's Wood was built about the benefits of sprinklers. Beyond expressing incredulity that after years of experience the Home Office could need another study, I am stunned to read that that study's findings are still awaited—after one decision by a Home Secretary not to fit sprinklers and a subsequent one to reverse the policy. Both decisions were made without recourse to the policy advice—why? Mr. Moore was asked at the inquiry whether he intended to call Ministers; he answered, "No". Will the Minister ask him to reconsider and have hearings in public? Is not that small part of the jigsaw an illustration of appalling policy procedures and decisions?

Another crucial issue in the evidence is that of police access to the site during the incident. Shortly after 14 February, many reports indicated that the police had not gained access as soon as they arrived at Yarl's Wood, but were instead held outside for some hours. I am not aware that the police have denied those reports. The police were unable to give evidence to the county council inquiry for legal reasons that I understand and respect, but Group 4 did so through David Banks, the managing director of its custodial services. On page 230, he says:

> "You have asked, relative to access for the police. Were the police denied access to the site on the night of the incident? The answer is no, the police were not denied access to the site."

That is a fundamental issue. How does the Minister intend to resolve it and how may the public see that that is done? After all the legal restrictions on the police are lifted, will she contemplate giving them a public opportunity to present their description of events on the night?

My constituents and I look to the Home Office or subsequent procedures to clarify other matters. For what was the Home Secretary apologising on his visit to the area in March when he referred to errors being made in terms of the people who were at Yarl's Wood? Which detainees were there inappropriately and why? Why did Group 4 not know? How were decisions made to build such a fire risk to house people who had nothing to lose? Why were no serious fire precautions taken, save for showing detainees a video on arrival?

How were the insurance arrangements made? A parliamentary answer tells me that the Home Office has an insurable interest in Yarl's Wood because it is Crown property. The insurers for its interest are the same as those for the contractors running the centre: Mr. D. J. Pye's Lloyd's syndicate, acting through Capita Maclaren loss adjusters. As we know, it has taken the smart but immoral decision to sue the local police for £100 million and rising under the Riot (Damages) Act 1886, but the Home Office is a party to that. What insurance details were considered at the time of placing the contract to run Yarl's Wood? Did anyone think to ask what would happen in the event of a riot? If so, what was the answer? If not, why not? What will happen now to lift the threat of that massive bill off local taxpayers?

There are many other questions, but time is short, so I shall touch only briefly on the role of Mr. Moore. I understand from his evidence that he intends to submit his report to the Home Secretary by the end of June—a week from now. How many people at Group 4 has Mr. Moore interviewed? How many witnesses has he interviewed independently, by which I mean not relying on statements made to others? Which Home Office Ministers or officials has he interviewed? Has he sought access to the records of every detainee at Yarl's Wood on 14 February who was subsequently deported? Why has he held no hearings in public?

What is Mr. Moore's, and the Minister's, view of commercial confidentiality? That has been used as a screen to prevent access to certain issues. My view and that of my constituents is that when safety advice has been rejected by those responsible for the lives and safety of people kept under lock and key, commercial confidentiality should go out the window. The public are entitled to every scrap of knowledge about cost, contract, and price arrangements for insurance, and the details of every piece of correspondence or meeting through which decisions were made. Does the Minister agree, given her need to satisfy a new audience who are concerned about the planned accommodation centres?

With regard to my constituents' concerns, I asked for this debate partly because of the Home Office's failure to live up to the expectations built up by the Home Secretary on his very welcome visit to my constituency in March. If the Minister has had a chance to read the transcripts of the inquiry—I do not blame her if she has not—she will have noticed a common complaint running through the comments of virtually all groups and individuals in my constituency that were involved with the Home Office at the decision-making and planning stage for the building, and in dealing with the vital issue of access to the site. That complaint is of the Home Office's lack of attention to any matter beyond the boundaries established by a rather successful liaison committee. I pay tribute to the local councillors and those of my constituents who gave up much time to serve on that committee month after month. It provided the Home Office with substantial support, recognising its responsibilities in the face of a very difficult national situation.

However, advice about construction and safety and public warnings about security breaches were not heeded, and questions raised on a variety of issues, from who would be in the centre to the treatment of detainees, were dealt with reassuringly. No one had any reason to doubt the accuracy or good faith of those replies until we had the evidence of our own eyes on 14 February. Since then, as I have said in the House before, that confidence has been extinguished as surely as the fire was that night. People began to remember the fob-offs and the less-than-full answers.

To put that right, the Home Secretary came in March to assure us that full answers would be given to concerns raised by those close to the site. Those concerns go far beyond their own property rights or safety. My constituents, including those on the liaison committee, have always played an active part in refugee and asylum seeker support groups. That is not always popular, but I pay tribute to them for their care and compassion. I have not dwelt on their concerns, but I have not forgotten them. Certain aspects of the detainee regime might be a key part of any findings of the Home Office inquiry.

I wrote to the Home Secretary to follow up the meeting, and suggested a way forward, particularly in relation to access issues which could be dealt with quickly before rebuilding commenced and while other issues were stalled or sub judice. I cannot stress enough how vital that is. There might be some conflicts of interest, but they can be resolved with good will and energy if the Home Office gets off its collective backside and goes out to talk to people, as I suggested in March. It has not done so, and people living on Twinwoods Road—the only route to the centre—have had their patience stretched near to breaking point. I am grateful for the efforts of the local councillors and the residents' leader for keeping tempers in check, even though the chairman of the liaison committee has not had her letter answered, nor has Oakley parish council.

I put some of that strongly, but with good reason. May I remind hon. Members, stripping all niceties away, what Yarl's Wood is about and why people are justifiably concerned? On the night of 14 February, 385 people were being held lawfully but against their will in my constituency. They were in a supposedly secure environment, in a timber-framed building known to be highly combustible but without water sprinklers, and had received nothing more than rudimentary fire safety instructions. They were miles from a fire station, and the local fire brigade had warned against the absence of sprinklers but had been rebutted by the Home Office, which took precautions against accidental fire but did not seem to appreciate the risk of deliberate fire. Due to criminal activity, for which the perpetrators when convicted deserve the severest punishment, potentially lethal fires were started, endangering detainees, those guarding them, my constituents and those in the emergency services who attended and performed bravely in the face of severe difficulties.

Residents nearby were largely unaware of the incident for many hours because no system existed to alert them, nor were they aware when the supposedly safe environment was breached. Police attempting to deal

[Alistair Burt]

with the incident were denied access when they first needed it. The aftermath includes a destroyed centre, a £100 million insurance bill, no public access to the Home Office inquiry, no action by the Home Office on a series of concerns advanced by residents, and little evidence of understanding of the frustrations being expressed. I regret to place all this before the Minister, but it is my duty to do so. On behalf of my constituents, I call upon her to recognise the severity of the issues facing her Department and to grasp this golden opportunity to make a difference.

1.17 pm

Mr. Patrick Hall (Bedford): I am grateful to the hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt) and to the Minister—

Mr. John Cummings (in the Chair): Order. Do you have the permission of the Minister?

Mr. Hall: I do. I thank the Minister and the hon. Gentleman for allowing me a couple of minutes to follow a measured and thoughtful contribution to the Yarl's Wood debate. I echo the sentiments expressed by the hon. Gentleman about the public's concerns, many of which are held by my constituents as well as his, and I add my appreciation of the task carried out so responsibly and thoroughly by Bedfordshire county council.

I want to emphasise three of the many issues that have been raised today and on other occasions by the hon. Gentleman and others, and by me. First, the purpose of Yarl's Wood must in future be absolutely clear. The fact that it was not used as was apparently originally intended, only for end-of-process asylum seekers, but that such people were mixed freely together with other applicants at the beginning of the process plus convicted criminals, must have contributed to the tensions that exploded on 14 February.

Secondly, Stephen Moore's Home Office inquiry needs to be published soon and must be as open as possible. Only information relating to the police criminal investigations should be withheld. Matters relating to the Home Office contract with Group 4 must be placed in the public domain.

Finally, regarding the disgraceful attempts by Group 4's insurers to send the bill for reconstruction to Bedfordshire police, the Government must ensure that contracting out public services to the private sector means that the contractor does not simply keep the profits when things go well, but that it carries the risk for when things go wrong.

Lessons must be learned from Yarl's Wood before something else happens to the detention estate. It is imperative that public confidence be restored.

1.19 pm

The Minister for Citizenship and Immigration (Beverley Hughes): I thank the hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt) for his kind welcome at the start of the debate. I also thank Bedfordshire county council for its report and for the work that it put into it. I endorse and associate myself with the hon. Gentleman's remarks about the excellent response by the emergency services and others at the time of the fire. I also thank him for his work and for the constructive way in which he has tried to find a way forward for his constituents. He recognises the need for centres such as Yarl's Wood, and has tried to find a way through the issues surrounding them.

I also thank local people for the way in which they have responded. I have spoken to some of them today. I accept that the issue is difficult overall, and I perfectly understand how disturbing the incident at Yarl's Wood would be for ordinary local people. I can imagine myself in those circumstances, and I share and acknowledge their feelings. I understand that their trust must inevitably have been challenged by the events of 14 and 15 February, regardless of whether that feeling is completely justified or whether some of the hon. Gentleman's points about who was in the centre and so on were accurate.

The hon. Gentleman asked many questions, and he will understand that I cannot give a simple answer to some of them. He will also understand that I cannot discuss the report and the recommendations that will inform Stephen Moore's overarching inquiry, except where the Government have already said that they have made decisions. Before I deal with some of the hon. Gentleman's more general but none the less important points about the nature of Stephen Moore's inquiry and about consulting and involving local people, let me deal with some of his specific points.

Sprinklers are clearly a critical matter. I understand the keen interest in why there were none at Yarl's Wood. All that I can say at this stage is that the then Home Secretary decided not to fit them on the basis of a range of advice from different sources. However, the current Home Secretary has undertaken that sprinklers will be fitted in the remaining accommodation at Yarl's Wood, at Harmondsworth, and at future immigration removal centres, and we have begun consultation work on that matter. The hon. Gentleman also referred to a review on the use of sprinklers, but its scope is more general, and includes several different types of estate within the Home Office. It will be concluded shortly.

The hon. Gentleman asked why events took the course that they did, notwithstanding the range of advice available to the Home Secretary. Such questions are important, and the inquiry will have to deal with them. He also mentioned inspection. He will know that the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 gave Her Majesty's chief inspector of prisons the statutory power and responsibility to visit all immigration removal centres and detainees. Before taking on my present responsibilities, I was Minister with responsibility for prisons and I worked closely with the chief inspector. I took a keen interest in and have some knowledge of her work and I am perfectly happy with it. She is the person to inspect the custodial environment in the centres, just as she does in prisons. She takes an holistic approach, and I think I am right in saying that she intends to write a thematic report on the immigration estate, as part of her work programme. I accept the hon. Gentleman's point about inspection, which is important, but the chief inspector of prisons is the right person to carry that out.

All three hon. Gentlemen who have spoken in the debate raised the question of insurance. I echo the comments made by the Home Secretary on 25 February about the implications of the Riot (Damages) Act. I cannot say more on that now because the matter is subject to continuing negotiations between the insurers for Group 4 and Bedfordshire police authority, but I reiterate the Home Secretary's comment that we recognise that the claim made by the insurers is unquestionably beyond the resources of Bedfordshire police. We will take whatever advice is necessary and work with the police authority to protect its interests and those of the council tax payers whom it serves. We shall certainly want to ensure that the police are not burdened with the bill.

We are carefully considering the more general question of the implications of the incident for future insurance. That is a big question which we must sort out, because we cannot continue to provide significant establishments, for which insurance is necessary, without ensuring that the insurers will deliver when an incident occurs.

The hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire raised several issues about the Stephen Moore report. He mentioned June in connection with the time scale, but I understand that Stephen Moore has said that he will try to deliver the report to the Home Secretary by September, because he must wait for other investigations and reports to be concluded before he can complete his report.

Alistair Burt: I mentioned June because that is what Mr. Moore said when he gave evidence to the Bedfordshire county council inquiry.

Beverley Hughes: My information is different, but I shall certainly investigate that. I want to ensure that the scope of the inquiry is as comprehensive as possible in terms of those from whom evidence is sought, and that it covers the hon. Gentleman's questions. We do not want the validity and credibility of the final report to be open to challenge because people believe that not all the available evidence was sought. There will not be a public meeting of the sort requested by the hon. Gentleman, but it will be open to everyone to contribute to the inquiry process. The hon. Gentleman asked many questions that are germane to the inquiry, and I want to satisfy myself about the way in which it will be conducted and about its scope. Its terms of reference are the fire itself, but I hope that the inquiry will be comprehensive, so that it is not open to challenge.

The hon. Gentleman also raised several important points about consultation, which I discussed with residents before the debate. I say to the hon. Gentleman, and through him to his constituents, that we must get this right. As I said earlier to his constituents, they and my officials may have different expectations about the process of communication, and we need to bring the two sets of expectations closer together. I understand if some of my officials think that there is nothing much to say at the moment. That is true, because we are working hard considering the options. Inquiries are taking place, and we cannot make any definitive judgments until we have considered the results. Equally, I understand that, even if there is nothing to say, local people can be reassured in this interim period by being told that we are still here and are still interested. I give my commitment to try to ensure that that happens.

I am not going to apologise for the fact that we have a removals centre. I cannot do that because [illegible] need the facilities. I know that the hon. Gentleman accepts that. Wherever we site them, there will always be difficulties, but I accept that that puts the onus on Government and officials to try to ensure that we minimise the inherent difficulties as much as possible, and to work as co-operatively and openly as we can—although there are some limitations on that—with local people.

Business Park (Audenshaw and Denton)

1.30 pm

Andrew Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I am grateful to have the opportunity to debate the proposals by North West Water and the developers Arrowcroft to remove a treasured piece of green space in my constituency and turn it into a business park.

I am delighted to see the new Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty), in his place. I congratulate him on his well-deserved promotion. To some extent, I also commiserate with him because I understand that in planning matters Ministers have a semi-judicial function, and I accept that he is not going to be able to say all that much at the end of the debate because of that function. Anyway, I am very grateful that he is here to listen.

My constituents and those of my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) would not understand it if I did not take up this opportunity to press their total abhorrence of the proposed scheme. My right hon. Friend would very much have liked to be here but, unfortunately, other parliamentary duties made that impossible for him. He has been steadily paging me all morning, insisting that I put on the record the fact that he is as strongly opposed to the scheme now as he was 10 years ago when it was first proposed.

The area of land concerned is on the east side of Greater Manchester, between my right hon. Friend's Gorton constituency and mine, Denton and Reddish, in which a little of the land lies. In the 1800s, the old city of Manchester cut off one of the small streams flowing down to the Irwell and built two small reservoirs on it. Water was taken from the then Ashton canal into the top reservoir during the wet period of the winter, and was stored to provide fresh water to the people of Manchester.

Some 50 years later, in about 1885, the authorities got parliamentary approval to build five further reservoirs above the lower reservoirs, as they are now called. In fact, only three were built—very fine reservoirs, which are still there. The authorities then decided that there was more demand for water than could be coped with by expanding the Audenshaw reservoirs, and went up to the Lake district to get water from the area around Thirlmere and Ullswater. On the site of the two proposed reservoirs that were never built, first Denton golf club and then Fairfield golf club—uniquely, Fairfield is also a sailing club—grew up on the land, and they have been very successful ever since. That is a brief history of the site.

In addition to the two golf clubs, a large number of people come out from Gorton, Audenshaw, Reddish and Denton to walk through the site. It is a very important lung to the people living in that area. It is also a bit of countryside—something that I find very difficult to get across to developers and other people. The nature of the reservoirs' construction is such that someone walking through the area can look up and see first the grass walls of the reservoir, and beyond that the Pennine hills. They have a feeling that they are out in the countryside, yet they are a relatively short distance from the centre of Manchester. For local people, the area has been a lifeline for years and years.

Very sadly, just over 10 years ago, North West Water, aided and abetted by Tameside council, decided that the site could be turned into a business park. It came forward with a planning application, but much to my delight and that of my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton, the then Secretary of State felt that the scheme was so large that he would have to call it in and hold a proper public inquiry into it. When it came to the public inquiry, the whole thing collapsed because it was not possible to come up with a viable road system to get to the site. On the scale that was being discussed, it would not have been possible to get traffic in or out of the site, especially if a business park were constructed.

Those in my constituency know the area as "the reservoirs" or "the stonewalls". The developers at first decided that they would call the site Kingswater; more recently, having abandoned that name, they call it Waterside Park. It is an insult to local people to come up with a name like that. Having failed at the first public inquiry, Tameside council decided that it would put a business park into its unitary development plan. My right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton and I spent a lot of time trying to convince the inspector at that inquiry that the council should take the area out of the plan and earmark it as public open or recreational space. We managed to convince the inspector that if a business park was to be built, it was essential that an alternative golf course be found. On that basis, he said that the scheme could go ahead, but when the council came forward with a development proposal, it could not come up with an alternative golf course. It is not possible to find the land for one in that area. If it could find the land, the business park could be built there.

We persuaded the Secretary of State that he should call the development in, and when the proposals were brought forward, my right hon. Friend and I went to the inquiry and put all the arguments to the inspector. Eventually, the case found its way on to the Deputy Prime Minister's desk, who said very firmly that the scheme should not go ahead. He gave seven major reasons why it should not go ahead. I believe that those seven reasons are still valid. Unfortunately, developers decided to challenge my right hon. Friend's reasons, and on three of them the court found that he needed to reconsider his position. During the past few months, a whole series of representations have been made suggesting that the Deputy Prime Minister got it right—or that he got it wrong. I have to say that the vast majority of my constituents have written to me saying that the Deputy Prime Minister got it spot on when he turned down the original proposal. I want to emphasise that.

I hope that the Deputy Prime Minister will take a decision fairly soon. We want the matter settled as soon as possible. It is possible for him to decide to hold a further public inquiry, but I think that far too much has been said about the matter already. An awful lot of trees have been cut down for the paperwork on it, and it would be much simpler if he confirmed his decision to refuse approval.

However, there is another aspect to the issue. I have continually pleaded with North West Water that it should understand the strength of local feeling against it and the damage that pushing ahead with the scheme does to the company's own image. North West Water is one of the major sponsors of the Commonwealth games. People will enjoy themselves at the games in July, but their importance to Manchester is that they will help to secure major regeneration of the city's east side. On the east side, the emphasis will be on new sports facilities: the stadium, the baths and the cycling facilities. It seems absolutely crazy for North West Water to want credit for helping to make those sports facilities work in the east side of Manchester while simultaneously working to wreck two golf courses.

In effect, North West Water saying is that one golf course will close and the other will have buildings put on it so that the whole course will have to be remodelled. That seems absolutely crazy. I would argue that it is in North West Water's interest to say, even at this late stage, that it is going to scrap the scheme and get credit for encouraging the development of sporting facilities in the east side of Manchester. It is interesting that Sport England has made very strong objections to the loss of the golf course.

Fairfield golf and sailing club has what might be described as a working-class membership. It is in no way elitist, but is a place that welcomes local people from Gorton, Audenshaw, Denton and Reddish. It co-operates with Wright Robinson school, which is a sports academy. The school overlooks the facilities, and many of the youngsters are encouraged to play on the golf course, which is a facility for the area.

My pleas are that the Deputy Prime Minister make his decision quickly and enforces it, and that, even if it does not happen before the Commonwealth games, North West Water accepts that it should not push ahead with the scheme but go for good publicity and abandon it.

Let me deal with some of the issues. We will not just lose a golf course but an open space that is, as I said, a lung for the whole of the east of Manchester, including the people in Gorton, Audenshaw, Denton and Reddish. People can walk out from narrow terraced houses that have only yards, not gardens, and walk through the site which has mature hedgerows, a huge bird population and attractive wild flowers. It is a place where adults can walk and kids can mess about. That does not always please the golf club, but it is important in urban landscapes to have places where kids can mess about, because they can do an awful lot of damage if they mess about on the wall outside some elderly person's dwelling. They might upset elderly people, with the result that there is conflict between youngsters and the elderly. However, if they can go out to "the reservoirs" and "the stonewalls", kids can be kids and mess about and enjoy themselves without upsetting anyone, apart from occasional minor upset to people on the golf course. Therefore, it is an important area for kids.

It is also an important area for walking dogs. There is an absolute lack of open space in east Manchester. Another aspect to emphasise is that the facilities are free. Increasingly, people in urban areas must pay for facilities. It is important that people on low incomes are able to take their kids out or put them in the pram and push them through the area at no cost.

The lower reservoirs are a major fishing site. Manchester education committee offers water sports on one of the lower reservoirs, and the Fairfield golf and sailing club used to have sailing facilities on one of the others. It is sad that, because the issue has gone on for more than 10 years, it has been difficult for Fairfield golf and sailing club to invest in improving its clubhouse and reinstating its sailing facilities. Another strong reason for making the decision quickly is so that such facilities can be reinvigorated. The open space and recreation facilities are very important.

People say that 3,000 jobs would be created. I am the last person to stop jobs coming to Tameside. However, in the 10 years that we have been arguing about the site, Tameside has had an extremely successful record in attracting inward investment. The council has managed to attract new industry to several brownfield sites. So, although it was claimed 10 years ago that we would not be able to bring unemployment down unless we had the development, unemployment has come down.

Several other sites have become available for development, most at prices that industry can afford rather than at a price that supports the sort of expensive business park development that was planned. The Hyde group is now developing a business park on the old Stratton and Henshaw site in my constituency. I could go through a list of other sites that have been or could be developed. Reeb has presented a very good site for shopping in the centre of Denton. If the same imagination had been shown by the council, a project could have been put together for a business park if necessary, but the jobs argument does not stack up.

Turning to traffic, the M60 and M67 meet at the edge of the site and the M67 ends at a roundabout. That is unsatisfactory for a motorway and there is huge traffic congestion at that point. To build a business park with 3,000 jobs, to which many people will have to commute from south Manchester instead of walking to work locally, will make the traffic worse at that point. There is talk about building a flyover or making some other arrangement, but local people are sick and tired of the traffic problems.

I understand that my hon. Friend the Minister will be happy with about 10 minutes in which to respond, so perhaps I may take a few more minutes without upsetting him. I want to finish by emphasising that the Government's policy in recent years has been brilliant. They have understood the need to regenerate urban areas, to bring new developments to brownfield sites, to reinvigorate old town centres and to reduce car dependency. In PPG3, which covers housing, and the new draft regional guidance for the north-west, the emphasis is on previously developed land.

The proposed business park flies totally in the face of that concept. Manchester has a successful business park. Manchester science park is close to the academic excellence of the university, and it is on brownfield land that needed redevelopment and has good transport links. We do not want a repetition of the 1980s and the failed idea that people must be attracted to sites by offering them green fields and trees. That is not necessary. What is important is that developments have good transport and communications links.

Developers have claimed that people can use Denton station, which is a joke. It has one train, in one direction, one day a week. That is sad and I have often tried to think what could be done to reinvigorate that station, but unfortunately the railway line goes in the wrong direction and the station is in the wrong place. To claim

[Andrew Bennett]

that Denton station will have any significance for the proposed business park is nonsense. Two bus routes pass the site, but at a considerable distance from where the developers want to build. They are now talking about the possibility of setting up a shuttle service to the site, but the shuttle service can be introduced only if the 3,000 jobs materialise and most people are cynical about that.

In terms of Government policy, the proposal is a disaster. The Secretary of State was spot on when he refused permission the first time. I greatly regret that the developers did not accept that and thought they could go to judicial review. The whole planning system is under review at the moment. One of the worst aspects of the present planning system is the way in which people rush to judicial review and then complain that the planning system is slow and cumbersome. I hope that the developers will now accept that the role of the Secretary of State is to implement Government policy, and that that policy is to have development on brownfield sites and to reinvigorate old town centres, and not to allow developments such as the proposed business park, which would simply encourage car dependency and destroy a very important lung for people in my constituency.

I shall listen with interest to my hon. Friend the Minister. I accept that what he can say today is limited, but in Denton, Audenshaw, Reddish and Gorton, there will be cheers when the Deputy Prime Minister confirms his decision that the development should not go ahead.

1.49 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Tony McNulty): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Bennett) for his kind words at the beginning of his speech, and I congratulate him on securing the debate and raising the issue of the proposed development, which, as he says, has a long history. I thank him for putting his concerns and those of our right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) on the record.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish said, there is little that I can say about the application for the proposed development of Waterside park, but it might be helpful if I explain the development proposal and place the current planning application into an historical context.

Waterside park is a large greenfield site of some 90 hectares adjacent to the M66 at Denton. It is owned by United Utilities, formerly North West Water. Its development for business purposes was first proposed in 1990 under the name Kingswater park. The proposal proved controversial to say the least, and was called in by the then Secretary of State. An inquiry was arranged but the application was withdrawn shortly before the inquiry was due to take place.

The local planning authority, Tameside metropolitan borough council, took forward the idea for a business park on the Denton site, and developed proposals for the land as part of its unitary development plan. Again, the proposal was strongly opposed by local people. There was a thorough debate about the proposals at the UDP inquiry, where views both for and against the proposals were expressed. The UDP inspector recommended that the policy be retained. The council accepted his recommendation that the land be allocated for business use, and accordingly adopted the UDP in September 1996.

Under present proposals, the business park will have 74,000 sq m of B1 business space, with ancillary shops, pubs, leisure facilities and some 200 homes, and will involve the relocation of an existing golf club and the creation of new public open space. The development is now called Waterside park, as my hon. Friend knows. The Secretary of State decided to call in the planning application in February 1999, so that he could consider the possible implications for open space provision in the Greater Manchester area. Considerable concern had been expressed about the possible loss of the golf club: a green lung in an urbanised area.

A public inquiry was held in December 1999, and views both for and against the proposal were expressed. The inspector reported in May 2000 and recommended that planning permission be granted subject to conditions. The Secretary of State did not agree with the recommendation, as my hon. Friend has mentioned, and he set out his reasons for that in his letter of 30 November 2000. Among his concerns were the loss of the golf club and the fact that half the proposed housing would not be on previously developed land, commonly known as brownfield land. National planning policy for new housing has a preference for using previously developed sites, and he therefore refused planning permission.

The applicant launched a High Court appeal against the Secretary of State's decision. The grounds of challenge were wide ranging, and the Secretary of State, having taken legal advice, submitted to judgment in respect of two of the grounds for the challenge: the point about environmental assessments and procedures, and the point about housing densities. The decision of the High Court means that the Secretary of State has to redetermine his decision about Waterside park.

My hon. Friend knows that the Secretary of State has to play a quasi-judicial role in determining planning cases that come before him; he alluded to that in his speech. Not only does the Secretary of State have to be impartial, he also has to be seen to be acting impartially. My hon. Friend will therefore understand that I cannot discuss the merits of the case in advance of the Secretary of State's new decision.

As part of the redetermination procedure, officials have written to parties at the inquiry inviting comments on the two issues in which the Secretary of State submitted to judgment. That is a requirement under planning legislation. We have also invited views on two issues that have arisen because the world has moved on since the initial decision. Those issues are the North West Development Agency's search for strategic sites in the region, and the emerging new regional planning guidance for the north-west.

The deadline for the submission of new comments was 14 June. We are now in the middle of considering all comments, both from those at the inquiry and other interested parties. My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish will be interested to know that we received 133 responses from interested parties and local residents. I thank him for forwarding the letters that he received from his constituents.

One of the issues that the Secretary of State will have to consider in the light of the representations is whether the inquiry needs to be reopened to explore the issues further, or whether the information available is sufficient for him to reach a decision. My hon. Friend will understand that it would be premature to make a decision on that point, but there does not seem to have been any great pressure to reopen the inquiry. It would also be premature to comment on the representations that we have received, but I assure him that all representations—both those in favour and those against the proposals—will be taken into account before the Secretary of State makes a new decision.

My hon. Friend outlined his wish for developments in three key areas: first, the decision; secondly, the speed of the decision and, thirdly, matters relating to North West Water. As he knows, I can say absolutely nothing about the nature of the decisions. I hope, through my good offices and those of the Deputy Prime Minister, to ensure that the decision is made as swiftly as is practicable, but I cannot offer him any timetable. It is not for me to exhort North West Water—or United Utilities, as it is now—about its corporate responsibility, advertisement plan, business strategy for the future or any other such matter. Such aspects are of more concern to United Utilities.

Andrew Bennett: May I press my hon. Friend about a further inquiry? My constituents consider that the situation is unfair in that United Utilities—or North West Water, whatever it is called—can afford to have barristers present at such a inquiry, whereas it is not possible for them to raise the money that would be needed to hire legal representation. I hope that he will take that into account and that he will accept that we need a speedy decision, not another inquiry.

Mr. McNulty: I thank my hon. Friend for that response. I repeat, there does not seem to be any growing pressure to reopen the inquiry, but that remains an option to be considered by the Secretary of State. I thank my hon. Friend for drawing the matter to the attention of the House. He has put his case in his usual robust and forceful way on behalf of his constituents. I happily accept the reasons why our right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton cannot be with us today, but I know that he, too, has a long-standing interest in the application.

My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish can be assured that the Secretary of State will take note of his views on the matter. My right hon. Friend will reach a decision on the planning merits of the proposed development as soon as possible and will take full cognisance of all representations that have material planning concerns at their core. I assure my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish that I shall take as much interest in issues in the north-west as I will in those in London or elsewhere in the country.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at two minutes to Two o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 27 June 2002

[SIR MICHAEL LORD *in the Chair*]

Research Assessment Exercise

[Relevant documents: Second Report from the Science and Technology Committee on the Research Assessment Exercise, Session 2001–02, HC 507, and the Government's Response thereto, Fifth Special Report, Session 2001–02, HC 995]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Derek Twigg.]*

2.30 pm

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I call Dr. Brian Iddon—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry. I call Dr. Ian Gibson.

Dr. Ian Gibson (Norwich, North): I know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that you have an affiliation to Ipswich town football club. You know my feelings about that club. We have worked together on issues in Ipswich. I thank you for getting my name right the second time. Perhaps the Higher Education Funding Council for England might get the research assessment exercise right next time round too.

I am delighted to see so many right hon. and hon. Members in Westminster Hall. It shows their appreciation of the British university system and the endeavours of those who work in it to provide excellence throughout the academic world. We are revered throughout the world for the way that we educate our young people. I guess that the report ultimately says that we really can do better and that we hope we can persuade the Government to take up some of the issues that will allow that to happen.

The issue of funding in universities for research at all levels in the arts, the humanities and the sciences is extremely important. There has been an amazing swing over the past 10 years to private funding of research in universities as against state funding. That has troubled many people who work in the higher education sector. The independence of those who work in the universities is vital. MORI and other polls show that the public value people who are seen to be independent. If funding comes from corporations, it makes it difficult for individuals, however excellent they are and however independent they think they are, to get their message across.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): Is it not true that people in this country need to continue to promote blue-sky research rather than market research? Public funding does that better than private funding.

Dr. Gibson: Of course that is true. At the same time, striking the right balance between blue-sky and functional research is difficult for any university, and certainly for Government Departments. We must try to get it right. We can never predict where blue-sky research will lead, but it must take place because amazing things can come out of it.

I return to the nitty-gritty of the Committee's second report of this Session, where we considered the REA. It has become part and parcel of university life, almost as important as car parking charges, office space and whether one has a carpet. Academics get excited by few things other than their own research but I can say from my years of experience that if car parking charges loom, if their office space has to be shared and if the RAE is looming, the adrenalin flows and the committee meeting structures develop overnight.

This RAE is clearly very important. It is taxpayers' money that goes into universities. We must ensure that those millions of pounds are monitored. Our Committee considered the way that it is done, the lessons we can learn and how we can move the system on. The results of the 2001 RAE show a dramatic increase in research ratings awarded to university departments. As research funding from the HEFCE is based on those ratings, it creates real funding problems when the money emerges to each and every university and their departments.

I shall make a quick point about the procedures for the debate. In line with the suggestion from the Liaison Committee—as hon. Members will know, the process involves the Chairs of Select Committees and two hours of penetrating debate with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister—we decided that we should have a substantive motion for the debate. We said that Westminster Hall was instigated partly to allow more opportunities for debate on Select Committee reports—we welcome that—yet restricting them to Adjournment debates diminishes their impact. However, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House ruled against our request.

We therefore believe that we should return to the Liaison Committee and say that debates might have a tougher flavour if they involved a substantive motion at the end. A vital part of the motion that we wanted for this debate was that we recognise that the research quality of the higher education sector has improved; we have considered the report's recommendations and the essential contribution that higher education research into science and technology make to society and the economy; and we call on the Government to fund the RAE results fully in the forthcoming spending review.

Instead of us all shaking hands, saying, "That was a good debate", and going home, such a motion would give pith to a debate and mean that we had something on paper. I hope that, through the Liaison Committee, we will toughen up some of the debates in this Chamber.

We launched our inquiry in November 2001, and the report was published in April 2002. We received 49 written memorandums from a range of organisations and individuals, and we had two evidence sessions, which involved the Higher Education Funding Council for England, the Association of University Teachers, Universities UK and my hon. Friend the Minister for Lifelong Learning and Higher Education. I welcome her to the debate.

I record with some sadness that an important debate in which many of us would have liked to participate is taking place in the main Chamber at the same time as this debate. I hope that we can ensure that the structures that organise debates consider that issue sensibly and allow hon. Members a chance to participate in both places within the House of Commons.

[Dr. Gibson]

Some members of the Science and Technology Committee—brilliantly, I think—visited their constituency universities and operated in a semi-Select Committee environment. For example, I went to my local university—the university of East Anglia—and operated in a Select Committee environment there. That was an experience at the coal face with people who had been through not one but several RAEs and had built up experience accordingly. That fed into our report and was extremely important.

We considered the situation in England, of course, but noted the results from, and the decisions taken in, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. We received the replies from the Government and the HEFCE on 21 June, and these were published on 26 June.

I shall give a few facts about the RAE 2001. Some 2,598 submissions were received from 173 higher education institutions, and 48,000 researchers were involved. There were substantial improvements in ratings. In 1996, 31 per cent. of research-active staff worked in 573 departments rated 5 or 5*, which are the top two grades; in 2001, the figure was 55 per cent. in 1,081 departments. In 2001, 64 per cent. of the research submitted was of national or international levels of excellence—grades 4, 5 or 5*—compared with 43 per cent in 1996.

I congratulate all the individuals involved and commend the organisation within universities that achieved that very high standard. The way in which we have made such an improvement puts us second to none in all parts of the world.

We recognised, however, that gamesmanship could be involved in these things. After all, we are talking about the brightest people in Britain. I know that we in this place think that we are the brightest people in the country, but there are people outside who are equally bright, as we would acknowledge at a bad moment. They know how to play the system—do not we all?—and perhaps there was some selective entering and transferring of researchers, fiddling of the boundaries between departments and so on. Departments could increase their ratings by such mechanisms, but that was insignificant compared with the major improvement overall. We also had problems with the way in which the panels were selected to assess departments, with subject groupings and so forth, but those are minor points in comparison with today's difficulties and funding the vast improvement.

The Select Committee agreed that raising standards of research and encouraging universities through the RAE were important factors in developing research strategies. Those who say that universities are a crazy mix of people based in lovely campuses, on long holidays with permanent sabbaticals are so wrong. Universities have changed out of all recognition since some of us were students or started our careers. They know all about spreadsheets, they have examined the problems and they tackle them in a businesslike way as they try to react to Governments of whatever hue.

These positive aspects are important, but some of the detrimental effects of the RAE also emerged from our discussions. I went through it all myself and have the scars on my back to show it. I know about the friends one no longer has because of the need to adopt this aggressive procedure. Grade 5 delivery in my department consumed my life—almost as much as Norwich City getting into the premier division. Since entering this place, I no longer have to deliver the five stars, but the lessons learned and the culture that existed in my former department have been carried on by others: the structures were set in place.

I shall outline some of the criticisms received from all quarters, and I invite right hon. and hon. Members to intervene if they would like to me to say more about them. It was argued that the RAE encouraged short-termism, distorted publication practice, discouraged interdisciplinary research, shattered staff morale and discriminated against women.

Dr. Phyllis Starkey (Milton Keynes, South-West): On that point, I welcome the report's highlighting of the impact of the RAE on women and the under-representation of women in many departments. Does my hon. Friend accept that discrimination against women is deep-seated and cannot be explained solely in terms of women's greater domestic commitments? Universities also discriminate against women who do not have any children, so it is not enough to concentrate only on providing better child-care facilities or breaks for child care. The problem is more deep-seated and more fundamental action is necessary if universities are to use the full potential of their women employees.

Dr. Gibson: I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention. She has been a champion of that issue ever since I met her in the Palace of Westminster. The RAE is certainly a symptom and reflection of a more deep-seated problem. Few women run departments, and even today the Royal Society has only a few women members. That shows clearly that we must tackle a deep-seated institutionalised imbalance. I would welcome any new initiatives—in the RAE or in higher education more generally—to deal with the problem.

We did not say it expressly in the report, but we need to examine what has gone wrong with higher education and why so many people at grassroots level are feeling so down at present. People in the higher education sector took part in yesterday's lobby. If more women gained top positions, it would help to encourage young women who do brilliantly in their first degree courses to continue into academic life. Mechanisms should be in place to make that easier. I welcome some of the Government's current initiatives to address these problems, but they were a long time coming and we are becoming impatient. Discussion of our analysis and results today should make a contribution.

Problems with the RAE have also contributed to departmental closures, as discussed in the report. Wider questions are relevant. What is the role of higher education and under what contracts do we employ people? Academics are now expected to do so much. When I first entered academic life, it was much easier for younger people starting out. I do not understand why it has become more complicated, but one is expected not only to teach but to be involved in community activities. One has to interact with regional development agencies, to undertake research and to consider knowledge transfer. There are tremendous pressures. No one ever asked me to start a spin-out company when I started doing research, but people are now asked to think about that as part of engendering interaction between universities and industry.

The policies are now much more aggressive, which people entering university find difficult. Questions may be asked later about whether departments can do all these things within the confines of a university, and whether the Government recognise that these important issues require different funding streams. Of course, when universities are trying to get research grades as part of the research assessment exercise, they forget that the buildings around them are dripping water and that the cement blocks that were built in the 1960s are no longer stable. We concluded that there have been benefits, but there has undoubtedly been collateral damage. Careers, which have distracted universities from other functions, have been a significant element of that process.

The most important issue for some people is the funding of the RAE. They achieve a higher standard, they feel good, the corks are popping all over the campus, and they wait for the cheque to come from wherever it does these days—it may be the vice-chancellor's office, if they are lucky. The HEFCE concentrated on funding 5* star departments at the top of the gradings. We believe that there is a shortfall of about £200 million in the system as a result of the improved grades. As many hon. Members know, 4-grade and 5-grade departments have lost money. I can take hon. Members to any university in this country: they will all say that their budgets are short by £80,000, £90,000 or £100,000. This is where HEFCE makes its savings. There has been an improvement in ratings, but the expected money on the existing formula has not materialised. The new universities, of which we were so proud, have been trying to get into the research culture, but have not been able to get that sort of money. Staff morale has fallen, and the structure is looking flaky. There is a crisis in university departments, and uncertainty about how they will adjust to having improved research, but having less money to do what they want to do. If people improve, their expectations rise. They want to do better and go from a 5 to a 5*, which we should encourage.

Bob Spink: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that there should be a separate fund for the Science and Technology Committee to develop research facilities where they are currently weak, embryonic, or do not yet exist?

Dr. Gibson: The hon. Gentleman has read our script. We recognise the problem in our report. Some new medical schools told me that they have no money for research. Where is the equipment, the back-up or the ancillary staff to do that research? We need to define such new groupings. I am proud that the Government have set them up, but we must pump money into them. Some brave decisions need to be taken.

The HEFCE says that it is the Government's fault. The Government have broad shoulders, and I imagine that they can take that criticism, as they provide the money. The truth is that the HEFCE carried out a review after the 1996 RAE, and it is up to it whether to undertake the 2001 RAE. It took evidence from a wide range of organisations and researchers, and called them customers. It must have known that money would be needed for improved excellence in research. If it did not know, why did it not know? There should have been modelling as part of the review to determine what the implications would be if the ratings improved to today's levels. It appears that that was not done.

There was an expectation in the academic community that grades would rise. It was known what had been done; people had been told in pre-runs of the exercise that grades were improving and it had been acknowledged quietly, on the side, that they had improved. The HEFCE then existed in an environment in which the thought was, "Right. We're on the way now, and things are going to happen."

The HEFCE could, of course, have said, "Well, what could we have done about it if it was going to improve?" I will tell hon. Members what it could have done: it could have postponed the RAE exercise until it had some indication from the Government how the money might be found for improvements.

On which side is the research directorate of the HEFCE? It seems to have a religious belief in the RAE, and has not understood the implications of the process. When they appeared before the Committee, HEFCE witnesses were arrogant and dismissive when it came to facing the damage they had done. The Department for Education and Skills should not delegate so many important decisions to a quango, as the Committee said, given the DFES's alleged underspend. More money could have been found to help the exercise and to fund the improvements. The Committee expressed disappointment at the level of involvement of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, who is the Cabinet Minister with responsibility for science.

A press release yesterday stated that there are plans to carry out a new review of the RAE. The research directorate is wedded to the RAE concept and cannot see its limitations, or indeed, when it has had its day. Thus it should be seriously suggested that the review is not carried out or is stopped until an independent body is set up to carry out an in-depth review of funding for research in higher education and to come up with a comprehensive plan for future funding in all the diverse areas of research activities in higher education. However, it would benefit the chief executive of the HEFCE if such an exercise were seen to be independent and would regain much of the confidence in the academic community that has been lost.

It is no wonder that the Committee said that there was a strong case for more money for higher education research in the spending review, not only to fund the RAE 2001 properly, but to address the chronic underfunding and imbalance in the dual research support system which everyone supports but is much underfunded.

I want to say more about the HEFC because, as hon. Members can tell, we are not the best of chums. It attacked the Committee's report, which is why I take the position that I do. I want to defend but I want also to explain why it was absolutely wrong in some of its assertions. It said, naming the Committee and me, that we behaved

"as if it was self-evident"

that the selective entry of staff to the RAE process was distorting the RAE results. That means that people being dropped is somehow legitimate. Surely it is self-

[Dr. Gibson]

evident that it is necessary to know what the true research situation is in a university department. We do not judge a choir by listening to the soloist; we do not judge a pizza by trying the cheese on top. We look at the entirety. We cannot measure the quality of a university department by judging only its best researchers. That particular practice is damaging for departments and managements. If people are not performing in the research area, but that is part of the contract, there is something wrong with the contract and how it operates in universities. Every academic in a department with a contract that states that they should carry out research, teaching and administration should do so, and universities must look at their management practices if it is not being done. Academics undertake research, but whether they get support from the department is a managerial issue, which departments and universities are sometimes not prepared to take on.

The Government's response is relatively positive about the report, but vague. "We will consider your points in review," hardly turns me on. The way to deal with it might be to get them back after review and question them again, so I put down that pointer. We shall see what comes about.

The one point on which we differ concerns teaching versus research universities. It is not a new question, but it is worthy of a debate. The Government suggested that not all good teachers need to do research and that some need only to be scholars, but one cannot be on top of a subject without being involved in some cutting-edge thinking or research. Scientific knowledge cannot just be passively consumed; it must be challenged and moved on if it is to be of any value. In my opinion—and I think the Committee's opinion too—being taught by researchers is what distinguishes higher from further education. I thought that we were moving away from that when polytechnics became universities, because for me universities mean undertaking research and encouraging people to do likewise.

Teachers in schools and further education colleges are very good at their job—no one is questioning that—but not necessarily at research. As the Committee noted, the science base demands people who have a special kind of brain and do an honours degree or MSc. We need people who can do research and question everything in a basic textbook. They must take nothing for granted and challenge everything. As someone who has taught, I have never believed a scientific statement, because I know that someone will challenge it.

One knows too, if one engages in research, that there are issues that have not yet reached textbooks. When were prions first mentioned in textbooks? People in the research community knew about them for some time, but textbooks did not carry information about them because there was not consensual approval from universities.

Dr. Starkey: Given that the Government are committed to increasing the number of university students to half the peer group, is my hon. Friend suggesting that all the extra teachers should be, or are capable of being, cutting-edge researchers?

Dr. Gibson: We over-teach our students, so I am not sure about how many new lecturers we need. I had to give so many lectures per year, but I could have done half of them—not because I would have been ducking, as I enjoyed teaching—and then got the students to participate more interactively in the other half. Such a new style of teaching might save us from the position of having to hire new people.

It is when students do a research project—it does not have to be in a laboratory; it could be a library or literature project—that they become excited and knowledgeable and start to question the subject. If we are just going to put the 50 per cent. into rote teaching, we will not achieve the highest possible standards. We must consider new curriculums and new ways of teaching and inspiring students to use IT. Such experiments are taking place in universities, but I do not get the feeling that they are being brought together. I appreciate the problem of the extra students, but before we consider the extra teachers, we must consider the extra lecture theatres and labs in which to teach them. That is particularly important for the sciences.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I have followed the hon. Gentleman's argument fairly closely, but does he not accept that some people may be gifted researchers but cannot teach students or communicate with them? I agree with him about the concept of students doing more research themselves, but we cannot expect excellent researchers necessarily to be good teachers.

Dr. Gibson: I accept that, and I know that many people cannot do research because they are not able to interact with equipment. They are all fingers and thumbs. However, that all goes back to how we educate those people in school and teach them in practical classes. Sadly, we have found that many people who will end up as lecturers are not getting that practical experience.

I know many lecturers who I would not have let near students, but sadly they had to do it. That problem is all about the selection process. When I was first appointed to university, I was never monitored for efficiency in teaching. I was monitored for efficiency in research, and training young lecturers and giving them opportunities in sharpening up the act. They do not have to be written off just because it seems that they cannot teach; universities have the resources to improve their teaching skills. The picture is changing. I agree that there are good teachers and bad teachers and that some are better than others, but I believe that teaching skills can be nurtured and are not genetic. People can be trained to teach more effectively and can learn by watching other teachers. The major issue is how teachers are appointed in the first place. Nowadays, when people are appointed to universities they have to give a lecture or two to students, who fill in questionnaires about how they have done. Such developments are perhaps not widespread enough but we are beginning to address the problem.

I do not accept that the HEFCE's criticism of us is valid. We took a wide range of evidence and a wide range of experience was reflected in the debates we had in local universities and so on. Some people argue that the solution to the problem is to move to the liberal arts college model for the first part of higher education, which would make sense given the increasing gap between the knowledge needed at A-level and that needed to start an honours degree. If that happened, scholarship—which I would define as the study and synthesis of the literature in a field—would inform teaching and lab research would become less important for teachers. However, advanced teaching for honours and masters degrees must in my and the Committee's opinion have a research basis, and students must be involved in the activity. The HEFCE proposes a reduction in the volume of research if the funding deficit is not met by increased funding. Its conclusion that commitment to research is

"compromising the financial health of universities"

is a remarkable one for a body that arranges the RAE, the main driver of the importance of research and a major source for university funding.

What is the way forward? The Select Committee thinks that there is a role for the RAE but that it needs to be less dominant and part of a broader university research funding strategy. We suggested that the HEFCE's research budget could be divided into four sections. Top rank departments could be exempted from RAE funding according to their external research income. Other departments could, as before, enter the RAE as a means of selecting and funding better departments. Some departments entering the RAE could bid for development funds, and there could be a fund to support the indirect costs incurred through external project funding. Funding must relate to the different activities that universities carry out so effectively.

The Select Committee welcomes the RAE and looks forward to an analysis of it. We hope that our report will play a major part in the thinking on the subject. The British university system has excellence and, at a time when the pressures are on to get more people into the system, we will struggle without that extra funding and if the starvation principles that have operated for some time are not removed. The crisis in universities will continue if those issues are not addressed. I thank hon. Members for attending and listening to the debate. The HEFCE and the Select Committee will get it right and move things forward.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir. Nicholas Winterton): Order. Before I call the next speaker, I point out that if the many hon. Members who wish to contribute to this important debate show an element of self-discipline, I am sure that they will all be called.

3.4 pm

Dr. Andrew Murrison (Westbury): I shall endeavour to be disciplined.

It is important to put the subject into context. Universities in part exist to engender a powerful economy. I was taken with a note that the Save British Science Society sent me this morning. It informs me that universities contribute £35 billion each year to the UK economy. The society was also good enough to give a helpful breakdown of what that means by county. Public bodies invest £104 per head in universities and research institutes throughout the UK, and Wiltshire would receive £64 million if the same figure applied there. To my horror, however, I see that the Higher Education Funding Council for England spent nothing on teaching or research in Wiltshire last year. That might have something to do with the fact that the county has no universities, but hon. Members will nevertheless forgive me for regretting that Wiltshire does not receive £64 million.

The society tells me that only one of Wiltshire's Members of Parliament—or 17 per cent. of the total—has a science degree, but the figure for all Members is 9.7 per cent. My office telephoned the society to ascertain who that wonderful person was, and I found to my horror that it reckoned that I was a scientist. Given that I am a medic, I think that the society was stretching the term somewhat, although one gets some idea of the way in which medics are perceived. However, it was nice to be classified as a scientist, and I am sure that my physiology and biochemistry lecturer at the university of Bristol would be delighted.

It is highly regrettable that Wiltshire has no universities, but it is important to note that it has many schools. Like all Members, I visit many schools, and I talk to teachers. The Committee is currently studying science education for 14 to 19-year-olds, and it has come across from science teachers in particular that there have been inflationary pressures on A-level grades in recent years. That is important in the context of 5 and 5* university departments which, we are told, have increased from 23 to 55 per cent. of the total over the past nine years. I hope that that huge number reflects reality, but we must admit that inflationary pressures operate and ask what influence they have had on the apparently massive uplift in the success of our universities. From the evidence that I heard, I could make no progress in determining exactly where within the spectrum reality lay. The jury is out, and we should be a little cautious about popping the champagne corks and celebrating the apparent uplift in excellence at our universities. I hope that the figures reflect reality.

In her evidence, the Minister used the citation index to back up the view that there has been an uplift in university excellence. She rightly said that the index had increased by about 18 per cent. over the past four or five years. That gives some support to the notion that universities are excelling in a way that they did not a decade ago, but again we must sound a cautionary note. All of us who have recently been involved in research know that the number of libraries and publications has burgeoned, while the number of outlets for publications, papers, monographs and books has increased beyond recognition. We must accept that part of the 18 per cent. uplift over the past four or five years may be due to the increased number of outlets for scientific work and the liberal arts.

It would be wrong to debate this subject without mentioning some of the dissenters. When taking evidence, we met quite a few people who were concerned about the RAE's effect on universities. Professor Susan Bassnett, the pro vice-chancellor of Warwick university, made a powerful point about the proportion of researchers in 5 or 5* departments:

"What that 55 per cent. represents . . . is a morass of fiddling, finagling"—

I am not sure what that is, but the term is obviously used in Warwick—

"and horse trading. Nobody who works in a university in the UK in 2002 seriously believes that research is improving."

[Dr. Andrew Murrison]

Perhaps that was a little unkind. Of all the evidence that we took, Professor Bassnett was somewhat out on a limb. However, we must take account of comments from notable academics such as she.

Going a little closer to my home, the British Medical Association is not really impressed with the RAE. It said that it encourages researchers to stick to safe research—in other words, research that it knows will produce publications. Perhaps it is saying that, in a rapidly evolving field such as medicine, we need researchers who are prepared to take risks. We can all think of examples where risk-taking by scientists in the medical field has pushed back the frontiers of science; penicillin is the example that is usually quoted.

The influential Russell group of universities is not very keen either, perhaps surprisingly, given that it benefits from the system, and says that the RAE encourages short-termism. In that respect, the report's recommendation that we should shift to a seven-year period for assessing departments is welcome, because it would give scientists longer to produce a track record of publications and research and, of course, bring scientists in line with those in the liberal arts.

We are concerned that the exercise does not examine whole departments. It seems bizarre that portions of university departments should be shunted into the cupboard. I can think of other forms of investigation in the public sector where that would be completely incomprehensible. It would be bizarre if Ofsted decided to examine only part of a school, so that schools were allowed to demonstrate only their strengths rather than being examined across the board. One might take the view that examination should focus on those that are not achieving as well as they should be.

I am interested in what I believe is a developing distinction between research universities and those that are principally involved in teaching. The Chairman of the Science and Technology Select Committee raised the subject of medical schools. The Peninsula medical school in the south-west is one such example. It just happens that, by and large, medical schools have, rightly, been established in universities that have a research base of some sort, but I think that there may be a tendency to move towards teaching universities, and that may be accelerated by the need to have medical schools that provide teaching for a specific purpose. I have certainly heard criticisms that some new medical schools are merely doctor factories. That may be acceptable. In medical schools, there has always been a problem in trying to incorporate some research and basic science experience into the medical training. We may see a shift towards universities that are principally involved in teaching, and I would not be surprised if medical schools were to take the lead in that. It is difficult to see how some universities, such as Plymouth, can provide a fully functioning, research-based medical school like the one at Bristol university.

The Minister treated us to the usual argument about decades of underfunding, but when she got to the nitty-gritty, she was not prepared to tell us what she meant by that. In its evidence, Universities UK said that investment worth £10 billion was needed. The Minister prevaricated when I challenged her to say whether she agreed with that. Given her strong words about underfunding, one might imagine that £10 billion was about right, but we could not secure that commitment.

There is the important issue of priorities, which we discussed in the Select Committee. The Minister established several priorities. She told us that strengthening research excellence was one, along with increased participation, teaching and technology transfer. We then had a debate on how she was going to prioritise the priorities—priorities should be prioritised—but she did not fully take that up. I was a little concerned by that, particularly when she told me about more priorities. My hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) pursued the matter with her. As priorities generate funding, he was concerned about how the Minister would divvy up the finite resources available to her if priorities were not well set out.

I will moan a bit to the Minister because it is all very well talking the talk— we have had lots of talk about priorities and decades of underinvestment and so on—but she baulks at the specific, which shows an element of self-indulgence. We need her to give us a commitment on what her exact priorities will be and how much money she will give to universities, given that she feels that they have suffered from decades of neglect. I sound a cautionary note to universities because we are told that the Government have prioritised primary schools during their first tranche of education initiatives. However, having visited the primary schools in west Wiltshire, I see little evidence of that. My message to the universities in my area is "Do not hold your breath."

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That was not a particularly good start.

3.16 pm

Alan Howarth (Newport, East): I congratulate the Select Committee and its Chairman, my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson), on producing an expert, lucid and provocative report. Colleagues of the Committee have complete confidence that it will have an independent voice.

My hon. Friend made some feisty remarks about HEFCE. I hope that the working relations between the Select Committee and HEFCE will none the less remain cordial. It is exceedingly important, in the interests of the universities and of science and technology in particular, that that should be the case.

I add to my hon. Friend's tribute to United Kingdom academics and scientists. This is not the occasion to talk about the achievements of our academics working in the humanities field, but many of the issues that are addressed in the report apply equally to them. They share in the academic distinction that the research assessment exercise has revealed. I am pleased that the Select Committee, and the Government, in their response to the report, have paid vivid tribute to the remarkable achievements of academia in this country.

In a way, those achievements defy gravity. Given the Treasury brutalism of the 1990s, it is remarkable that, in 2001 and 2002, our higher education system produces world-class research, apparently on an ever-increasing scale, and educates students in ever-larger numbers. The trouble was that the more successful the system, the more the Treasury was inclined to think that it did not need to pay what it really cost. That was unjust and foolish.

Happily, Ministers are aware that that was the case. I was pleased that, in his speech to the Royal Society, the Prime Minister said:

> "The strength and creativity of our science base is a key national asset",

and, importantly, he added:

> "I want to make the UK the best place in the world for this research."

My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Science and Innovation, Lord Sainsbury of Turville, is, to my recollection, the best Science Minister ever. I am well placed to say that, having been Science Minister myself. I readily yield the palm to him. In recent years, I was a member of a ministerial group on science, of which he was the chair. His passion, knowledge, practicality and ambition for British science impressed me greatly.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Lifelong Learning and Higher Education is a formidable Whitehall warrior. The report was a shade unjust to my hon. Friend if it suggested that she does not do absolutely everything she can to secure the funding that the system needs. In fact, the Treasury is the ghost at this feast. That brings me to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, a corporeal ghost. He has already to his credit the facts that he has increased the science budget substantially—by 15 per cent. in the 1998 comprehensive spending review and by 7 per cent. in real terms annually since the 2000 spending review—and that £1.75 billion has been invested in university science infrastructure jointly with the Wellcome Trust, which should always receive tributes in this place.

My right hon. Friend also wants us to note the significance of the research and development tax credit which, he suggested in a speech to the Amicus trade union, might be worth about £500 million to companies that are innovative in research. It is interesting that he has chosen that policy route; it is an open-ended commitment on the part of the Treasury, whereas the Government, in their response to the Select Committee report, insist that the research assessment exercise cannot command a demand-led budget.

When I was Minister in the Department for Education and Science, I looked at the case for extending tax breaks to businesses to encourage them to undertake more research and development. That is an excellent thing if it is affordable. It is good for business culture. Its weakness is that it does not take account of quality. It is no substitute for proper support for the science base through the funding councils and the research councils.

We await with bated breath the outcome of the spending review, which we shall know soon. There are anxieties about what my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will feel he can afford. The Government have taken an enormous punt on health, which will pre-empt the allocation of many of the resources that may be available in future. Those responsible for ensuring that there is funding for transport and the police insist that their needs are large. Unquestionably, it is crucial that we invest in education and in research and development in the universities—that is indispensable for our economy, for our quality of life and for our intellectual culture.

Dr. Murrison: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Alan Howarth: If the hon. Gentleman will excuse me, we have so little time.

Investment is needed in many aspects of higher education: teaching and research; infrastructure—the transparency review has revealed how much that needs; the widening of participation, which gets more expensive the further we widen; the scandalous situation of academic salaries, which again is unjust and foolish; and students, whom we should like to do more to support. That just covers higher education, before we consider further education and schools. The economic prospects seem a little less assured than they did a few months ago. However difficult it might be for the Government to find the money to support our university system, it is essential that they do so.

It is extremely unfortunate that HEFCE could not fund the implications of the RAE announced last December. It is essential that it should be able to do so. It is not proper to ask the system to go through a vast procedure, to raise expectations and then to let people down. Previous assessment exercises were more or less fully funded, more or less straight away. The problem was that HEFCE had too little money. It is fair to note that the funding available to it to increase research in 2002–03 was a 5.9 per cent. increase to £940 million. However, it did not have the resources to fund the improvements that the RAE showed up, although significant improvements were predictable. Such money as it had was already tied up because of the three-year funding regime. When the RAE was published in December, the system was going to have to wait until July for announcements about what might be available for the future and until April 2003 at the earliest to receive the fruits of the public expenditure review.

There are advantages in three-year funding; it enables everybody to plan. However, there are disadvantages. It was unrealistic to expect HEFCE to keep money in its back pocket in the event that it might need to spend more as a result of the RAE. It could not withhold significant sums from an already underfunded higher education system. Nor was it realistic to expect the Department to keep money in reserve. Thus, the Department was able to find only another £30 million to help HEFCE to deal with the implications of the RAE, although the Select Committee computed that some £206 million was needed. The Treasury, however, could have found that sum from the contingency fund. It was affordable for Government as a whole and it is regrettable that they did not take action immediately.

The result was that, as Universities UK has impressed on us, all except five-star rated departments are to have their funding reduced. That is hugely demoralising. The university system is riven with discussions and rumours about department closures and redundancies of academics. The Association of University Teachers fears that up to 1,400 people may be redundant. It is immensely important to find the funding that we need in order to make good the situation as soon as we can.

[Alan Howarth]

Benefits have derived over the years from the RAE, including the discipline that it has brought to bear on research management and the focus on excellence. The Select Committee has also drawn attention to some possible unfortunate consequences. All will be examined in the review. However, it would be unfair to expect academics to go through a further RAE without the assurance that whatever might be implied by its findings would be funded. Only pure masochism or, ~~perhaps,~~ professionalism would enable them to do that. It is excellent that HEFCE has asked Sir Gareth Roberts to undertake the review of the procedure that is about to start, although it is a shame that it will begin in a somewhat blighted atmosphere.

The RAE has highlighted many issues. My hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Dr. Starkey) has drawn attention to those concerning women academics. I should like to mention the transparency review.

I trust that the Government will not await the findings of the review of the RAE before acting on the findings of the transparency review. HEFCE has told us that United Kingdom research in 1999–2000 was in deficit by £1.35 billion. That is more than the whole of the quality-related research funding that it has to distribute. Some 20 per cent. of that is due to shortfalls in payment by industry and charities, but 80 per cent., some £800 million, is a shortfall in what the Government ought to be paying.

Ten years ago, we spoke in Government about the low-price culture. In those days it was imposed by Government, because Government Departments would not pay what the research cost. I was pleased, therefore, that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, in his address to the Royal Society, said that the response of the Government must be to encourage openness, transparency and honesty. True, he was referring to agriculture, but that should apply in all Departments. He also said that improvements in the Government's handling of science should continue. What was happening was graphically explained by Professor Sir Howard Newby at the CVCP conference in November 2000, when he said:

> "Research is being supported by resources provided for teaching and other activities, by neglect of maintenance for infrastructure, by excessive staff hours".

Everybody colluded in that—the Government, universities, industry and charities. The universities colluded for far too long. Now that they have applied the methodology of the transparency and accountability review, it is for Government to honour the funding implications of their policy, through quality-related research funding, in research council grants and in the price paid for publicly funded contracts.

The Roberts report on the supply of people with science, technology, engineering and mathematics skills is enormously important. It draws attention to systemic problems that must be dealt with systemically. We do not have the qualified teachers that we need in schools and fewer pupils are taking mathematics and physical sciences at A-level. Between 1991 and 1999, the number of pupils taking A-level physics decreased by 21 per cent. and the number of pupils taking mathematics decreased by 9 per cent. At undergraduate level, between 1995 and 2000, entrants to chemistry degrees fell by 16 per cent. and entrants to physics and engineering degrees by 7 per cent.

There are problems of curricula and facilities in both schools and universities. The figures relating to postgraduates are also alarming. The number of doctorates awarded to UK-domiciled students—note, UK-domiciled—fell by 9 per cent. between 1995–96 and 1999–2000. However, there are problems of stipends and training. Equally, we face difficulties at post-doctoral level with pay and career uncertainties. There is poor recruitment of academic staff in mathematics and physical sciences, and the age profile gives rise to concern. Again, disgraceful pay lies at the heart of the difficulty.

I do not want to be too downbeat. We can be cheerful at the fact that the Government understand the problems. The Government commissioned the transparency review and the Roberts report, and they endorse the review of the RAE process that is being undertaken by HEFCE. The Government's response to the Select Committee report is far from defensive and acknowledges the issues. The biggest question is how much money they will produce to support the system, and we shall know that shortly. If they do not produce a step change in funding, I fear that the great creative endeavour of UK science could unravel, which would be a cultural and economic disaster.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Nicholas Winterton): Order. Once again, I appeal to all hon. Members to heed my request for succinct and brief speeches to enable every Member who wishes to speak to participate in this important debate.

3.32 pm

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I welcome the opportunity to follow the distinguished gentleman who has just spoken, the right hon. Member for Newport, East (Alan Howarth), who was a Science Minister in his day. I have not been a Science Minister, although I happen to be disciplined in the queen of sciences. To declare an interest, one of my daughters is a general practitioner and another teaches science in a secondary community school. I am an office bearer on the parliamentary Scientific Committee.

Although I welcome the report, I believe that it has given us grounds to seek a wider review of research and university funding. There is no point in saying that things must be done in certain ways if the finance is not available. I speak from my experience in Northern Ireland where, during the 1990s, research funding in universities decreased by 53 per cent., whereas in the UK as a whole, it increased by 9 per cent. It is important that we achieve a better balance. Although improvements have been made in universities in Northern Ireland, research funding to the university of Ulster—which did remarkably well in a recent review—is to be cut by 4 per cent. in the year 2002-03. When we compare universities in Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England, we see that £24 per head is allowed for science in Northern Ireland, compared with £58 in Scotland, £44 in England and £35 in Wales.

I was fascinated to discover in the paper presented to most of us by Science that of the 18 Members of Parliament who have a scientific degree, only one is from Northern Ireland. That works out at 5.2 per cent., compared with 9.7 per cent. of all MPs who have degrees in science. However, they miss an important aspect. Universities in Northern Ireland have produced some outstanding homespun scientific industries; one need think only of Northbrook Laboratories, Galen and Randox Laboratories, all of which emerged from the work done by the research departments at Queen's university.

The hon. Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) mentioned gamesmanship, and people in the sector are perhaps learning the parliamentary skill of spinning. However, he is right that not everything can be put down to gamesmanship, and if the nation is to benefit from the world of knowledge, we must recognise and support the positive developments that have taken place.

Queen's university, which is in my constituency, has undergone significant restructuring in recent years. In the words of the vice-chancellor, Sir George Bain, there

> "is no question that the painful change the University has gone through has strengthened Queen's."

However, the funding and the improved RAE showing that were expected as a reward for that pain have not materialised. That begs the question of what incentive our universities have to take difficult decisions and to improve their research abilities if their funding does not improve or is, indeed, cut. Funding should reflect the dramatic improvements that were made across the spectrum from 1996 to 2001. We should recognise those improvements, and not sit back and say, "If you could make improvements with that amount of funding, we're not going to give you more in the future." That is not what we should do.

I hope that we shall redress the anomalies, such as the dichotomy between research and teaching. Ultimately, a university should not be penalised for providing good teaching but not doing enough research. We should not focus only on the superb research, and forget that all research should be evaluated. Often, research that does not appear to be important at the time becomes the seed from which other knowledge springs. All research should, therefore, be evaluated and acknowledged.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his co-operation, and I hope that other hon. Members will follow his example.

3.37 pm

Mr. Gordon Marsden (Blackpool, South): I begin by declaring a non-pecuniary interest as a member of the advisory council of the Institute of Historical Research at London university, which has just been subject to the RAE process.

I have a long-standing interest in this issue as a former Open university lecturer. I was also the editor of "History Today" for 12 years, when, rather like the Chairman of the Committee, I listened long and hard to academics in the humanities and across the board complaining about the RAE. It is worth reminding hon. Members that such criticisms are not new; they were alluded to in Lord Dearing's report and in the 1998 report of the Science and Technology Committee. Indeed, the Select Committee on Education and Employment, of which I was privileged to be a member in the previous Parliament, touched on the issues in two reports; on student admissions and retention. It is worth reminding hon. Members of what we said:

> "We are concerned that the overall quality of teaching"—

this echoes what the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) said—

> "should not suffer as the result of emphasis placed upon success in the Research Assessment Exercise ... We recommend that HEFCE and individual institutions should look carefully at earmarking funds for outreach activities and pastoral care, and ensure that excellence shown in these areas, especially by young academics, should enhance rather than jeopardise career advancement and promotion."

That is important. Those in HEFCE can say until they are blue in the face that those other areas are looked at and, with respect, so can the Government. However, as other Members have pointed out, the hard fact is that interest follows the money and unless money is made available to those other areas for extending pastoral care, outreach in the community and teaching, the focus will change.

The Select Committee is to be commended on this excellent and robust report; such a report was necessary. I especially welcome the comments on the effects of the RAE on interdisciplinary study and on the distortion of scholarship. We are right to talk about the fears for blue-sky research in a system that sometimes seems to place too much emphasis on process and not enough on discovery. That point was touched on in an article by Sir Harry Kroto and Tony Stace—both distinguished professors at Sussex university—in *The Times Higher Education Supplement* in February 2002.

As someone who comes from the humanities field, I want to point out that there is a problem there too. The director of the Institute of Historical Research, Professor David Cannadine, made that point forcefully—I think at his inaugural lecture—when he said:

> "What might in an earlier era have been one big, important, ground-breaking article is now salami-sliced into three to give quantity of output. A lengthily researched and deeply pondered book becomes instead a prematurely published survey, or an arid monograph, which almost no one reads."

If such criticism is accurate, we are entitled to ask who the Jacob Bronowskis, AJP Taylors or Simon Schamas of 2020 to 2030 will be. That is an important point.

There is a significant lack of transparency about the reward to be gained from this process. Again, in giving evidence to the Select Committee on Education and Employment in April 2000, Dr. Roger Brown of the Southampton Institute—a distinguished critic of the operation of the RAE—was asked the following question by Professor Middlehurst:

> "If I am a bright young researcher and I have published the articles which get my university a 4 or 5, do I see the benefit?"

Dr. Brown replied;

> "If I may say so . . . the evidence shows that the funds do not go to the departments that gain the high ratings in the first place."

Nor do they go to the individuals concerned.

The RAE is an extremely time-consuming process. I noted the comments made earlier about the parallels with the early days of the Office for Standards in

[Mr. Gordon Marsden]

Education, which the Select Committee on Education and Employment also examined. We heard about box-loads of documents being brought along and so on. The Minister and the Department would do well to consider seriously the suggestions in the report for a lighter audit.

Because the matter is so important, we now face the horrendous possibility of some form of litigation. In an article in *The Times Higher Education Supplement* in May 2002 it was stated that:

> "A number of university departments are hoping a judicial review could force the Higher Education Funding Council for England to reassess the quality of their research".

That is particularly true of those in the environmental science department. We should not take that route.

There are scams in the systems. Someone referred to Professor Susan Bassnett, who earlier this year wrote in *The Guardian*:

> "About three years ago, there was a virtual cattle market in academics, with poaching going on behind every scene. Like several of my friends, I was offered a very high salary to go somewhere as a research professor, with the lure of no teaching or administration."

I can confirm that, from my experiences as editor of *History Today* and conversations that I had with several academics who were in that position and faced with that temptation.

The report mentions the collateral damage that can be caused by an over-emphasis on the RAE. I have touched on that point already. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) is deeply committed to the outreach and teaching processes. However, if there is not a weighting for other activities and if we cannot find some form of structure that is not so top-heavy, inevitably the bright 30-something young lecturer or academic, faced with the dilemma of whether to devote attention to research or to other activities, is likely to put the other activities to one side.

I echo what my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North has said; HEFCE has been both complacent and arrogant in its response to the report. There is ample evidence also that RAE, as it functions at present, inhibits collaboration. That is also true in the humanities. There are significant interdisciplinary problems in the sciences, but there are also problems in the humanities, particularly in the new universities.

The RAE, whether it wishes to or not, can also devalue teaching. There are no fiscal incentives for teaching as there are for the research, even though money may go in. The chairman of HEFCE admitted as much himself and the Minister made that point in the evidence that she gave to the Select Committee. She rightly refused to rank research above increased participation, teaching and technology transfer. That point needs to be made. We must also avoid creating an apartheid between teaching and research. The new universities must not lose out. Again, I think that HEFCE is complacent and smug, especially in view of the Association of University Teachers' statistics, which show that 75 per cent. of its funding is currently allocated to only 26 universities.

What should we do in response to all that? I have made a number of suggestions before and I will repeat a few of them today. There is scope to look at integrating both the RAE and the teaching quality assurance into a new broader higher education excellence audit that will be lighter and less bureaucratic. We can learn lessons from the organic way in which Ofsted has developed. We need to allow researchers to submit evidence of work in progress and to gain interim credit. That will reduce some of the pressures to publish prematurely in the sciences and humanities.

We must give credit for innovative ways of communicating and disseminating research and best practice in teaching both online and in published form. That is not something that the RAE does easily at the moment. We should ring-fence funding more directly to reward those who have won it for high ratings and prevent charges that this money is not accounted for properly.

I should be appalled if the RAE fixed the current academic situation in aspic. A Government who are committed to broadening education and higher education participation and a party that was the proud founder of the Open university should not support uncritically a system that threatens to preserve a hereditary elite of departments or universities via the RAE. That is why it cannot just be left to HEFCE. That is why the Government and my hon. Friend need to take a more active part in the process.

3.48 pm

Mr. Mark Hoban (Fareham): First, I apologise to my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Mrs. Laing) and the Minister for the fact that I will not be here for the winding-up speeches due to another commitment.

The tone of the debate so far has been a little negative. We ought to recognise that what we have seen over the course of the past four or five years is an improvement in the standing of our university research institutions. As the hon. Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) remarked in his opening comments, 31 per cent. of research staff were in 5* departments in 1996. That has increased to 55 per cent. in 2001. In Hampshire, 76 per cent. of staff submitted to the research assessment exercise are in five star departments. That is a great tribute to the universities of Southampton and Portsmouth, one of which is longer established, and the work that they have done to improve the standard of research in those two institutions.

Money should follow excellence, and we have a mechanism that has examined the quality of the research produced by universities. We may cavil at the games that universities play on who is in and out of the research exercise—it is important to revisit that process for the next round of reviews—but we should reward institutions that are academically successful. We must remember that in the environment in which universities operate, the market for high quality staff is not restricted just to the United Kingdom. They also compete in the international arena for good quality academic research staff. If we are able to fund world-leading departments, the chances are that we will recruit more of those staff to the UK and, crucially, retain those whom we have nurtured and prevent them from escaping in the 21st century version of the brain drain.

Having said that, I am conscious that whenever we monitor and reward results, negative behaviour starts to emerge. The hon. Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Marsden) referred to the cattle market in academics, which is one aspect. A transfer market will open up and although that may not be bad, it will make us wonder what behavioural measures are being encouraged in universities to generate improvements in performance. Three points are worth considering in discussing the distortion arising from the RAE; knowledge transfer, community involvement and regional presence.

The Committee examined whether HEFCE was properly rewarding the knowledge transfer activities of universities, and there was some doubt about whether universities were getting full value from their work. It was interesting to note that many felt that the panels that visited universities were a little light of industrial representatives who could have made a valuable contribution in assessing the quality of research and knowledge transfer. HEFCE should examine that problem in conjunction with employers and industry.

One piece of evidence to the report that reinforces that concern was the evidence that more patents were submitted by departments with low ratings for research output. That demonstrates that departments are producing research that requires patents but not getting full value, and we must examine that.

On community involvement, I represent an area that is dependent on technology transfers from universities for its future prosperity. After visiting schools in my constituency, I am conscious that we are not seeing scientists in classrooms or encouraging enough pupils to follow through to A-level and degree science. They are not being pulled through the school system because they do not see role models from universities and industry. If the pressure is always on academics to publish research, whether that is in salami-sliced packets or not, they may feel that activities that are not rewarded by an explicit funding stream are not valued. That might stop them going out into schools and the wider community to promote the message that science is important to the nation's economy.

On regional presence, the Department's response to our report said that it felt that there was a good regional coverage of research facilities. That clearly does not include the county of my hon. Friend the Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison), which received no money from HEFCE because it has no universities. That is one area where there is not a wide coverage of research facilities, but I am concerned by the increased concentration of resources. The funding weights, which show that resources have been moved from departments rated 5, 4, 3a and 3b, also demonstrate that we might see a greater concentration of funding in particular universities and the risk that, over time, good quality research will not exist in certain parts of the country. That is a major concern. If students and industry are to have access to high quality research facilities, the local economy will miss out.

From talking to parents and others, I am acutely aware, as is the Minister, that more students are living at home because of the problem of financing university participation. If students are forced to draw only on their local universities for higher education and if good quality research becomes concentrated in fewer universities, those staying at home might not have access to good quality research and the good quality teaching that comes with it. I am worried about such distortionary impacts arising from RAE.

The concentration of funding, coupled with the Government's desire to increase participation in higher education to 50 per cent., might force us—perhaps implicitly, rather than explicitly—down the United States route, where there are teaching universities and universities dealing with research and teaching. Colleagues on the Science and Technology Committee with more experience of universities than me expressed concern about a new binary divide opening up in higher education. When the comprehensive spending review is published next month, we must have a proper debate on the role and function of universities. We shall have to decide on our priorities.

3.56 pm

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): I offer you my congratulations on your recent award, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

It was important that the Science and Technology Committee exhaustively reviewed the application of the research assessment exercise in universities—at least as far as science and technology subjects were concerned. Aspects of the RAE have proved controversial, and those who were directly involved in the exercise in the past knew about the problems. I am pleased that the publication of the report has catalysed the HEFCE into promoting a report of its own. Under the chairmanship of Sir Gareth Roberts, I hope that it will examine the subject in greater depth.

We recognised that the RAE concentrated the minds of academics—in particular those who managed research in university departments—and resulted in better management of resources and facilities. Quality has improved, as the report states, but it has done so selectively, not across the board. I am especially concerned about the pressure on blue-skies research. We must promote the Harry Krotos of this world, and they must be given time to think. In universities today, too little time is available to think about research; we must lever that time back in again, otherwise we might miss out on some of the greatest inventions.

The RAE has had some beneficial effects, but we have also seen collateral damage. All of us—especially the HEFCE—must ask whether the exercise has been beneficial to university life as a whole. University life is not all about teaching and research: many aspects involve interaction with industry and the rest of the community. The RAE has certainly been a bureaucratic exercise. Sixty assessment panels assessed 200,000 publications submitted by 50,000 academics in the last RAE in 2001. Whenever we ask about the costs, it is difficult to obtain a hard figure. Is the expenditure of money and time worth while overall?

Universities contribute £35 billion to the UK economy. In some constituencies, including my own, they are major employers. Bolton Institute is one of 119 higher education institutions, albeit not yet a university even though it awards its own undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. I hope that it will be a university before too long.

Government investment in research and development in this country compares unfavourably with the rest of the world's developed countries, such as the G8. The

[Dr. Brian Iddon]

UK Government invest only 0.20 per cent. of gross domestic product, whereas Japan invests 0.29 per cent., Germany invests 0.34 per cent. and France invests 0.4 per cent. Those are significant differences.

My anxiety is that many university science, engineering and technology departments are closing. We cannot blame that all on the RAE, but some of the damage is collateral to it. As a result of the 2001 RAE, 55 out of 119 institutions have suffered real-terms cuts in research funding. Some are set to lose more than £1 million, others much more than that. Cranfield university is set to lose £3.1 million; other losers include the university of Greenwich; Queen Mary, university of London; and my old alma mater, the university of Hull. The Institute of Cancer Research is also set to lose money, which will be of interest to our Committee Chairman who takes a great interest in cancer research.

Only the research of departments with a 5* grading has been protected in the current RAE. All others have lost funding in real terms. The Committee estimated that the 2001 RAE required funding of £206 million, but the Government offered only £30 million. Perhaps the Minister will tell us what representations she has made in the 2002 comprehensive spending review to ensure that universities catch up in what in recent decades has been a loss-making exercise.

Cuts in research funding mean the loss of jobs, and in some cases the loss of departments. It is estimated that the RAE might cost 1,400 academic and support-staff jobs. Yesterday, we were lobbied by the Association of University Teachers, of which I remain an honorary member. I met representatives from Bolton Institute and from the university of Salford, where I taught chemistry for 31 years. Seventy jobs—30 academic-related and 40 support-staff jobs—might be affected at Salford, although some of the people involved will be redeployed in that or another university. A similar number of jobs are affected at UMIST—the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology—and 80 to 120 jobs might be affected at the London School of Medicine and Dentistry, Queen Mary, university of London. Those are significant numbers.

Those are examples of the damage that we are doing to our universities not only as a result of the RAE, but for other reasons. I was pleased by the Prime Minister's important speech at the Royal Society on 23 May. He said that he was committed to supporting and expanding the science base, which, after all, is our future. However, things are not so good on the ground. I am hopeful that the Government will reverse that position when the next comprehensive spending review is published.

Since the start of the RAE, 18 chemistry departments—at least, units of cost referring to chemistry—have been lost. We expect 11 more chemistry departments to suffer the same fate as a result of the current RAE. If that happens, only about one quarter of the 119 institutions that I mentioned will teach chemistry. More and more students live at home because of pressures of fees and maintenance costs, but whatever the reason, every student who has to live at home should be given the opportunity to study chemistry—or any other subject—at a local university. In many parts of the country, we are in danger of losing whole departments, which will result in students having to incur greater costs by living away from home.

I am worried about the middle league of universities. In the RAE, there is a struggle upwards to achieve. Those that get 3a or 3b will not be funded at all, despite the recommendation of the AUT—with which I agree—that they should be. Middle-league universities wrestle with themselves about whether they can keep research going. For example, one department at Salford university is set to close. Even though its staff have worked so hard that they have managed to get into fourth position and set the university on an upwards trend, Salford has decided that its chemistry department is in the middle league and can no longer be funded.

There has to be time to think in universities or we will miss out on some of the greatest innovations and discoveries. At the moment that time does not exist because huge pressure is put on academic staff. Businesses should be subject to business pressures, but it is unfortunate that universities are too. That is not always right.

4.5 pm

Adam Price (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): On behalf of Plaid Cymru, I commend the Select Committee for its impressively robust and independent report.

The Committee is right to point out that the RAE process has positive effects of stimulating universities into managing research and ensuring some strategic direction in the apportioning of funds. However, as the report says, there are several problems with the RAE process, which distorts research practice in many ways. An excellent example of that is the way in which university presses rush out publications. The university of Wales press, for example, has published about a dozen books in the past month—it usually produces at most one or two a month.

As the hon. Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) said, the RAE process distorts in another sense, and I shall concentrate on that in my brief remarks. Inherent in the RAE process is an explicit tendency to concentrate resources on existing centres of excellence. There is unresolved tension between the research driver and the third, regional mission in terms of technology transfer and regional presence.

The RAE process is an example of something that economists suggest should never occur: increasing returns to scale. If an institution achieves high-quality research it receives further funds, which enable it to consolidate its position of strength. It is a virtuous circle for successful institutions, whereas weaker university institutions can be locked into relative weakness.

As we have heard, that is of concern in Northern Ireland; it is also of concern to us in Wales. The report picked up two aspects of that issue, the first of which is local research. I read the Government response on that, but there is plenty of anecdotal evidence that local research tends to be regarded as parochial. Even Wales-level research—national research to us—in the social sciences and economics is not thought to have sufficient international stature or to be of sufficient interest to be published in refereed journals. That is of concern in terms of embedding university institutions within their regional context. Through the 100 years of its existence, there has been a long-running critique of the university of Wales based on the extent to which it has contributed to wider debates in policy terms, particularly in social sciences. Universities have increasingly emphasised their regional mission, but we should re-examine funding for local and regional research, and whether we could ensure that by providing other funding streams or by broadening the RAE process.

On research funding, the Government have placed the role of HE institutions at the forefront of the policy agenda in regional economics, in the Dearing report and in the White Paper on competitiveness and science and innovation. There have been substantial improvements to the science base in Wales. I am glad that Cardiff now has the seventh-best performing university institution in the United Kingdom. There has also been a significant improvement—a quadrupling—in the number of departments in Wales achieving 5* plus ratings since 1996.

Nevertheless, there is concern in Wales—as there is throughout the UK—about whether that improvement can be sustained with existing funding. For instance, Wales receives only 3 per cent. of research council funding. I acknowledge that that is a slightly different issue, but I have made the point that there are territorial dimensions to research funding. The Minister will be aware from the higher education review in Wales that Higher Education Wales—the umbrella body for university institutions—has called for additional investment of £90 million through the next CSR. It, too, will be waiting with bated breath for the Chancellor's response.

That is important because of the role that such institutions play in economic development. We are all aware of the importance of knowledge capital to driving economic growth, particularly in peripheral regions and those that are economically disadvantaged. The Minister will be alive to that tension, which was amply demonstrated by the debate about the synchrotron facility, which was situated in the Rutherford Appleton laboratory rather than in Cheshire.

The interesting debate about whether there is a role for the regionalisation of science policy mirrors a debate that has been taking place in the European Commission for many years between the directorate-general for regional policy and that for innovation and competitiveness. There is tension focused on global competitiveness: there is a clear argument for concentrating on existing centres of excellence, but if we do that, there is a danger that we will lock poorly performing regions into their current economic position.

The experience following the debate in the north-west is instructive. A regional science council has been formed, and there is interest in Wales for a Welsh science council. The Government's response leaves that door open, but might it be possible to consider a parallel network of science and technology councils throughout the UK alongside the network of regional development agencies in England and the existing institutions in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland? That would allow a creative interplay between regional development policy on one hand, and science and technology policy on the other.

4.12 pm

Dr. Desmond Turner (Brighton, Kemptown): The question that we should address is simple, although the answer is rather complicated. Does the outcome of the RAE contribute towards generating scientific excellence, or excellence in any other disciplines, within our university system? Especially after having participated in the Select Committee's own exercise on the RAE, I have to say that the jury is out.

The only thing that we can be certain of is that the apparent gradings of research have improved. However, gradings are just that: they are measured by artificial scales and do not necessarily mean what they seem to mean. Anyone who has been involved in research knows that every measurement process can introduce its own kind of bias.

To what is the dramatic improvement in performance due? Are researchers trying harder? Some of them may be. Or are they being measured differently? Are universities getting cleverer in some cases at manipulating the system to maximise their apparent performance, or is the improvement due in some measure—I suspect that it is—to the extra resources that the Government have put in since 1997? It is not difficult to get an accurate answer to that question. Whatever anyone thinks about the report on the RAE, it has been enthusiastically welcomed by university faculties, so we have struck some chords somewhere and we have some valid points to make.

There is no doubt that the system has been manipulated. For example, my local university, the university of Sussex, has achieved a remarkable increase, with a very high percentage of departments rated at 4 and 5, although not 5*. The university took the conscious—and clearly quite unwise—decision not to ration the faculty members that it put into the RAE; it put them all in. If it had been selective, it would have come out with some 5* departments and an increase in funding from HEFCE. As it is, it faces an £800,000 cut in its HEFCE funding.

Several hon. Members have mentioned Harry Kroto, who is a member of the faculty at the university of Sussex. Let us suppose, for the sake of RAE assessments, that he was a piece of property and the university was choosing a faculty to submit. It would not submit Harry because he does not publish that often, but when he does, he gets Nobel prizes. We really have to question the value of that quite seriously.

Hon. Members mentioned blue-skies research, which is absolutely essential. What pays for blue-skies research? HEFCE funding. Because they have not manipulated the system and got stars, the university of Sussex and many other institutions that have either retained or increased their RAE ratings face cuts and cannot sustain blue-skies research as they should—or if they can do so, it is only with great difficulty. There is no doubt that departments will close. It is an inexorable process.

The RAE and its adverse consequences—I hate to keep focusing on the adverse consequences, but they exist, so let us recognise them and count them—come on top of a very long period, which includes the 18 years of Tory rule, during which universities have not had proper funding, and faculties and the other support professions working in universities have been drastically underpaid.

[Dr. Desmond Turner]

Universities are now reaching a point of real crisis. What is the salary of a PhD research fellow who has had to go through a long period of poverty as a student? It is £24,000. What is the starting salary of a 20-year-old police constable? The same: £24,000. We have some peculiar values, starting here. Against the background of those strange values, the RAE as it has been constituted has not made things any better. I will not put it any more strongly than that.

If we were to realise the input into our society that universities have traditionally made and the need to maintain and build on it, whether it is for the intellectual or commercial health of society or whatever, we would understand that universities have a central role to play. They have been subject to gross under-investment for far too long. There are tremendous returns for the nation from investment in universities, but subjecting them to almost Thatcherite management assessment procedures—that is what the RAE is—then giving them less money when they have improved their performance, will not produce the goods.

The hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth), among others, referred to a dichotomy between research and teaching. There should be no dichotomy. If institutions are to be worthy of the label "university" research and teaching must go hand in hand. As a student, I was fired up by lectures—indeed, by any form of contact with scientists of repute who were at the cutting edge of research. One cannot describe the difference between hearing something from the horse's mouth and hearing someone who is simply repeating the textbook, however good a scholar he might be. We put such contact at risk by encouraging a dichotomy, by underfunding universities, and by distorting funding as the RAE has done.

The Chairman of the Select Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson), said that the Government's response to the report was broadly favourable. I think that the Government understood much of what we said. We had what could almost be called a stout rebuttal from the HEFCE, but that means very little given that it has said that it will set up a review. I agree with hon. Members who have suggested that any review should be carried out not by the HEFCE, but by an independent body. If they are looking for a body that could really do the job, I would suggest the Science and Technology Committee, although, this time, we would like to be paid, thank you.

There must be some way of measuring performance, but it need not be as bureaucratic as the RAE has been, or involve people in working to meet its requirements for most of five years, every five years, as the RAE has done. Incidentally, why must science faculties go through those hoops every five years, given that faculties of humanities and the arts do so only every seven years? There is no logic to that.

The RAE has resulted in scientific literature being stuffed with potboilers, because people do not wait to finish their research. They do not wait to publish the blockbuster paper, but have to publish their work in parts, before it is finished. In its present form, the RAE is a disincentive to the best flowering of British universities' potential.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The winding-up speeches from Front Benchers will begin at 5 o'clock, and four other hon. Members have indicated their interest in speaking before then. We shall adjourn at half past 5 o'clock.

4.24 pm

Mrs. Patsy Calton (Cheadle): My colleagues the hon. Members for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) and for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) have already mentioned the importance to the north-west of regeneration through science. I will not repeat the statistics, which I imagine we all received from the Save British Science Society, because I am sure that no one in this Chamber doubts the importance of science to regenerating the economy.

A few weeks ago, I attended the Biochemical Society annual general meeting. The major part of the morning's proceedings was taken up with the research assessment exercise. It came through clearly that there has been a dramatic increase in ratings. Some anxiety was expressed that the validity of those ratings might be a bit suspect, but there seems to be considerable confidence in the ratings increase because of the international peer review aspect of the research exercise. We should celebrate British science and the value for money that it brings, because for every £1 million spent it is first in the world in terms of publications and citations.

Concern was expressed at the meeting that some research departments had not included all their researchers in the exercise. The Government should take up that issue because it results in a degree of invalidation and makes it difficult to compare like with like. As members of the Biochemical Society recognised, the RAE has had a beneficial impact on quality, but there is no doubt that there is unnecessary bureaucracy and damage done to morale. It was repeatedly said that the exercise had produced improvements in quality, but funding had not followed. Hon. Members have already referred to the lack of comparability between remuneration for research posts and that for professional posts in other spheres.

There is less emphasis on quality teaching. Until a year ago in June, I was a science teacher, and I have listened carefully to the comments that have been made about teaching universities and research universities. I would be very concerned if we moved towards a situation in which there were universities that were only teaching universities. The vibrancy that comes from being part of a university community that produces research is important for young people.

However, I take issue with some of the comments made by the Chairman of the Select Committee. Researchers do not necessarily make good teachers: teaching is a completely different activity from research. It must be backed up by the sort of understanding that does not necessarily come from a university environment where research is seen as the main focus of activity. I am not sitting on the fence—both activities should go on in universities. My point is that the importance of good teaching is not receiving anywhere near enough emphasis.

One or two hon. Members mentioned that the decline in study of the physical sciences at A-level results from lack of contact with scientists, but as a teacher of A-level chemistry, I found all too often that the experience given to students by people engaged in active research was way over the students' heads and impossible for them to understand. In those circumstances, it was almost a waste of time. Young people need to be taught, and teaching is a different activity from reporting.

Dr. Desmond Turner: Does the hon. Lady agree that while that might be true of school sixth formers, university is different?

Mrs. Calton: I thank the hon. Gentleman for reminding me of the point that I was going to make. With the increased participation that we hope to achieve, there must be a recognition that some of the young people who come into our universities might require a much more careful teaching regime than some of their highly qualified predecessors did. That is not a matter of high versus low qualifications; it is because in this country we have a tendency to think that just because a person has not studied a subject—let us say chemistry, although it could be any subject—before university, he will not be capable of learning it. In fact, other countries have demonstrated that young people can pick up such subjects at university. They do so through effective teaching programmes rather than through an assumption that if they are sat and talked at for long enough by people who are stimulating enough, they will necessarily learn what they have to learn. There is far more to it than simply putting people in contact with university academics.

The Biochemical Society was concerned that the RAE would lead to the stifling of speculative research, referred to by hon. Members as blue-skies research. I have wondered once or twice what people will make of this debate in five years' time, when the blue-skies idea has moved on. The RAE just about rewards the good, but seedcorn is definitely needed for the up and coming. The clear message from the Biochemical Society was that expectations have been raised and dashed.

I am concerned that in my region the RAE has ended up as a driver in the proposed amalgamation of UMIST and the University of Manchester. There will be job losses in successful departments. I have had letters about that from constituents in the past few days. One said, among other things:

> "Had the quality of UMIST's research been funded at 2001 levels, UMIST would have received a cash increase of £2 million. Instead UMIST suffered a £2 million year-on-year real term cut as a result of the new funding formula."

I ought to declare an interest: I am a graduate of UMIST. My concern is that despite the undoubted potential benefit of amalgamation in terms of bringing together those with academic and commercial backgrounds, that does not seem necessarily to be the driver.

Another letter from a constituent stated:

> "Five star departments will receive an average 2.5 per cent. increase in funding, roughly equal to the current Retail Price Index but five rated departments face a 12.3 per cent. cut, and four rated departments a 29.2 per cent. cut in funding."

That is absolutely appalling. I am being signalled to wind up, and shall do so. I conclude by quoting one more letter, which states:

> "You and your constituents need well trained and capable scientists and engineers to design and operate the complex infrastructures on which we all depend. It is difficult to see how the current situation is going to enable our water, sewage treatment, power, pollution and health care systems to deliver better outcomes given these cuts in funding."

4.34 pm

Mr. Mark Hendrick (Preston): I congratulate the Select Committee on its excellent report. There is much that I was going to say that I will not now say, and much that I did not intend to say that I will now say. Having said that, I do not think that I will have time to say very much.

There is definitely a need for quality research. The RAE has an important role and must be seen to be effective in that role. Clearly, excellence is required. If we consider the number of organisations involved in higher education—the HEFCE, the research councils, the Department for Education and Skills and the Office of Science and Technology in the Department of Trade and Industry—we can see that many bodies have their fingers in the pie.

People have mentioned the UK's achievements, including our position as second highest in terms of publications and citations. That is an important parameter, but it is not necessarily an indication of quality; rather, it is an indication of quantity. Previous speakers have raised important issues about the quality of publications and citations. We must ensure that research is not carried out merely for its own sake, but that it makes an important contribution to the body of knowledge, so that where possible it can be exploited commercially and in other ways.

As someone who trained as an electronics engineer in the polytechnic sector, where the quality of teaching and links with industry were excellent—although my institution did not have a research background—I know that some of the polytechnics did a great job. To turn them into universities is one thing, but to expect them to behave exactly as the old universities do is difficult and not necessarily desirable. As a postgraduate, I spent four years at university in Manchester doing several qualifications—one of which, strangely enough, was a university of Manchester certification of education—and I totally agree with the analysis of the hon. Member for Cheadle (Mrs. Calton). I have met many lecturers who teach and many excellent academics and researchers, but not many who can do both.

I spent six years working as a design engineer at the Daresbury laboratories for the Science and Engineering Research Council. I also worked at the Royal Signals and Radar Establishment, now the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, in Malvern, so I have seen

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research from several angles. The Government are right to say that the system needs to be examined, and RAEs are extremely important in that context. The Select Committee report says:

> "Most of the evidence we have received has suggested that the RAE has had a broadly beneficial effect on research in the UK."

Most of us would agree with those sentiments.

Although it is important to encourage and fund excellence, we should not penalise the good. The best should not be the enemy of the good, and the more science and research that goes on, the better. From my political perspective, underfunding had a Thatcherite tone until 1997. That attitude should not be allowed to continue today.

Output is important in research practice, but it is also important that research does not take place in a vacuum. I have visited the United States several times, and I have always been impressed by the way in which universities are enmeshed with Government organisations, private companies and even the defence community. A whole establishment exists around science, and research is not seen simply as the academic pursuit of good science for its own sake.

Other hon. Members have mentioned morale and careers, so I shall not go into those issues. They have also made excellent points about pay and about the participation of women—the arguments about the latter being applicable in many other spheres of working life.

In his speech to the Royal Society, the Prime Minister drew attention to national priorities, some of which are controversial, such as genetic modification and the biosciences. Excellent work is being done in nanoscience, and subjects such as light-emitting polymers, e-science, the biomedical sciences and the post-genomic world are important for the future. We should focus on the long term, not just on the short and medium terms.

When I was at Daresbury, much of the work that was being done on the synchrotron generator and the Van de Graaff generator was aimed at blue-skies research. Such research is not a passing fad—I part company with the hon. Member for Cheadle in that regard. We need blue-skies research, and it must be publicly funded. If it is not, it will not for the most part be conducted at all, because only mega-corporations have the necessary finance.

Mrs. Calton: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hendrick: I will not give way, because other hon. Members want to speak. If the hon. Lady wants to raise the issue privately with me after the debate, I will be happy to chat with her. There is much to be done in blue-skies research.

Objective assessment is important in terms of rating, raising standards and improving strategies. Good research clearly contributes to the available body of knowledge and it can be commercially exploited, although it need not be. The aerospace industry is strong in my area, and it is important both because of the spin-offs to developing industries and because of the spin-in from companies that do their own research. However, although industry contributes a great deal to research, it is important that the public sector continues to contribute in a way that benefits science, business and commerce.

4.42 pm

Mr. Mike Hall (Weaver Vale): Congratulations, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on your knighthood, which is well deserved. I also congratulate the Science and Technology Committee on its excellent report, which will allow me later on to raise the specific constituency issue of the future of Daresbury. The laboratory is not quite in Cheshire, but in the borough of Halton, although I will not argue about the geography.

The report does three things. It draws attention to the fact that science research is underfunded, and calls on the Government to commit at least an extra £206 million in the comprehensive spending review. It also draws attention to the fact that several bodies are responsible for funding scientific research. The HEFCE funds universities, while the Office of Science and Technology directly funds places such as Daresbury laboratory. Those bodies must work together to ensure that science research has a future.

Paragraph 55, on page 24 of the report, notes that we need to introduce a regional dimension if we are to sustain a broad-based approach to science that extends across the whole economy and is not centralised around a few centres of excellence. I take precisely the same view.

I do not have many scientific qualifications and I have no degree in science, although I have a chemical technician's certificate from Stretford technical college. My degree is in education. In passing, I should congratulate my son, who told me today that he has got his BA (Hons) in history from Lancaster university. I am delighted for him even though he did not go into science. We shall certainly be popping a cork later.

Daresbury laboratory is the home of the synchrotron radiation source, which is a second-generation light source. For those who are not familiar with what goes on there, it accelerates nuclear particles to as close as possible to the speed of light in a circular accelerator; they are then drawn off in straight lines and the resulting bright beam is used to x-ray all sorts of things—all in real time. It has given us the solution to the structure of anthrax, has been influential in the study of the HIV/AIDS virus, and was instrumental in bringing forward the genome project, which my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick) mentioned. What is more, it tells us why Cadbury's chocolate tastes nice—it is because of the temperature at which it crystallises. Mr. Cadbury worked that out a long time ago, as laboratory staff were delighted to point out to His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh when he visited.

The third-generation light source, the DIAMOND project, is Daresbury's brainchild. It was designed at Daresbury, planning permission was obtained there, the geology of the site is absolutely right, and the local authority was signed up for it. Then the Government in their infinite wisdom decided to site it at the Rutherford Appleton laboratory.

That decision was made at the highest levels of Government because it was a three-party project, involving the British Government, the Wellcome Trust and the French Government. We were told that the

French Government and the Wellcome Trust would not go ahead with the project if it were anywhere other than at Rutherford Appleton. However, that decision did not take proper account of the science case: notice should have been taken of where the science would best have been delivered. If the project had been undertaken at Daresbury, there would not have been a dark period and it would have been under construction now. As I understand it, there is still no planning permission at Rutherford Appleton, the geology is suspect, and there is difficulty in recruiting the scientists to take the project forward.

The third-generation light source is crucial to British science. The Prime Minister said to me that if a project could be found that would sustain the Daresbury laboratory in future, the Government would back it. He challenged people in the north-west to find one, so we set up the Daresbury and north-west science group, bringing together academics—the report says that academics should work together with scientists—in a whole community approach. Professor Weightman of Liverpool university was a leading light of the group, and he proposed the CASIM project—the centre for accelerated science, imaging and medicine.

CASIM will use a fourth-generation light source—a medium-energy technology that accelerates protons as close as possible to the speed of light, and peels them off to x-ray matter almost in real time. It is blue-skies science with an absolutely practical application. It will be essential if we are to take British science forward. The imaging part is backed by expertise already in the north-west, and the medicine part—this is the most exciting aspect of the project—is to do with breast cancer. There are a number of problems with breast cancer, one of which is determining the exact location of the tumour—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is talking about an issue that is as important to me as it is to him, but it is not entirely relevant to the debate on the research assessment exercise. If it is, perhaps he will show me the connection.

Mr. Hall: I shall bring myself to order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If you look at paragraph 55 on page 24 of the RAE report, it mentions regional competence in the field and scientific excellence. We need this project in the north-west to ensure that we have a balance of scientific research across the whole of the scientific community.

The imaging will enable us to precisely locate the tumour in a woman's breast and to fire protons at it—smart bullets, which will go directly to the centre of the tumour with no collateral damage to surrounding tissue. If we can use that science in its practical application, we shall have a wonderful achievement.

My final point is that the location of the CASIM project has not yet been determined. It has passed through an excellent scientific peer review with glowing colours and the Government are now in a position to decide where to site it. We in the north-west have the expertise and the knowledge; it is our brainchild, and we have been challenged by the Prime Minister to bring the project forward. It is a leading world scientific research project and we want it at Daresbury laboratory in the north-west.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on being able to name page and paragraph. He must have anticipated my reaction.

4.49 pm

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am grateful to you for allowing me to catch your eye, given that I was unable to be here earlier. I gave prior notice to the Chairman of the Select Committee, but I apologise to you for not being here at that time.

In the time available I shall concentrate on just two points. First, the Committee's report was motivated by the fact that the quantum of research for science and technology after the RAE would be lower than it was between 1996 and 2001. There are many reasons for that, some of which are bound up with the fact that the number of active researchers in some subjects, such as physics, was substantially lower. However, the Committee viewed the overall effect with something approaching horror. The response of the Minister who gave evidence to the Committee, bodies such the HEFCE, and the chairman of Research Councils UK, Dr. John Taylor, is best described as the Committee hearing the sounds of violins playing as those authorities fiddled while the temple of science and technology was ablaze.

It is not good enough for any of those people to say that they noticed that the quantum of research for science and technology had gone down and that it is a pity. It is not good enough to say, as the research councils did, that it is up to universities to decide how to distribute the money and that if a university wants to give it to its chemistry department that has a 3b rating, it can, but that they knew that when the results came out the university would not do so but instead start thinking about closing departments that were no longer up to speed.

It is not reasonable to have a market, because science and technology skills are essential to the economic welfare of this country in the 21st century. It is vital for the future health, wealth and prosperity of this county that our youngsters have the opportunity to develop those skills, as many hon. Members have said today. It is important for our country to be able to provide the support that people in other countries need from those skills. That aspect of the report is fundamental. We want a Government response that says that they are committed to increasing, not lowering, the quantum of research for science and technology.

The second important element of the report is the ghost of the binary divide, to which several hon. Members have already referred. When my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick) was speaking about not expecting polytechnics to do as much research as universities, I noticed that the Minister nodded enthusiastically. Her nods are consistent with a willingness to accept the binary divide and split universities into those that research and those that teach. That aspiration is appalling because of its consequences for the vision of a society that is sophisticated in science and technology. I shall dwell on only one example, which concerns nursing.

The consequence of the RAE was that whereas 14 nursing departments in universities used to have long-term funding arising from their RAE ratings, only 10 will have that afterwards. That fact produced horror and alarm in the Council of Deans and Heads of UK

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University Faculties for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting, which wrote to various bodies outlining its problem.

It is worth examining the health of nursing research. The year 2001 saw a 20 per cent. increase—from 36 universities to 43—in submissions to the nursing panel. The same year saw a 37 per cent. increase from 455 to 623 in the number of staff submitting their projects, and a superb increase from three to 10 in the number of departments rated at 4 or above. Those figures all suggest that everything was pretty healthy in the nursing research world. However, much of the new research had taken place in the face of huge difficulties with resources. The results were achieved by working extraordinarily hard, often with little in the way of research support.

The 12 departments gaining a 3a were almost all in the old polytechnic sector. They had scrambled up, sometimes with a minimal amount of support, and accomplished nationally recognised research with international dimensions. For all that, they were offered one year before the cord was cut.

That is unacceptable for all the sciences. I have focused on nursing because it illustrates how muddled and confused is Government thinking on these matters. If someone tried to pull that off with a health report, people would think it was nuts. The problem is wholly concealed in the university system. Nurses are trained by nurse lecturers who have a first-rank research commitment, which, as many hon. Members have noted, makes their teaching much more effective. Trying to do that anywhere else would be regarded as crazy, but because a form of joined-up government is required between science policy and education and health, that misery has been foisted not just on nurses, but on environmental scientists, physiologists and others. The science funding system is under severe threat.

As a member of the external advisory board for Oxford university's Faculty of Literae Humaniores and of the National Committee for Philosophy, I should perhaps have declared a non-pecuniary interest. I would have liked to say more about those subjects, particularly history and philosophy of science and developments in mathematical logic. I shall desist—

Dr. Gibson: Oh thank God!

Mr. McWalter: Whenever I desist from such subjects, the Committee's response is always one of considerable relief.

I hope that the Minister will acknowledge the most important issue—that the quantum of resource for research in the sciences must not be lowered.

The Minister for Lifelong Learning and Higher Education (Margaret Hodge): It is not.

Mr. McWalter: Yes, it is. The Minister says that it is not, so I shall have to repeat the argument. The overall quantum of research funding has increased, but it is lower for science and technology. I thought that the figures were very clear, but they may need to be produced again. Secondly, I hope that the Minister will disavow any attempt to introduce the binary divide, given its appalling consequences for several subjects, including nursing.

4.59 pm

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): This has been an excellent debate, ably introduced by the Chairman of the Science and Technology Committee. It shows the value of having the opportunity to discuss Select Committee reports in Westminster Hall, albeit when equally important debates are being held in the Chamber in which many hon. Members want to be involved.

The debate has concentrated on science, which I hope does not introduce a false dichotomy with the humanities. The RAE covers both, as the hon. Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Marsden) pointed out. I hope that hon. Members will agree that science and technology are of great academic, social and economic importance. I hope that they will also agree on the primacy of research in the scientific framework that we must develop in this country.

We need the RAE if we are to have a system of allocating funds. If that system is to provide the dual support that we in this country currently enjoy, there must be some assessment of quality of research. We must ask whether the current system has exercised that function adequately, or whether it has introduced more distortions and failed to reward excellence. If the latter, we must also ask how it can be developed in the next few years to become better at identifying excellence. As the Select Committee says in its report, we must consider whether the RAE values excellence. It certainly recognises excellence, but does not necessarily reward it.

The RAE is largely valid and credible, but evidence has been adduced to the Committee that that is not the case in some areas. We must ask whether the process is overbearing or bureaucratic. Evidence to the Committee suggests that those on the receiving end often find that it is overbearing or bureaucratic and are concerned by that, although the HEFCE, which carried out the exercise, does not believe that to be the case. If we are going to have this monumental exercise, which involves a great deal of work by many people, we must ask whether it is seen to be fair and worth while. However fair or unfair it may seem to those on the receiving end, the lack of rewards this year raises a question mark over whether it has been worth while.

As many hon. Members have said, it would appear that the results are excellent this year. Some people asked whether that was because of a devaluing of the criteria used for judging excellence. Neither I nor the Select Committee believe that. There is undoubtedly some manipulation at the margins: in any assessment exercise, departments will try to play the game and secure an advantage. However, that does not devalue the basic validity of the exercise. We should be pleased that a growing number of research departments in this country appear to be carrying out good quality research as assessed in this country and against their international peers.

There are significant concerns about whether the current system has introduced distortions, such as to universities' priorities for maintaining and funding their departments. There is also concern about distortions in the research material, whether there is premature publishing, short-termism in research projects, and whether adequate attention is given to blue-skies research. I think my hon. Friend the Member for Cheadle (Mrs. Calton) meant that the term "blue-skies" was in danger of becoming out of date rather than the importance of blue-skies research in itself.

Mrs. Calton *indicated assent.*

Mr. Heath: I see that I correctly interpreted her remarks. The distortion of recruitment of both researchers and academic staff is a real problem. Those departments that are seen to be excellent will recruit the best academics, and the rating will become a self-fulfilling prophecy. I also worry—this point was raised in the Committee's deliberations—that there may be a growing distortion in undergraduate recruitment. Universities' prospectuses now tend to show if they have excellent RAE results, and that will attract the most able students. Again there is a self-fulfilling prophecy: those who want to teach the best students and be involved in the best research will go to the best universities, and that will denude the wider spread of able academic staff and undergraduates. There is a danger of distortion in external collaboration between disciplines and between institutions because of the perceived danger that that might affect the RAE scores.

I worry that we are rewarding research excellence at the expense of scholarship. Scholarship is rather important. My tutor was the world's greatest authority on the carotid body, but on nothing else. The carotid body, as anatomists and physiologists will know, is important, but it is not necessarily the whole of the systolic system. However, he was a scholarly man who knew how to direct his students towards those who knew about other subjects. That, and not simply the narrow band of research, should be rewarded.

The effect on teaching has already been mentioned. Until we get a premium on excellence in teaching to match the premium on excellence in research there will be a distortion in the whole university system. Dearing said that, yet it is still to be acted upon. It is perverse that the Minister has less time than anyone else to answer all the points that are made, but I hope that she has time to address the question of whether there is a developing binary divide between teaching institutions and research institutions. I wish that we were open about that. If we are to have excellent teaching institutions that do not attempt research, let us be clear that that is what we are creating. I hope that the Minister can give us that clarity today.

The hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) mentioned the lack of a strategic framework in both regional and structural terms in this country for science departments. That concerns me. It is another unexpected consequence of the system. The main problem is that we do not have the funding to reward the RAE system. Let us not get away from that. I am concerned that the HEFCE appears to be washing its hands of the problem because it only distributes the money. The Government seem to be washing their hands of the problem because they only supply the global sum. If the response from the DFES is an extra £30 million when £206 million is needed, there is obviously a very real problem.

The right hon. Member for Newport, East (Alan Howarth) quoted the Government's response that the budget cannot become demand led. Perhaps it cannot, but I am not sure that I agree with the Government. The budget should be excellence led. At the moment it is not, which artificially restricts what goes on. There could be no better example of that than the medical schools. I went last week to talk to the dean of Barts and the London medical school. The school was formed in 1996 after St. Bartholomew's and the Royal London hospitals were merged. It was assessed in 1997 and did not do very well, as might be expected. Having improved its research profile, it now finds that instead of the 40 per cent. increase that it should have had it has a 30 per cent. loss amounting to £2 million.

How can we expand medical education in this country, when the London hospitals alone are losing 500 academic places this year? That is their estimate of the result of the exercise and of other things such as the allocation to medicine compared with other subjects, the reduction in the course weights for laboratory and clinical subjects, and the loss of generic research stream. That is a very real problem. My concern is that the HEFCE's response is complacency, and the Minister's response, as seen in the Government's official response, is wishy-washy, albeit helpful. I hope that she will be able to harden up that response and tell us that there is a joined-up strategy for excellence in science, and that she will deliver it.

5.10 pm

Mrs. Eleanor Laing (Epping Forest): I begin by apologising for the absence from the debate of my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt). As many hon. Members will know, there is a clash between what is happening in this Chamber and—I almost said the real Chamber—the other Chamber, where there is a debate on individual learning accounts in which my hon. Friend has to take part. He is sorry not to be present for this debate and I am delighted to be here in his place.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) and his Committee on a thorough and incisive report. This is a serious subject, which has been well researched; the Committee has dealt with it seriously. It has given those of us who are not members of the Committee a good insight into the problem, and there is a problem.

Every hon. Member present probably agrees that higher education in the United Kingdom has been a world leader for a long time. We have an interest in creating and preserving the very high standards in the higher education establishments throughout the UK because of the beneficial effect that they have on the economy in terms of producing jobs, high quality graduates, good research and so on. It is a preferable area in which to invest and in which to create and preserve excellence. It is our duty as a nation to do that because the work of scientists and engineers brings benefits throughout the world, not only to the UK. We are discussing the very basis of that work and we all appreciate how crucial it is.

I am worried about the many points raised by the hon. Member for Norwich, North. To recap, it is my understanding that the Committee is drawing our

[Mrs. Eleanor Laing]

attention to serious defects such as the fact that the current system for the allocation of research funding produces distortions because people are working the system, as the hon. Gentleman said, and some of the best brains in the country are employed on that task. One would expect them to do the best for their own establishments and their own departments, but they are still working the system rather than carrying out their basic roles.

I am concerned about what I have read in the report and what hon. Members have said in the debate. I congratulate them; many experts on the subject are gathered in this Room, which is quite unusual in the House of Commons today. There are many people present who really know what they are talking about, which is why we have had such a constructive debate. I do not mean to flatter hon. Members, but it is rare to be able to say something like that.

It is worrying that the amount of time spent on this bureaucratic exercise is inevitably detracting from the work that the academics involved could, and should, otherwise be doing. As with so many of the Government's plans for the allocation of resources or bidding for funds, so much bureaucracy is involved that the system becomes top-heavy. As the hon. Member for Norwich, North said, there is also the encouragement of short-termism, which is again not necessarily a good thing in terms of research projects that last longer than a year. One-year funding is not always the right way of approaching that matter, although we all appreciate the tensions that exist between the Treasury, funding sources and the beneficiaries of funding.

I am also concerned about the discrimination against women; I am sure that the Minister will pick that up in her remarks because it is worrying. I am also concerned about the apparent bolstering of an elite at the expense of promoting new ideas. We should give a fair chance to establishments that have not yet reached the high status that some have achieved, as a result of their expertise or the length of time that they have been in the business.

Of most concern—as many hon. Members have mentioned—is the suggestion that HEFCE was complacent in its response to the Select Committee's report. I sincerely hope that the Minister will not be complacent in her response to the Select Committee and to HEFCE. The work that has gone into the report should be taken into consideration. The subject should not be considered for three hours this afternoon and then closed so that Ministers can say, "It's all right. We have debated that report and that bit of business is done." I hope that the Minister will undertake to act on the report's key recommendations and not merely say that the Government have dealt with it by discussing it. They are fond of paying lip service when that sounds good; putting their words into action is another matter.

The Government have also promised a review. As has so often happened, such a promise raises expectations that are subsequently kicked into the long grass, and then dashed. I hope that the Minister undertakes to put the report before the review body to make sure that the work done by the Select Committee is taken into consideration. I also hope that when the Minister receives the results of the review, she will act on its recommendations. If not, it will just be more bureaucratic money down the drain; money that would be better targeted on research projects than on looking at the way in which allocations are made. Allocations could indeed be more satisfactorily achieved and I hope that the Government will try to bring that about.

The debate has been well-informed. The name of Professor Sir Harry Kroto has been mentioned several times. Not being a scientist—

Dr. Gibson: The hon. Lady is a lawyer.

Mrs. Laing: Yes, I am afraid so, although in my younger, formative years I studied physics, chemistry and mathematics. Coincidentally, I was fortunate enough to meet Professor Sir Harry Kroto this morning and to hear him deliver an inspirational lecture that made me wish I had spent more time studying physics. One of the underlying points that he made was that politicians would be better off if they had a decent scientific and logical education—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear!"] I thought that there may be some assent to that suggestion. I entirely agree that the study of science trains the mind and I am glad that I had a little of such training in my early years. Sir Harry Kroto made me realise the importance not only of teaching science, but of generating information about scientific research on the internet and developing free thinking and ideas.

I am glad that all hon. Members who spoke recognised the importance of investment in science and technological research. I am sure that the Minister will say that she recognises that, too, but as with any debate, we all know that there is competition for funds. When Her Majesty's Treasury comes into play, the question is not what we want, but what we will be left with when it has torn things to bits. I therefore wish the Minister luck in her battle with the Treasury to secure the funding that is properly due to science and technology research.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I call the Minister for Lifelong Learning and Higher Education to reply.

5.20 pm

The Minister for Lifelong Learning and Higher Education (Margaret Hodge): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am glad that you got my ministerial responsibilities the right way round. This is the first time that I have served under your chairmanship since you received your recent honour, so I start by offering you many congratulations.

I also congratulate the Committee on its splendid report. I assure the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mrs. Laing) and the Committee that, as always, we take its recommendations seriously and we will have regard to the contributions made in this debate and the recommendations as we take the matter forward.

The standard of debate has been high, and as Harry Kroto has been mentioned several times, we should congratulate him; he becomes president of the Royal Society of Chemistry three weeks today. I must admit, however, that my hon. Friend the Member for Halton (Derek Twigg) and I had horrible science teachers. Had we had better ones, we might have got a little further.

In the few minutes I have left, I shall focus as much as possible on funding, because most hon. Members raised that issue. Is there enough? No, but it is better than it was. I hope that the Committee agrees that we have made a start in putting in place an appropriate infrastructure. Even in the financial year that has just started—2002–03—there has been almost a 6 per cent. increase in the amount of money going into research. We managed to find another £30 million to deal with the successful outcome of the RAE. Investment from the joint infrastructure fund and the science research investment fund has been considerable and every university that I go to recognises the impact that that has had on building the infrastructure. An 18 per cent. real-terms increase is going into higher education, so let us acknowledge that.

Equally, I acknowledge that there is still underfunding. Indeed, the Government have been pretty open about that. The transparency review considered the way in which research is funded, and shows that a 36 per cent. real cost subsidy is going into research. We know that there is a large capital backlog, that not enough money is going into renewal and that although quality-related research funding has increased over the past 17 years, it has not increased at the same rate as the research council investment. An imbalance is growing in that respect.

We do not spend enough relative to other competitor countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, and relative to our main competitor economies, such as America. Business does not invest enough in research and development either. Only 3 per cent. of businesses do that, so there is a long way to go, as we recognise.

Equally, with an assessment exercise based on quality, there will always be winners and losers. We must accept that fact in the dynamic world of research into which we want to move. I may be muddled and confused, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead (Mr. McWalter) said, but QR funding for nursing has increased by 83 per cent. in cash terms. Some may have lost, but others have gained. That is true in medical research—which the Liberal Democrat spokesman, the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) mentioned—and in other areas. Departments will lose and gain. That is part of the dynamism of an assessment exercise based on quality. It is a way of keeping improvement going in the system.

I also acknowledge the issues relating to engineering and science. That is why we have had the Roberts review. Again, we take seriously that issue, which was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon), the hon. Member for Cheadle (Mrs. Calton) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East (Alan Howarth). A number of hon. Members talked about the unintended consequences and distortions of the RAE, which is one reason why we want to go ahead with the review. Positive ideas have arisen from the report and the contributions that we have heard today.

My hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Marsden) always suggests positive ideas and we will examine them as we progress with the review. Has the system been manipulated? Such questions in a sense become academic. We should focus on real improvements in the quality of research, on which we want to build.

My hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Dr. Starkey) spoke about discrimination against women. She is right that it applies not only to research, but throughout the higher education system. Only six or seven vice-chancellors are women. We are constantly trying to improve that.

I want to move on to blue-skies research. The purpose of RAE and QR funding is to give universities the freedom to engage in such research. The research council's money will focus on particular projects. The irony is that we are sometimes criticised for placing too much emphasis on blue-skies research and not enough on applied research. Today's debate touched on that viewpoint. Perhaps we have the right balance between QR and the research councils. Even blue-skies research requires assessment. There will always be a finite quantum and we will always have to choose where to invest the money.

Several hon. Members spoke about the regional nature of research. My hon. Friend the Member for Weaver Vale (Mr. Hall) made a powerful case, which my colleagues in the Department of Trade and Industry are considering. The hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) made a similar point. We have made a start with HEROBIC and HEIF funding and we anticipate progress in future.

Several hon. Members—including my hon. Friends the Members for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson), for Blackpool, South, for Preston (Mr. Hendrick) and for Hemel Hempstead, and the hon. Members for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth), for Cheadle and for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath)—spoke about the balance between teaching and research. It is an important issue, on which I want to encourage debate. Under the current system of funding, everyone goes after RAE or research money and numbers. We should be seeking new ways of encouraging universities to focus on what they do best, whether that is knowledge transfer, teaching, research or widening participation.

The system requires incentives to encourage those aims, but that does not mean a black and white solution of one or another. This afternoon's debate was, to be honest, muddled. Not all researchers are good teachers and teaching needs to be valued in itself, and properly funded. Priorities will always exist. RAE was never a mechanism to determine the quantum of funding. That is done through the spending reviews with which we are now engaged. RAE is a mechanism to determine quality.

Finally, we should all congratulate the higher education sector this afternoon. RAE has been a success; despite some suspicion at the margin, it has brought about a massive improvement in research, which is splendid. It puts UK higher education at the top of the league internationally, however one measures it.

RAE is a good thing. It may need review and reform, but it provides flexibility and plurality and allows us to fund the unfashionable and the unconventional. We should build on that. The issues raised this afternoon—about frequency, bunching at the top, measuring research output, interdisciplinary research, bureaucracy, costs, research for external clients and so forth—are all legitimate matters for further consideration.

It all depends on the Chancellor and I shall end by quoting from his Mansion house speech last night. Speaking optimistically, he said that he wanted to

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improve science education and the science and technology skills base in Britain. He announced his commitment that the

> "Spending Review will take forward our manifesto commitment to set up a— National Centre for Excellence in teaching ... Complete the re-equipment of science laboratories ... Improve funding of science, technology and engineering postgraduate research ... And ensure that universities can finance not just teaching and academic research but a third specialism—commercialisation of university inventions— with funding for the Higher Education Innovation Fund and for Science Enterprise Centres: our aim to ensure that British inventions mean more British businesses and more British jobs."

I hope that hon. Members will view the report in a similarly optimistic mood.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I believe that 16 hon. Members have spoken within three hours of an excellent debate. I congratulate all hon. Members.

It being half-past Five o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the sitting lapsed, without Question put.

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  - The Rt. Hon. The Baroness Hollis of Heigham
  - Malcolm Wicks, Esq, MP
  - Maria Eagle, MP

Her Majesty's Household—
- LORD CHAMBERLAIN—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Luce, GCVO
- LORD STEWARD—The Viscount Ridley, KG, GCVO, TD
- MASTER OF THE HORSE—The Lord Vestey
- TREASURER—Keith Hill, Esq, MP
- COMPTROLLER—Thomas McAvoy, Esq, MP
- VICE-CHAMBERLAIN—Gerry Sutcliffe, Esq, MP
- CAPTAIN OF THE HONOURABLE CORPS OF GENTLEMEN-AT-ARMS—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Grocott
- CAPTAIN OF THE QUEEN'S BODYGUARD OF THE YEOMAN OF THE GUARD—The Lord McIntosh of Haringey
- LORDS IN WAITING—The Lord Davies of Oldham, The Lord Bassam of Brighton
- BARONESS IN WAITING—The Baroness Farrington of Ribbleton, The Baroness Andrews, OBE, The Baroness Crawley

SECOND CHURCH ESTATES COMMISSIONER, REPRESENTING CHURCH COMMISSIONERS—Stuart Bell, Esq, MP

HOUSE OF COMMONS

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First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means—Mrs. Sylvia Heal, MP

Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means—Sir Michael Lord, MP

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House of Commons Commission—
The Rt. Hon. The Speaker (Chairman), The Rt. Hon. Robin Cook, MP, The Rt. Hon. Eric Forth, MP, Archy Kirkwood, Esq, MP, Stuart Bell, Esq, MP, Sir Patrick Cormack, FSA, MP

Secretary of the Commission—R. J. Rogers

Audit Committee—
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Secretary of the Audit Committee—Mrs. S. A. R. Davies

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Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards—Philip Mawer

17 June 2002

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 17 June 2002

WALES

Assembly Elections

Kevin Brennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what responsibility he has for amendments to electoral law in relation to elections to the National Assembly for Wales. [62545]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I am responsible for making provisions, under section 11 of the Government of Wales Act 1998, in relation to the arrangements for Assembly elections. These provisions are set out in the National Assembly for Wales (Representation of the People) Order 1999 (SI 1999 No. 450). Earlier this year, important amendments were made to these provisions.

I am currently considering further changes, with a view to bringing arrangements for the 2003 Assembly elections into line with those for elections to this House.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Refurbishment Projects

Ms Walley: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee what refurbishment projects *(a)* are in progress and *(b)* will start within the next six months; and what action is being taken to ensure that these will procure certified timber. [59771]

Derek Conway: The major projects currently in progress are:

Norman Shaw South
Victoria Tower archive storage
Replacement of main Palace boilers and chillers.

The major maintenance and refurbishment projects due to start within the next six months are:

Refurbishment of Committee Rooms 7, 8 and 9
Commons Court and Commons Inner Court stone restoration
Ladies' Gallery lift overhaul
Stone restoration and security near base of Clock Tower
Removal of huts and restoration of Speaker's Green
Removal of roof-top huts in Cloister Court
Basement plant room modernisation
Asbestos removal
Encaustic tile replacement, St. Stephen's Hall
New Palace Yard and Black Rod's Garden security works
Fire precautions and PDVN
Hansard office reorganisation.

In addition, the following major projects are due to start within the next six months in the House of Lords:

Old Palace Yard phase 3
Asphalt roof near Chancellor's Court
Moses Room roof and ceiling.

In 2000 a clause was added to the General Specification used for parliamentary projects requiring certification that timber is supplied from sustainably managed sources. For contracts written before that, certification is nevertheless sought from the contractors.

Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards

David Winnick: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, how many days a week the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards is working; and if he will make a statement. [61324]

Mr. Kirkwood *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young) on 12 June 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1245–46W.

MINISTER FOR WOMEN

Members of Parliament

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Minister for Women what steps the Government have taken to remove the barriers to women's membership of Parliament. [59079]

Ms Hewitt: The Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Bill completed its parliamentary stages on 28 January, and received Royal Assent in February. The Act enables political parties to use positive measures in the selection of candidates with an aim to reduce inequality in the numbers of men and women elected to our democratic institutions.

Employment Law (Transsexuals)

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Minister for Women what assessment she has made about the applicability of employment law relating to a transsexual person who is now a woman. [57278]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* The Sex Discrimination Act (Gender Reassignment) Regulations 1999 amended the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 in the fields of employment and vocational training to give protection against discrimination to people intending to undergo, undergoing, or who have undergone gender reassignment. The regulations help individuals who undergo reassignment to either sex. The Equal Opportunities Commission's powers were extended by the regulations so it can help people experiencing discrimination on these grounds. The commission is taking this forward effectively, and about two thirds of the requests it receives relate to employment or vocational training. A few individuals have taken cases to employment tribunals under the normal process for sex discrimination claims.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Correspondence

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many letters were received by each Minister in his Department in each month since June 1997. [59313]

Mr. Straw: The Cabinet Office publishes an annual report to Parliament on the volume of Members' correspondence received by Departments. The report for 2001 was published on Friday 24 May. Copies of previous reports are available in the Library of the House.

Records of other correspondence received by my Department are not kept centrally and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects to provide the first of the monthly updates for the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam concerning the case of his constituent Mr. Jason Clark's father. [62542]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Friday 21 June.

Consultation

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the public consultations undertaken by his Department since June 2001, stating in each case the *(a)* number of respondents and *(b)* percentage of those specifically consulted who responded. [60151]

Mr. Straw: My Department has undertaken two formal written public consultations since June 2001:

(1) A Green Paper on Private Military Companies—options for regulation; and

(2) A Green Paper on Strengthening the Biological and Toxic Weapons Convention: Countering the Threat from biological Weapons. Neither consultation will be completed until September this year.

Middle East

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the Palestinians from the Church of the Nativity resident in *(a)* the Irish Republic and *(b)* other parts of the EU will be free to travel to the United Kingdom; and what steps will be taken to monitor attempts to enter the United Kingdom. [60178]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* The Common Position of the Council of the European Union concerning the temporary reception by member states of the European Union of certain Palestinians provides that acceptance in a member state does not imply a right for the persons concerned to move freely within the territories of the member states and that the validity of the national permit shall be limited to the territory of the member state concerned.

Any Palestinian received in another member state who sought to travel to the UK would normally require a visa for that purpose which, if applied for, would be considered in the normal way. Entry to the UK from the Republic of Ireland is governed by the Immigration Act 1971 and the Immigration (Control of Entry through the Republic of Ireland) Order 1972 and any visa national who enters the UK without the requisite visa is an illegal entrant. The normal expectation is that such an illegal entrant would be returned to the Republic of Ireland.

Movements into and out of the United Kingdom will be monitored in the usual way.

Staff Training

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much the Department has spent on staff training and development in each of the last five years. [61066]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has spent the following on training and development for UK-based and local staff both in the UK and overseas.

	£
1997–98	6,261,972
1998–99	7,233,036
1999–2000	6,671,147
2000–01	9,874,047
2001–02	11,331,631

Sustainable Development

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 23 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 528W, on the EU meeting at Brussels, if he will make a statement on the nature and aim of the substantive contribution by relevant council bodies on the EU's role in the World Summit on Sustainable Development process; and if he will list the bodies involved in making that contribution. [61403]

Peter Hain: The Seville European Council is the opportunity for the EU to finalise its preparations for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD). The European Council Conclusions should set out major EU priorities for Johannesburg, focusing on poverty eradication and key initiatives such as freshwater and sanitation, and sustainable energy.

The Development Council, General Affairs Council and Seville European Council are all involved in producing the Conclusions, incorporating contributions from ECOFIN, the Environment Council and Article 133 Committee on trade. The Development Council of 30 May has for example already agreed substantive Conclusions setting out key priorities for action that the EU would like to be taken up at WSSD and detailing the external dimension of the EU Sustainable Development Strategy. Copies of these are available on the EU Council of Ministers website at http://ue.eu.int/pressData/en/dev/70867.pdf.

President Mugabe

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he was informed of the intention of President Mugabe to travel to Rome via the United Kingdom; what steps he took; and what steps he will take in future to prevent such transfers. [61393]

Mr. MacShane: We understand that Mugabe and his entourage flew directly from Harare to Rome and, contrary to media reports, did not transit London.

High Commission, Harare

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what Jubilee celebrations took place at the high commission in Harare; what the costs were; and which Zimbabwean nationals were invited to the functions hosted by the high commissioner and his officials during the Jubilee celebrations. [61865]

Mr. Straw: To mark the Jubilee, the high commissioner hosted a reception at his residence on the afternoon of Friday 31 May. A few bills have still to be presented, but the cost of the event to date is £6,953.88. 781 guests and their partners were invited. We do not have a record of the nationality of the guests, but the high commission estimates that about half were Zimbabwean nationals. No Zimbabwean on the EU travel ban list was invited.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what guidelines exist with regard to officials from the high commission in Harare visiting farms which have been seized or are under threat of seizure; and how many farms have been visited since January. [61863]

Mr. Straw: There are no guidelines on British high commission staff visiting farms. Since January, high commission officials have visited around half a dozen farms to which they were invited, in order to see the situation at first hand. As a result of the attention focused on British Government policy and activity during the presidential election campaign, and the overall level of political violence, high commission staff remained in Harare in the period 20 February to 20 March, unless given specific permission by the high commissioner to travel internally. This curtailed visits to rural areas. The high commission is also aware that in current circumstances some farmers do not think it helpful to have a British diplomat visit their farm since this would expose them to further harassment by the authorities.

11 September

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether officers from *(a)* MI6 and *(b)* the British embassy in Washington have been requested to give evidence to the United States congressional hearings into the intelligence context of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks. [61961]

Mr. Straw: No British official has to date been requested to give evidence to the United States congressional hearings.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library a copy of the guidelines issued for civil servants in his Department on answering written questions. [61994]

Mr. Straw: Yes. There are two sets of guidance: a brief one, enclosed with our request for draft FCO written answers; a more detailed guide relating to such questions on the FCO intranet site. Both sets of guidance have already been made public.

Kisangani

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has had with the Government of *(a)* the Democratic Republic of Congo and *(b)* Rwanda regarding the reported massacre in Kisangani of civilians by Rwandan soldiers. [61867]

Mr. MacShane: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, along with his French, Belgian and US counterparts, wrote to the Presidents of Rwanda and the DRC following the recent events in Kisangani. They expressed concern about the situation in Kisangani and urged President Kagame to exert his influence on the RCD-G to reduce tension in Kisangani and stop the use of force against the civilian population. At the same time they urged President Kabila to refrain from any action that could escalate the military situation on the ground.

Gibraltar

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if it is Government policy to seek a Spa[illegible]h commitment to operate unhindered red and green customs channels between that country and Gibraltar. [62320]

Mr. Straw: The Government have, in the course of the Brussels Process talks, consistently urged the Spanish Government to ensure that traffic flows smoothly from Gibraltar into Spain.

We welcome the fact that, on 21 March, the Spanish Government opened a new second channel aimed at significantly seeding up the passage of private vehicles across the border.

We shall continue to monitor the situation and discuss with Spanish and Gibraltarian authorities how delays might be further reduced.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the Government's policy is on the people of Gibraltar's rights in the free movement of services, capital and persons as *(a)* EU citizens and *(b)* a constituent territory of the EU. [62317]

Mr. Straw: The people of Gibraltar enjoy the benefits of free movement of persons, services and capital by virtue of the provisions of Community law relating to these matters, as far as they apply to Gibraltar. I refer the right hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 10 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 821W.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the Government's policy is on *(a)* the provision of more telephone lines for Gibraltar and *(b)* recognition from Spain of the Gibraltar international dialling code. [62420]

Mr. Straw: We remain concerned about the various telecommunications problems that Gibraltar is experiencing. We are concerned that the new telephone numbers offered by Spain at the 26 July Brussels Process Ministerial meeting are still not in use. We have raised this with the Spanish; and invited experts from the Government of Gibraltar to a meeting, with Spain and us, to seek a way forward. But we have always said that more numbers alone will not solve the longer term problems.

Our objective remains Spanish recognition of Gibraltar's international dialling code, which we believe is the only viable long-term solution.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if it is Government policy to seek Spanish commitment to open up maritime and air links between that country and Gibraltar. [62315]

Mr. Straw: Yes. In accordance with the terms of the Brussels Communique, November 1984, the talks under the Brussels Process are aimed at overcoming all the differences between the UK and Spain over Gibraltar and at promoting co-operation on a mutually beneficial basis on economic, cultural, touristic, aviation, military and environment matters. These talks are continuing.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if it is Government policy to seek the recognition of Gibraltarian identity cards by Spain. [62316]

Mr. Straw: Yes. It has been the Government's policy to seek recognition by Spain of Gibraltar ID cards. This was achieved as part of the agreement concluded with Spain in April 2000.

Gibraltar ID cards, as reformatted, are therefore now accepted by the Spanish Government.

BBC World Service

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 22 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 19W, on the BBC World Service, what extra funding has been given to regional language services to the Muslim world; and what further action he proposes to take in relation to such services. [62170]

Mr. MacShane: We have provided the World Service with an extra £2.85 million for the enhancement of regional language services after 11 September 2001. This is additional to an uplift of £64 million in funding for the World Service for the present Spending Review period. The uplift over the baseline in this FY alone is £24 million. We maintain constant contact with the World Service over a range of issues, including funding.

EU Applicants

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library the Government's assessment of the economic and social impact on the United Kingdom of the accession to the EU of the eastern European applicant nations. [61765]

Peter Hain: The Government have not made an integrated study of the economic and social impact of EU enlargement on the United Kingdom. However, independent economic studies by the European Round Table of Industrialists and the Centre for Economic Policy Reform show that EU enlargement could increase UK GDP by £1.75 million and create 300,000 jobs among the EU-15. I have placed copies of these reports in the House of Commons Library.

European Diplomatic Service

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the Government's policy is on the setting up of a common European diplomatic service. [62319]

Mr. Straw: We believe that it is for EU member states to organise their respective diplomatic services at the national level. There are already 138 bilateral and five multilateral European Commission delegations overseas.

Tibet

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he made to Vice Premier Wen Jiabao and other Chinese leaders concerning the situation in Tibet during his recent visit to China; and what replies he received. [61767]

Mr. MacShane: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has not visited China recently. He most recently raised Tibet with his Chinese counterpart Tang Jiaxuan in January this year.

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what *(a)* discussions he had with and *(b)* representations he made to Li Ruihuan, Chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, concerning the situation in Tibet, during Chairman Li's recent visit to the UK; and what response he received. [61768]

Mr. MacShane: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary did not meet Li Ruihuan during his recent visit to the UK. However, the Lord Chancellor raised a range of human rights issues, including Tibet during his meeting with Li Ruihuan last month. Li Ruihuan's response was along standard lines.

General Affairs Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the outcome of the General Affairs Council meeting of 10 and 11 June was; what the Government's stance on the issues discussed, including its voting record was; and if he will make a statement. [62930]

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the conclusions of the General Affairs Council at Luxembourg on 10 June. [61876]

Peter Hain: I represented the UK at the General Affairs Council in Luxembourg on 10 June.

Enlargement

The Council welcomed progress made under the Spanish presidency, including on aspects of the agriculture chapter. The Council instructed experts to pursue work on the question of direct payment.

The Council reaffirmed the Union's commitment to an inclusive approach to enlargement. The Council reiterated its determination to bring the accession negotiations with the candidate countries that are ready to a successful conclusion by the end of 2002. In that context, it welcomed the Commission's proposals for strengthening the candidate countries' administrative capacity, and the provision of further special financial assistance from the

PHARE programme. It called on the Commission to continue with regular monitoring of candidate countries' practical implementation of the Community acquis.

Additional customs duties on imports of certain US products

The Council gave unanimous support to the Commission's proposal for a regulation on additional custom duties for certain US products. This will be formally adopted at the 13 June JHA Council, entering into force by 18 June to meet the WTO deadline.

India/Pakistan

The Council expressed grave concern about the crisis between India and Pakistan. It called on Pakistan to take visible, decisive and verifiable steps to: seal the Line of Control; restrain, and stop supply of, militant groups in Kashmir; and close the training camps on Pakistan's side of the Line of Control. The Council called for diplomatic and military de-escalation, implementation of a ceasefire and the resumption of dialogue. The Council underlined the EU's commitment to help defuse the immediate crisis, and to support efforts to achieve a lasting resolution to the differences between India and Pakistan.

New Partnership for Africa's Development

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects the NEPAD initiative to be implemented. [62093]

Mr. MacShane: The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NePAD) is an African-led initiative which acknowledges that Africa's development requires long-term commitments. The pace of its development and implementation will be set by Africa's leaders.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions his Department has had with Governments in Africa concerning the NEPAD initiative. [62092]

Mr. MacShane: My noble Friend Baroness Amos, the Prime Minister's personal representative to the G8 on Africa, has frequent discussions with African leaders concerning NePAD. For example, she had extensive discussions with members of the NePAD steering committee on 16–18 May in Maputo.

Zimbabwe

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which international organisations Zimbabweans subject to an EU travel ban are allowed to attend. [62318]

Mr. Straw: International treaty obligations oblige EU member states to grant exemptions to the travel ban for attendance at meetings of some international organisations, for example the United Nations and Interpol. Restrictions remain on movement outside of meetings.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he plans to take further measures against the Government of Zimbabwe following the re-election of President Mugabe. [62094]

Mr. MacShane: Zimbabwe will be discussed today at the General Affairs Council. EU Foreign Ministers will review developments on the ground. Extending measures against Zimbabwe's ruling party remains under consideration.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Defence Lawyers

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Solicitor-General what obligation rests on a defence lawyer to *(a)* ascertain and *(b)* believe the truth of matter pleaded in defence. [55456]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 14 May 2002]:* These obligations are set out in the professional codes of conduct of the Bar Council and the Law Society.

Leila Khalid

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Solicitor-General what outstanding charges there are against Leila Khalid; and if he will make a statement. [59003]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* No criminal charges were ever brought against Leila Khalid in this country; to the best of my knowledge there are no warrants or criminal proceedings in relation to Ms Khalid in this jurisdiction. Therefore none remain outstanding.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Solicitor-General if she will make a decision on the outstanding charges against Leila Khalid arising out of hijackings with a view to prosecution; and if she will make a statement. [59007]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* No criminal charges were ever brought against Leila Khalid in this country, therefore none remain outstanding; to the best of my knowledge there are no warrants or criminal proceedings in relation to Ms Khalid in this jurisdiction. It follows that there is no decision to be made.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Teachers' Pay

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the *(a)* total teachers pay costs and *(b)* average teachers pay were in each LEA in 2001–02. [60238]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested has been placed in the Libraries.

Higher Education

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 3 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 68W, regarding unit spending per student, what the percentage change in unit of funding per student was in 2000–01; and what she expects it to be in 2001–02. [50428]

Margaret Hodge: Between 1989 and 1997, planned public funding fell by 36 per cent. from just under £7,600 to just over £4,800 per full time equivalent student.

The Dearing report concluded that higher education institutions could not absorb further reductions of over 6 per cent. in the funding per student, which were in the plans of the previous Government.

Following the last spending review, the Government's spending plans for higher education have reversed the decline in funding over the last decade. Publicly planned funding for higher education announced in November 2000, did reflect a 0.4 per cent. decrease in funding per full time equivalent student in real terms in 2000–01, compared to the previous year. But for 2001–02, the unit of funding in real terms was planned to increase by 0.7 per cent. compared to 2000–01.

In addition to the funding for teaching and research the higher education sector received an additional £166 million in 1999–2000 and £242.5 million in 2000–01 for capital and to help widen access to higher education. It is planned that a further £359 million will be available in 2001–02. With this additional funding the unit of funding per student provided by this Department for 2001–02 in cash terms, will be £5,350.

The Government are investing, in partnership with the Welcome Trust, a total of £1.75 billion in science infrastructure between 1999–2000 to 2003–04.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the courses of study in higher education institutions, broken down by the proportion of undergraduate students of each social class. [61305]

Margaret Hodge: The available information on the social class of undergraduate students in UK higher education institutions relates to accepted applicants to full-time and sandwich undergraduate courses via the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) and not all undergraduate courses and students. The UCAS data can be broken down into broad subject categories and into First Degree or Higher National Diploma (HND) courses. The latest UCAS figures are shown in the table.

Proportion of UK domiciled applicants accepted through UCAS[1] to full-time undergraduate HE courses, by subject group, course type and social class[2]

	Social class[3] (per cent.)						*Accepted applicants*	
Subject group and course type[4]	*Professional (I)*	*Intermediate (II)*	*Skilled non-manual (IIIN)*	*Skilled manual (IIIM)*	*Partly skilled (IV)*	*Unskilled (V)*	*Known total*	*Grand total[5]*
Medicine/dentistry								
First degree	39	40	9	8	4	1	5,940	6,523
Subjects allied to medicine								
First degree	13	43	14	18	10	2	19,966	23,265
HND	8	39	14	23	12	3	740	1,025
Total	12	43	14	18	11	2	20,766	24,290
Biological sciences								
First degree	17	16	13	18	7	2	14,701	16,432
HND	8	32	16	26	14	2	192	235
Total	17	45	13	16	7	2	14,663	16,667
Agriculture and related subjects								
First degree	16	51	11	13	8	1	2,184	2,495
HND	8	47	13	17	13	2	1,039	1,298
Total	14	50	11	14	10	1	3,223	3,793
Physical science								
First degree	19	44	13	16	7	2	10,927	12,028
HND	11	32	14	26	11	6	202	263
Total	19	44	13	16	7	2	11,129	12,292
Mathematical sciences and informatics								
First degree	13	38	15	20	9	3	21,697	26,343
HND	8	35	16	24	11	5	4,205	5,915
Total	12	39	16	21	9	3	25,902	32,268
Engineering and technology								
First degree	18	41	11	19	8	2	13,234	15,452
HND	12	34	12	28	10	3	1,097	1,444
Total	18	41	11	20	8	2	14,331	16,895
Architecture, building and planning								
First degree	16	43	12	20	7	2	4,162	4,927
HND	9	32	12	34	10	1	386	477
Total	16	42	12	21	8	2	4,527	5,404
Social studies								
First degree	15	45	14	16	8	2	31,727	38,716
HND	5	31	16	26	18	5	579	978
Total	15	44	14	18	8	2	32,406	37,694
Business and administrative studies								
First degree	12	45	16	18	8	2	25,753	30,104
HND	8	39	16	23	10	4	4,676	6,284
Total	11	44	15	19	8	2	30,429	36,355
Mass communications and documentation								
First degree	11	45	16	19	8	2	7,208	5,475
HND	6	38	17	25	12	4	1,145	1,529
Total	10	44	15	20	9	2	8,354	10,004

Proportion of UK domiciled applicants accepted through UCAS[1] to full-time undergraduate HE courses, by subject group, course type and social class[2]

	Social class[3] (per cent.)						Accepted applicants	
Subject group and course type[4]	*Professional (I)*	*Intermediate (II)*	*Skilled non-manual (IIIN)*	*Skilled manual (IIIM)*	*Partly skilled (IV)*	*Unskilled (V)*	*Known total*	*Grand total[5]*
Languages and related disciplines								
First degree	16	48	14	13	8	1	14,905	16,573
Humanities								
First degree	19	47	13	13	6	1	9,859	11,045
HND	14	14	14	29	14	14	7	9
Total	19	47	15	13	6	1	9,866	11,054
Creative arts								
First degree	13	46	14	17	8	2	23,408	28,709
HND	8	38	17	23	11	2	3,888	5,070
Total	13	45	14	18	9	2	27,074	33,779
Education								
First degree	9	40	16	21	12	2	12,010	13,731
HND	5	34	16	28	15	2	530	697
Total	9	40	16	21	12	2	12,540	14,428
Combined studies								
First degree	14	45	14	17	6	2	38,558	45,238
HND	7	39	18	26	11	3	1,860	2,191
Total	14	45	14	17	8	2	40,208	47,429
All first degree courses	15	44	14	17	8	2	256,259	298,057
All HND courses	8	37	16	24	11	4	20,224	27,415
Total all courses	14	44	14	18	6	2	276,483	325,472

[1] Covers all UK higher education institutions and some specialist colleges of further education.

[2] Year of entry: 2001.

[3] The social class percentages are based on the number of accepted applicants for which social class is known.

[4] First degree or HND courses. HNDs are not offered in all subject areas.

[5] Including unknowns.

Source:

Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS).

School Meals (Garrison Towns)

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the validity of the use of the number of children receiving free school meals as an indicator of need in garrison towns. [56048]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: None, specifically in connection with garrison towns. Within the data collected by the Department annually from schools, the proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is an established indicator of socio-economic disadvantage. It has been used by the Department as one measure for grouping schools to allow comparisons of the performance of similar schools in the autumn package of pupil performance. This package is provided to assist them in the process of target setting and school improvement.

The Department is now engaged in a programme of establishing measures of pupil progress from one Key Stage to the next, and it is proposed that this year's secondary schools performance tables will contain two indicators of 'value added' based on such information.

Secondary Schools

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what review she is undertaking of the capacity of secondary schools. [59104]

Mr. Miliband: The capacity of all maintained mainstream schools is currently being reassessed using the new net capacity assessment method. This work is currently planned to be completed by November 2002.

British Sign Language

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether she intends to include British Sign Language within the personal, social and health education component of the national curriculum. [60127]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* We have no plans to include British Sign Language in the national curriculum. Schools that wish to do so can offer British Sign Language lessons to their pupils as part of the wider school curriculum. Teaching additional subjects, such as sign language will usually be built around the skills and strengths of the teaching staff and the learning needs of their pupils.

Sector Skills Councils

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when the chairs of the sector skills councils will be announced; when all the members of the sector skills councils will be confirmed; and what arrangements have been made for the staff of national training organisations during the transitions to sector skills councils. [60772]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: There is no set timetable for the introduction of the new sector skills network. Sector skills councils (SSCs) will be introduced only in sectors where employers want one and the SSC standard is met. One requirement is for the SSC to have a senior level board and chair, representative of the sector. As SSCs are licensed information about them, including their board, will be published by the SSDA.

The ending of Government recognition of national training organisations (NTOs) and the licensing of sector skills councils (SSCs) are separate issues. Organisations that were formerly recognised as NTOs are independent bodies. The continued funding, operation and staffing of former NTOs is a decision for the board of each organisation.

Apprenticeships

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many modern apprenticeships were *(a)* commenced and *(b)* completed in each year since the scheme's inauguration; what percentage of modern apprenticeships are not completed; and what the annual cost has been of the modern apprenticeship scheme. [60773]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: *(a)* Information on starts and qualification success rates is published in a statistical first release (SFR 03/2002 'TEC/LSC Delivered Government Supported Work-Based Learning—England: Volumes and Outcomes'), which is available in the Library of the House.

Modern apprenticeships

		Qualification success rates of leavers	
Financial year	*MA starts (000s)*	*Percentage who achieve level 2 or above on FMA*	*Percentage who achieve level 3 or above on AMA*
1995–96	25.8	—	9
1996–97	70.3	—	22
1997–98	84.2	—	27
1998–99	119.1	—	36
1999–2000	170.7	36	48
2000–01	188.3	45	49

Source:
SFR 03/2002, tables 1 and 3.

(b) Information on completion of modern apprenticeship frameworks is not available.

Accurate figures for annual expenditure on MAs are not available but the total MA spend since 1997 is estimated to have been well in excess of £1 billion.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many traditional apprenticeships were *(a)* commenced and *(b)* completed in each of the last three years that they were running. [60774]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Data on traditional apprenticeships commenced and completed are not available. We do have estimates from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) on the number of recognised trade apprentices at any one time and these are given in the table for the each of the last three years.

Number (Thousand)

Year	*All*	*Male*	*Female*
1999	207	172	35
2000	223	183	39
2001	202	169	32

Source:
Labour Force Survey, 1999–2001, United Kingdom

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the financing of modern apprenticeships with particular reference to differences of treatment relating to age. [61340]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: This is a matter for the Learning and Skills Council. I have therefore asked John Harwood, the council's chief executive, to write to the hon. Member with the information requested and to place a copy of his reply in the Library.

School Funding (Leicestershire)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much additional resources have been given to *(a)* Rushey Mead School, Green Academy, *(b)* Judgemeadow School and *(c)* Northfields House Primary as a result of their new status. [60779]

Mr. Miliband: Rushey Mead School has been awarded £3,963,827 to provide a Green Academy; Judgemeadow School has been awarded £100,000 of capital funding to improve its facilities for teaching modern foreign languages and will receive £495,862 in the period September 1999 to August 2003 to deliver its language college development plans (based on pupil numbers in January 2001) and Northfield House Primary has been awarded £365,700 of funding from the Space for Sport and Arts project.

Small Schools

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much of the Small Schools Fund was spent in 2001–02. [61130]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* In 2001–02 £80 million was allocated for the Small Schools Fund through the Standards Fund. Of this, local education authorities accepted 98 per cent. (£78.2 million). Under the Standards Fund arrangements for 2001–02, schools and local education authorities are able to carry forward unspent grant into the 2002–03 financial year. The Department does not currently hold information on the extent to which schools or local education authorities have chosen to carry forward this grant.

Clinical Veterinary Teaching

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when her Department or its predecessor last reviewed the financial arrangements for clinical veterinary teaching. [61187]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* The review of financial arrangements for veterinary teaching, are a matter for the Higher Education Funding Council for England to consider.

Disabled Students

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what action she is taking to improve access for disabled students to overseas courses, with particular reference to *(a)* physical access problems and *(b)* access to disability specific benefits. [61345]

Margaret Hodge: The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA) 2001 makes it unlawful, from September 2002, for providers of post-16 education in Great Britain to discriminate against disabled people. As part of their new statutory duties, institutions will be responsible for ensuring that any overseas institution which receives a disabled student as part of their course at a British institution is able to provide reasonable access in accordance with the requirements of the Act.

Higher Education students eligible for the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) who have to study abroad as part of their course at a UK institution are entitled to continue to receive the DSA while they are abroad. The disability living allowance (DLA) is payable to people resident in Great Britain. However, payment can continue during the first 26 weeks of any period of temporary absence, so students who return during vacations may receive continuous payments.

Internet Twinning

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the Government's aims at the Seville European Council on the establishment of internet twinning links for secondary schools in the EU. [61404]

Margaret Hodge: The European Commission will present its report on helping secondary schools to establish or enhance an internet twinning link with a partner school elsewhere in Europe. The Commission's paper was published on 21 May and sets out proposals for ensuring that school twinning projects are effective. We believe there are considerable potential educational benefits in extending school twinning, so we welcome the Commission's input and look forward to discussing with other member states how work should be taken forward on this issue.

Medical Education

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the funding allocations to medical education relative to other branches of higher education. [61471]

Margaret Hodge: Funding allocations for medical education are made by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) as described in the HEFCE publication 'Funding higher education in England—How the HEFCE allocates its funds' (Guide April 02/18).

The HEFCE funding methodology allocates funding over four price groups. Group D forms the base allocation. Group A, the highest, contains medical, dentistry and veterinary science courses. These are funded at four and a half times the base level, and in 2002–03, will be equal to £12,915 per annum per full-time student place.

Children in Care

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many and what percentage of children who lived *(a)* in a residential care home and *(b)* with foster parents went into higher education in the last five years for which figures are available. [61780]

Margaret Hodge: The requested information is not held centrally.

Tuition Fees

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the cost was in 2001 to *(a)* the universities and *(b)* the Government of administering university tuition fees, broken down by (i) publicity and information costs and (ii) costs incurred as a result of non-payment of fees. [61879]

Margaret Hodge: The information requested is not available. Government funding of higher education institutions in England through the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) takes account of the cost to universities and colleges of administering tuition fees. The forecast income that institutions receive from student contributions to fees is abated by 5 per cent. for collection of fees and any default. For 2001–02, that amounts to an estimated £18.2 million. The latest survey of the non-payment of fee contributions, published by Universities UK in November 2001, found that the amount unpaid at July 2001 across the UK was well within the 5 per cent. set aside for administration and default.

University Staff (Redundancies)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many academic staff in each university in England and Wales were made redundant in each year since 1996. [62030]

Margaret Hodge: The requested information is not held centrally.

Sixth Form Provision

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what impact this year's funding proposals will have on the Government's policy of bridging the funding gap between sixth form schools, sixth form colleges and community colleges who provide sixth form provision. [62252]

Margaret Hodge: The Government remain committed to bringing up the level of funding for colleges towards that of schools. We have always made it clear that we must look to the spending review settlement for 2003–04 and beyond to address this issue. We will make a further announcement when the outcome of the spending review is known.

Young Carers

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what guidance her Department issues to *(a)* schools and *(b)* local education authorities on identifying and supporting young carers. [62539]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The Department for Education and Skills issued guidance to schools on supporting young carers in the circular 10–99, Social Inclusion: Pupil Support, sent in July 1999 to the chairs of governors and heads of maintained schools in England.

Further Education Finance

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the pay levels of *(a)* college lecturers and *(b)* school sixth form teachers. [62562]

Margaret Hodge: Pay and conditions for teachers in maintained schools, including those with sixth forms, is determined on a statutory basis under the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Act 1991. The pay and

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terms and conditions of lecturers who work in sixth form colleges and general further education colleges are matters for individual colleges as the employer to determine, in discussion with the relevant unions. A wide range of pay and conditions now exist in the FE sector, reflecting the diverse needs of the colleges' local communities and colleges' individual decisions on implementing the nationally recommended pay settlement each year.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to review the pay levels of college lecturers; and if she will make a statement. [62563]

Margaret Hodge: We have no plans to review the pay levels of college lecturers. The Department contributed financially to the production of the "Association of Colleges and Joint Unions, National Review of Staffing and Pay in Further Education" published in March 2001.

As independent organisations, it is for colleges in discussion with relevant representative bodies to determine the pay and terms of conditions of their staff.

Ofsted

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will include in future Ofsted inspections an assessment of *(a)* school and *(b)* local education authority policies and practice in identifying and supporting young carers. [62540]

Mr. Miliband: This is a matter for Ofsted. I have asked HM Chief Inspector, David Bell, to write to the hon. Member and to place a copy of his letter in the Library.

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to announce the result of the quinquennial review of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. [62310]

Mr. Miliband: Following the quinquennial review of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) a report has been published today, outlining the findings of the review and the recommendations that have been made as a result. The report is available in the Library. It can also be seen on the DfES website: "www.dfes.gov.uk/consultations".

Teachers (Women)

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of teaching staff in UK secondary schools are female. [58254]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* In March 2000 (the most recent date for which provisional data are available) 58 per cent. of the teachers in regular full or part time service in maintained secondary schools in England were female.

Some 10 per cent.—20 per cent. of part-timers are not recorded on the Teachers' Pension Scheme, from which the data are obtained.

The devolved administrations for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are responsible for the supply of teachers in those countries.

Special Educational Needs (Gloucestershire)

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what discussions she has had with Gloucestershire County Council about their policy towards special schools; and if she will make a statement; [60110]

(2) what assessment she has made of special needs provision in Gloucestershire; and if she will make a statement; [60111]

(3) what assessment she has made of statementing in Gloucestershire; and if she will make a statement. [60112]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* Ofsted published a report of its inspection of Gloucestershire Local Education Authority in January this year. My officials have been working with the Authority's officers as the Authority has developed its Post-Inspection Action Plan. The inspection report was critical of the delay in the Authority's development of an inclusive approach to meeting special educational needs [and noted that the process of special school re-organisation had been slow]. It recommended that the Authority should produce a strategy for special educational needs (SEN), which has a swifter timetable for implementation, shows how it will raise standards for pupils and incorporates the Authority's different reviews in a coherent plan.

The report also recommended that the Authority should work with health authorities and the counties social services department, to reduce the number of cases where exceptional needs prevent the completion of SEN statements within 18 weeks.

My officials received the Authority's Post Inspection Action plan on 1 May. They will continue to work with the Authority's officers as this Plan is developed and implemented.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Express Newspapers

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) on what basis the then Secretary of State determined that Mr. Richard Desmond was a fit and proper person to control Express Newspapers; [61479]

(2) what account was taken of the nature of pornographic websites controlled by companies associated with Mr. Richard Desmond when the Secretary of State was considering whether to refer the acquisition of Express Newspapers by the Northern and Shell Group; [61528]

(3) what factors the then Secretary of State took into account when determining the non-competition issues concerning the acquisition of Express Newspapers by the Northern and Shell Group. [61480]

Ms Hewitt: Since 1984 it has been the policy of successive governments that the primary reason for making a reference will always be the impact of a transaction on competition.

Further, since October 2000 it has been the stated policy of this Government to accept the advice of the Director General of Fair Trading on whether or not to make a reference in all but exceptional circumstances.

In this case my right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State had regard to the advice of the Office of Fair Trading on competition factors.

In addition, the fact that Mr. Desmond had adult business interests was drawn to my right hon. Friend before the case was considered and the views of the Home Office, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and a range of third parties on non-competition issues were considered. We did not investigate further Northern and Shell's websites. There was no suggestion that these sites were illegal. The laws on obscenity apply to all publications and to the internet.

My right hon. Friend therefore took into account all factors which appeared to be relevant at the time before deciding that there was no reason, on competition or non-competition grounds, to refer this case to the Competition Commission.

Internal Communications

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what budget, functions and staff will be under the control of the new head of internal communications in her Department; and what the previous structure and budget was for those functions. [62050]

Ms Hewitt: The internal communications team will initially be five people amounting to four full time equivalents. A budget of £100,000 has been put aside for this financial year. The team's aim will be to identify and implement an internal communications strategy for the DTI so that everyone can contribute to the Department's success by being well-informed and having the opportunity to feed in their own views. The team will publish the DTI's staff newspaper, improve the Department's internal communications systems, particularly the intranet, and raise communication skills across the Department.

Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the impact of retentions on the profitability of SMEs in the United Kingdom construction industry. [58138]

Mr. Wilson: The DTI has made no formal assessment of the impact of retentions. The DTI is supporting the efforts of the Strategic Forum for the Construction Industry to address issues of payment and quality assurance; most recently in the "Accelerating Change" consultation document.

Construction Industry

Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received on the practice of retentions in the construction industry. [58140]

Mr. Wilson: Since taking over responsibility for sponsoring the construction industry after the general election in June 2001, Ministers at the Department of Trade and Industry have received 83 letters supporting early-day motion number 428 on the practice of retentions in the construction industry.

The use of retentions is commonplace, resulting from adversarial relationships between the players in the industry, and allegations about defects and poor quality of work.

DTI is taking a range of steps to address the root causes. "Rethinking Construction" sets out a change process that should lead to fewer defects, and hence progressively reduce the need for retentions. DTI has undertaken considerable work to support constructive procurement principles. However this issue will only be fully resolved when the whole construction industry changes by providing quality, defect-free work that fully meets the needs of contractors and clients.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the targets for the Renewables UK unit in Aberdeen will be published; and if she will make a statement. [58267]

Mr. Wilson: Renewables UK's aim is to maximise the UK's involvement in renewable projects both at home and abroad in terms of jobs and investment in manufacturing, services and supplies. There is an important link between this sector and the oil and gas industry, whose strategic forum—PILOT—has established a number of key aims for the year 2010 including the identification of £1 billion worth of new business opportunities.

As an initial working target Renewables UK has adopted half this target ie £500 million of new business to the UK in renewables manufacturing, services and supplies by 2010. However, Renewables UK is now working to refine and broaden this target by establishing baseline figures and developing a defined set of metrics. This will include undertaking an employment survey in conjunction with the Renewables Trade Associations to establish the number of current jobs in renewables.

I have established the Renewables Advisory Board (the interim boards met on 21 May). The board will work closely with Renewables UK to establish a challenging yet achievable set of targets, which will be published.

Coal Industry

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many collieries have closed in each year since 1997 in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* England. [60308]

Mr. Wilson: The information available shows that the total number of collieries that have closed in Scotland, Wales and England since 1997 is 37.

The number of closures each year is as follows:

	Scotland	*Wales*	*England*
1997	1	5	6
1998	1	9	3
1999	0	2	3
2000	0	4	1
2001	0	1	0
2002	1	0	0

Source:

Coal Authority data provided to the Department of Trade and Industry.

North Sea Fiscal Regime

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions regarding the change in the North sea fiscal regime have been conducted with PILOT since the announcement of the 2002 Budget. [59386]

Mr. Wilson: A number of discussions have taken place with the industry since the Budget of 17 April. Most recently, on 22 May, I met with industry representatives from PILOT to hear their views on the Budget 2002 changes.

Further discussions will take place at the PILOT meeting in June.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how PILOT's stated goals are likely to be affected by the change in the North sea fiscal regime. [59387]

Mr. Wilson: PILOT, the joint Government/industry forum, has an extensive action programme to improve the industry's competitiveness. It is pursuing a number of visionary targets for 2010 and last year set the interim production and investment targets for 2005. I expect PILOT to continue to monitor progress against these targets. The fiscal regime is one of many influences affecting the success of the industry meeting them. Further discussions on the vision targets will take place at future PILOT meetings.

Fabrication Jobs

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) how many fabrication jobs there are in Scotland; and how many there were in each of the previous five years; [58895]

(2) how many fabrication jobs there are in Scotland; and how many there were for each of the previous five years. [59384]

Mr. Wilson: Numbers employed in Scottish offshore fabrication are estimated at:

Year	*Number employed*
2002	1,220
2001	415
2000	3,060
1999	4,460
1998	4,180

Unsolicited Faxes

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the Telecommunications (Data Protection & Privacy) Regulations 1999 and the IC5715 Code of Conduct in controlling unsolicited faxes. [59991]

Mr. Timms: The effectiveness of the Telecommunications (Data Protection and Privacy) Regulations in controlling unsolicited direct marketing faxes may be monitored by, among other things, looking at levels of registrations with, and complaints to, the Fax Preference Service (FPS); up to date figures on these are available from the Direct Marketing Association, which was appointed to run the Telephone and Fax Preference Services under the regulations. Since the Fax Preference Service was put on a statutory basis in 1999, total registrations have risen from under 15,000 to over 1,000,000; the FPS currently receives about 1,500 complaints a week about faxes, compared to some 700 a week at the end of last year. Information on compliance with the ICSTIS Code of Practice is published in the committee's monthly reports.

There will be an opportunity to review the regulations in more depth next year when we consult on implementation of the updated version of the European directive on which they are based.

Icelandic Trawlermen (Compensation)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many claims for compensation in the last five years for the loss of Icelandic fishing have been rejected; and how many remain to be processed. [61405]

Nigel Griffiths: Since October 2000, when the Compensation scheme for former Icelandic trawlermen began, a total of 2,872 applications (not including duplicates) have been rejected.

A total of 4,158 applications have been accepted to end May 2002.

All applications received have been processed though a number have been referred back to applicants for further information, are being reviewed by officials or are subject to an appeal to the independent adjudicator.

Tyres (Disposal)

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many tyres were scrapped in each of the last five years in the UK; how many tonnes this was; and what proportion of the tyres were *(a)* disposed of in landfill sites, *(b)* illegally dumped and *(c)* fly-tipped. [60640]

Mr. Wilson: The following table provides a guide.

	Tyres (million)	*Tonnes (000s)*
1996	43	484
1997	43	490
1998	46	431
1999	45	427
2000	50	450

Note:

Figures rounded to nearest million tyres or thousand tonnes.

Source:

Used Tyre Working Group.

Latest available figures are for 2000. The numbers of used tyres disposed of each year and their weight is estimated based on data supplied by tyre manufacturers and importers on replacement tyre sales, statistics from Customs and Excise on import and export trade in used tyre casings and information from the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders on the numbers of end-of-life vehicles.

The method of compiling the statistics was refined in 1998 to improve their accuracy. Accordingly, figures from 1998 forward are not directly comparable with earlier years.

The numbers of tyres landfilled over the period 1996–99 remained consistent at around 30 per cent. of all tyres disposed of. With the closure of the single largest facility for handling used tyres in 2000, around 37 per cent. of tyres were landfilled that year.

It is difficult to gather accurate information on the illegal disposal of tyres, with incidences widely dispersed geographically and affecting a variety of local authorities, businesses and individuals. Research undertaken by the Environment Agency indicates that most local authorities experience low levels of fly-tipping, but the cumulative effect can lead to significant total numbers. The Agency has estimated that tyre fly-tipping is collectively costing local authorities around £2 million per annum. There is also substantial local fly-tipping of tyres on agricultural land. Not all tyre fly-tipping is immediately obvious, with significant numbers of tyre retailers experiencing fly-tipping on their forecourts overnight, and subsequently picking up the costs for ensuring responsible disposal and recovery.

There are occasional large-scale deposits, which in extreme cases can amount to several tens of thousands of tyres. There are generally only one or two incidents of this magnitude each year. A recent survey by the Environment Agency estimated that there are around 21 million tyres in long-term storage. Not all of these will have been illegally deposited.

Business Links

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her policy is towards the repayment of the *(a)* interest and *(b)* capital on loans made by Business Link to firms that subsequently suffered a severe loss of business as a result of the outbreak of foot and mouth disease. [61539]

Nigel Griffiths: Business Link Operators have not offered loans to businesses that suffered losses as a result of foot and mouth disease. However, some elements of the Rural Business Recovery Fund were used to assist businesses with interest relief on existing loans. The Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme (operated by high street banks) was extended to bring in scope businesses affected by foot and mouth disease. To date 40 new loans have been granted as a result of the extension. Repayment conditions are the same as loans normally offered under the scheme.

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many calls the Business Links Complaints Hotline has received since its inception. [61315]

Nigel Griffiths: Since the Business Link Feedback Line began in July 1998 it has received under 100 calls. The vast majority were complaints from clients of the Business Link Network who were unable to solve the problem at a local level.

I am informed that all the complaints received have been resolved apart from three which are currently being dealt with.

Computers

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many computers were replaced in her Department in each of the past three years; how the replaced units were disposed of and by which companies; and at what cost. [60752]

Ms Hewitt: In 1998 my Department HQ entered into a Private Finance Initiative partnership with a consortium led by ICL (now Fujitsu) in conjunction with CMG, known as UNITAS. This arrangement included the transfer of ownership of the vast majority of our computer assets to UNITAS and part of the contractual arrangements in place are that the responsibility for replacing equipment and its disposal when this is necessary lies with them. Part of our normal monthly service charge paid for the provision of our computers includes an element to meet any costs incurred by UNITAS in carrying out this disposal service.

Where equipment becomes surplus to requirement UNITAS always tries to re-cycle it and, accordingly, the number of PCs disposed of by UNITAS in the last three years has been negligible. Their environmental policy also dictates that any disposals are done in an environmentally friendly manner and appropriate security measures are applied to ensure hard discs are always erased before disposal. Where disposal is necessary UNITAS use a company known as STARS.

I understand that this question has also been put to the Minister for the Cabinet Office and that the answer to that question will include any replacement and disposal details for DTI staff working in Government Offices in the regions.

Minimum Wage

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had about extending minimum wage protection to 16 to 17-year-olds; and what plans she has to do so. [62151]

Alan Johnson: We have no plans to extend the minimum wage to 16 to 17-year-olds. However, I recently announced new terms of reference for the Low Pay Commission and will of course carefully consider any recommendations made on this issue in their next report.

Sub-post Offices

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many sub-post offices in Scotland have reduced their opening hours in each of the last five years. [62416]

Mr. Timms: I refer to the answer given to the hon. Member by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on 6 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 967W.

Sustainable Development

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the Government's policy on sustainable development. [60049]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* The Government set out its policy on sustainable development in the White Paper "A better quality of life: A strategy for sustainable development for the UK" [Cm 4345] published in May 1999. The Government's Sustainable

Development Strategy will inform the proposed Energy White Paper which the Government plans to publish around the turn of the year.

Energy White Policy

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the forthcoming White Paper on energy policy will include a cost benefit analysis. [60054]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* Energy policy is necessarily concerned with developments over long time periods. The analysis in the White Paper will include an assessment of costs and benefits across a range of impacts, recognising the risks and the inherent uncertainties of such estimation.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) how many chartered engineers are part of the Energy Strategy Unit tasked with producing the White Paper on the future energy policy; [60047]

(2) what the engineering and scientific qualifications are of the head of the Energy Strategy Unit; [60051]

(3) what the *(a)* composition and *(b)* structure is of the Energy Strategy Unit; [60052]

(4) what liaison is carried out by the Energy Strategy Unit with the EU on policy development. [60053]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* The Energy Strategy Unit is the team tasked with undertaking the consultation on energy policy, following publication earlier this year of the Energy Review and with drafting the energy White Paper which the Government propose to publish around the turn of the year.

It is composed of a team drawn from DTI, DEFRA, and elsewhere and its work is overseen by a senior cross-departmental group including members from DTI, DEFRA, DoT, HMT and others. Rob Wright, currently Director of Coal Policy in the DTI, has been appointed head of the Energy Strategy Unit. Within the DTI reporting structure, Rob Wright reports to Joan MacNaughton, Director General, Energy.

The Unit currently has five staff at senior management level, all of whom have first or second degrees in science, engineering, economics or mathematics. In addition, the team draws on a much wider range of experts in similar fields from within and outside Government including the Energy Advisory Panel.

The Unit is working closely with officials in the FCO, the DTI, DEFRA and other Departments who liaise directly with the European Commission and other member states.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what definition she uses of a low carbon economy; and what the Government's policy is on a low carbon economy. [60050]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* The UK's Climate Change Programme, issued in November 2000, sets out the Government's approach to the challenge. It is estimated that the proposals in the programme could reduce UK greenhouse gas emissions to about 23 per cent. below 1990 levels in 2010. This is well beyond the Kyoto target. Longer term, the Government believe that global emissions of greenhouse gases may need to be reduced by 60 per cent. to 70 per cent. if we are to avoid dangerous climate change. This will require a major transformation in the way we generate and use energy—essentially a move away from the substantial use of fossil fuels emitting greenhouse gases into the atmosphere to a low carbon economy.

The possible nature of such an economy and the means for achieving it was one of the issues considered in the Performance and Innovation Unit's Energy Review report to Government. The Government are currently consulting on the Energy Review and the responses to the consultation will help to shape an energy White Paper, by around the turn of the year.

Departmental Reviews

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the two departmental reviews being undertaken within the Department of Trade and Industry. [61316]

Ms Hewitt: Last year I announced changes to the structure and operation of my Department to improve the way in which it serves business, employees and consumers, 22 November 2001, *Official Report,* column 398W. Further information was made available in the Department's memorandum to the Trade and Industry committee (Reviews of DTI Structure and Business Support—Minutes of Evidence, 12 December 2001: HC 454-I). My Department's new structure came into being in April, and we are taking forward the other changes I have announced.

Broadband

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what targets she has set for the roll out of broadband services across the business community; and if she will make a statement. [61792]

Mr. Timms: The Government have set a target for the UK to have the most extensive and competitive broadband market in the G7 by 2005.

The Government have also set a target of having one million SMEs trading online by 2002, which was exceeded in 2000, although the target is technology neutral and not specific to broadband.

BAE Systems

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what meetings her Department has had with representatives of BAE Systems since June 2001. [62265]

Alan Johnson: The Department of Trade & Industry's Ministers and officials meet representatives of industry as often as possible, and have met those from BAE Systems on a number of occasions since June 2001.

Aerospace Industry

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what remuneration the Chair of the Aerospace Innovation and Growth Team will be paid. [62266]

Alan Johnson: None. The appointment is unpaid.

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what the mandate of the EC-Malta Joint Research Committee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement; [58400]

(2) what the mandate of the EC-Russia Joint Committee on scientific and technological co-operation is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement; [58404]

(3) what the mandate of the EC-China RTD Co-operation Steering Committee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement; [58402]

(4) what the mandate of the EC-Republic of South Africa Joint Committee on scientific and technological co-operation is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement; [58406]

(5) what the mandate of the EC-India RTD Co-operation Steering Committee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement; [58401]

(6) what the mandate of the EC-Canada Joint Committee on scientific and technological co-operation is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement; [58405]

(7) what the mandate of the EC-Argentina RTD Co-operation Steering Committee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement; [58403]

(8) what the mandate of the EC-Cyprus Joint Research Committee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [58399]

Ms Hewitt: Details of the mandates and the number of meetings held in the last 12 months by the Joint Committees established under the EC's scientific and technological co-operation agreements with the Argentine Republic, Canada, the People's Republic of China, the Republic of Cyprus, the Republic of India, the Republic of Malta, the Russian Federation and the Republic of South Africa are set out in the following table.

Country	*Mandate*	*Meetings in last 12 months*
Argentina	Managing the Agreement, including promoting and overseeing co-operative activities, identifying sectors for potential co-operation, and advising on ways to improve co-operation	None—Agreement has only just entered into force
Canada	Details not retrievable without disproportionate cost	One
China	Managing the Agreement, including promoting and overseeing co-operative activities, identifying for the following year priority sectors for potential co-operation, and advising on ways to improve co-operation	One
Cyprus	Functions include reviewing, evaluating measures for co-operation under the EU 5th Framework Programme, and examining ways to improve and develop co-operation	One
India	Managing the Agreement, including promoting and overseeing co-operative activities, identifying for the following year priority sectors for potential co-operation, recommending joint projects for sponsoring on a cost sharing basis, and advising on ways to improve co-operation	None—Agreement has not yet entered into force
Malta	Functions include reviewing, evaluating measures for co-operation under the EU 5th Framework Programme, and examining ways to improve and develop co-operation	None—a Committee has yet to be formed
Russia	Managing the Agreement, including promoting and overseeing co-operative activities, identifying sectors for potential co-operation, and advising on ways to enhance co-operation	None—last meeting February 2001
South Africa	Managing the Agreement, including promoting and reviewing co-operative activities, making recommendations for additional modalities of co-operation, and advising on ways to enhance co-operation	One

There is no UK representative on the Committees. The Agreements have no direct financial implications for the UK. Information is not available on items under discussion.

The Government welcomes the Agreements as their essential aim is to stimulate RTD co-operation between the European Communities and the Governments concerned and this increases the possibilities for the UK, as a partner of first choice, to engage in collaborative research. The Agreements have been subject to Parliamentary Scrutiny procedures and the Government does not consider that further steps are needed to assure the accountability and transparency to Parliament of the Committees.

Sunset Clauses

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which Bills introduced by her Department in the last five years have contained sunset clauses; and what plans she has for the future use of such clauses. [49629]

Ms Hewitt: One Bill introduced by my Department in the last five years contained a sunset clause. Section 16(41) of The Electronic Communications Act 2000 provides for the repeal of Part 1 of the Act five years from Royal Assent if no order is made before then under Section 16(2). The use of such clauses in future Bills will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the *(a)* cost and *(b)* saving has been from the Department's pursuit of Service Delivery Agreement targets in each year since they were introduced. [61646]

Ms Hewitt: SDA targets are set as an integral part of the Spending Review process. It is difficult to say for the majority of the Department's SDA targets how the Department's expenditure would have differed or no targets been set. Further analysis on the costs and savings of specific targets could only be undertaken at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what has been the *(a)* cost and *(b)* saving from the pursuit of the Department's Public Service Agreement targets in each year since they were introduced. [61040]

Ms Hewitt: Information on Departmental expenditure by Public Service Agreement (PSA) objective can be found in the Department's annually published Consolidated Resource Accounts, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House for years up to 2000–01. Information on costs incurred in working towards individual PSA targets is not available.

PSA targets are set as an integral part of the Spending Review process. It is not possible to say how the Department's expenditure would have differed had different, or no, targets been adopted. As a result, additional costs or savings resulting from pursuing PSA targets cannot be specified, although one of DTI's current PSA targets requires the Department to achieve an annual 2.5 per cent. improvement in value for money, including through savings.

Postal Services

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions her Department has had with managers of Consignia regarding a new post office and Royal Mail sorting office in Camborne. [59627]

Mr. Timms: This is a matter which falls within the day to day responsibility of Consignia and I have asked the Chief Executive to reply direct to my hon. Friend.

Regulatory Impact Assessments

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what costs are arising from regulatory impact assessments for legislation introduced by her Department in the 2001–02 parliamentary session. [57324]

Ms Hewitt: Details of all costs which arose from regulatory impact assessments for legislation introduced by the Department of Trade and Industry in the 2001–02 Parliamentary session were contained in the assessments prepared in respect of each Bill and Statutory Instrument where appropriate, copies of which were deposited in the Libraries of the House.

BNFL

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if she will make a statement on the use by BNFL and its subsidiaries of public funds to make donations to political elements within the United States of America; [61107]

(2) if she will list the donations made to political elements overseas by BNFL and its subsidiaries in each year since 1997. [61121]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* No. This is a matter for the company. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether BNFL sought clearance from her Department before making donations to political elements within the United States of America. [61108]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* No.

DEFENCE

Afghanistan

7. **Mr. Goodman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for how long British troops are planned to remain in Afghanistan. [58676]

Mr. Hoon: The International Security Assistance Force has made an enormous contribution to the stability of Afghanistan. We will transfer leadership of the ISAF to Turkey later this week, after which there will be a reduced but substantial British contribution.

The task force based around 45 Commando has been engaged in difficult operations that have successfully denied al-Qaeda and Taliban freedom of action during what is a critical period for the future of Afghanistan as the Loya Jirga has been meeting. I have previously told the House that the Royal Marines would be deployed for about three months and I expect the deployment to conform to this timetable.

Hon. Members will be aware that the Loya Jirga is drawing to a close in Kabul. In the light of this, and following final discussions with Turkey and other coalition partners, I hope to make a fuller statement to the House on the future of our forces in Afghanistan later this week.

24. **Mr. Tom Harris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how the international security assistance force has helped with humanitarian aid missions in Afghanistan; and if he will make a statement. [58694]

Mr. Hoon: As I said in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) earlier, at column 18 today, the primary role of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) is to help the Interim Administration maintain security in Kabul and its surrounding areas. However, national contingents within the ISAF have been involved in a number of humanitarian projects. United Kingdom service personnel, in conjunction with the Department for International Development, have contributed to the rebuilding of Kabul' s education system through helping with repairs to its schools. The ISAF has also on occasion responded to critical emergencies to help save lives. There has been no expansion in ISAF's mission as defined in the authorising United Nations Security Council Resolutions.

27. **Huw Irranca-Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the role and effectiveness of British troops deployed in Afghanistan. [58697]

33. **Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on recent deployments of British forces in Afghanistan. [58704]

35. **Paul Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the situation in Afghanistan. [58706]

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the progress of British military operations in Afghanistan. [58688]

Mr. Hoon: British military operations in Afghanistan have involved both warfighting and security assistance tasks. The task force based around 45 Commando Royal Marines has performed valuable work in denying remaining al-Qaeda and Taliban elements opportunities to regroup and commit terrorist attacks, especially around the time of the vital Loya Jirga process. British forces in the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) have also played a valuable role in helping the Afghan Interim Administration maintain security in Kabul. As I have already said in my answer to the hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr. Goodman), at column 33W today, I hope to make a fuller statement to the House on our forces in Afghanistan later this week.

38. **David Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the impact of the international security assistance force in Afghanistan; and if he will make a statement. [58709]

Mr. Hoon: The International Security Assistance Force has helped the Afghan Interim Administration transform the security situation in Kabul, allowing a shattered city to become a functioning political and commercial centre.

The United Kingdom's leadership of ISAF, ably exercised by Major General McColl, has been praised throughout the international community. I am confident that the ISAF will continue to make a positive impact under Turkish leadership.

Defence Housing Estate

19. **David Hamilton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many houses have been sold by the armed forces in *(a)* the UK, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* Midlothian in (i) 1980, (ii) 1990 and (iii) 2002. [58689]

Dr. Moonie: I regret that information for 1980 is not readily available.

Based on available records, the figures for 1990 show that more than 814 properties were sold in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and 109 in Scotland. I should point out that the information for 1990 is, however, incomplete given the lapse of time and significant organisational changes.

To date this year, 1,884 properties in England and Wales have been handed back to Annington Homes Ltd., with an additional 47 being sold by Defence Estates. A further 114 houses have been sold in Scotland in the same period. No houses have been sold in Northern Ireland this year.

No houses in Midlothian were sold in either 1990 or to date this year.

21. **Mr. Hopkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps are being taken to improve response times for maintenance to service personnel housing. [58691]

Dr. Moonie: The Defence Housing Executive (DHE) is constantly looking for ways to further improve its repairs service. Current response requirements for unplanned maintenance are: within 24 hours for emergencies, within five working days for urgent repairs and within two months for routine repairs. DHE achieved 99 per cent. of routine repairs within the required timescale against a target of 95 per cent. On urgent repairs, 87 per cent. were achieved on time against a target of 90 per cent. Against a target of 95 per cent. for emergency repairs, the achievement was 93 per cent.

The DHE is trialling a call centre in the north-east which allows the occupants of service families' housing to notify their requirement for response repairs directly. An appointment is then made with the occupant for the contractor to call and effect the repair. The contractor is incentivised to meet response repair targets and to reach a higher level of customer satisfaction. Failure to achieve the targets set by DHE will mean that fees will be withheld. The results of the trial will be used to inform the planned move to a prime contract for housing maintenance and works services, which is in line with a wider Government initiative.

Media Relations

20. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what guidance is given to service men on dealing with the media. [58690]

Mr. Ingram: Invitations for service personnel to take part in media interviews are usually made by broadcasting and press authorities through official departmental channels. If, however, members of the armed forces are invited directly to take part in radio or television broadcasts, or undertake press interviews, there is guidance in The Queen's Regulations that instructs personnel on how to report the approach, and if the interview is sanctioned, guidance about the handling of the interview and not being drawn on any policy issue which is, or may become, a matter of controversy between political parties.

Veterans

22. **Laura Moffatt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of new arrangements for helping veterans from the armed forces. [58692]

Dr. Moonie: The broad effectiveness of the Government's veterans' initiative is monitored through the work of the task force and forum, the latter of which includes representatives from the veterans' community. We also monitor progress in specific areas including the success of our resettlement training, our initiatives with the charitable sector to address homelessness among those leaving the armed forces, and the service provided by our veterans helpline. In a number of areas work is still in hand, but my overall assessment is that the initiative is making good progress, with real benefits being delivered, particularly to the most vulnerable service leavers.

Warships

23. **Angela Watkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the operational strength is of the Royal Navy's destroyers and frigates. [58693]

Mr. Ingram: The full strength of the Royal Navy' s destroyer and frigate force is 32.

Return to Civilian Life

25. **Mr. Watts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures he is taking to improve support for service personnel on their return to civilian life. [58695]

29. **Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures he is taking to improve support for service personnel on their return to civilian life. [58699]

36. **Tony Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures he is taking to improve support for service personnel on their return to civilian life. [58707]

Dr. Moonie: For those service leavers eligible to receive standard career transition services, the Ministry of Defence is currently working on introducing a Tri Service Resettlement Manual, to align resettlement procedures, policy and structures across the three services, and on replacing the current system for funding resettlement training to allow service leavers greater flexibility for such training. However, for one category of service leaver not eligible to receive standard career transition services, those being compulsorily discharged, the MOD has under consideration a change to the current rules to allow them to receive some specialist advice about finding jobs and accommodation, and accessing further support should the initial advice fail. A six-month trial to assess the feasibility of this initiative is under way.

Sea Harriers

26. **Mr. Heath:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Royal Navy Sea Harriers are in operational condition. [58696]

Mr. Ingram: On 29 May 2002, there were 27 Sea Harrier FA2 and four Sea Harrier T4 aircraft in the Actual Operating Fleet. The Actual Operating Fleet is the total number of aircraft available to the Operating Commander to undertake the defined military task. Numbers of operational aircraft can vary with time.

37. **Mr. Syms:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the withdrawal from service of the Royal Navy Sea Harriers. [58708]

Mr. Ingram: On current plans the first Fleet Air Arm Sea Harrier squadron will be withdrawn in 2004 and the remainder of the force will be withdrawn by 2006.

An investment plan has been agreed to take forward Joint Force Harrier (JFH) into the era of Future Joint Combat Aircraft (FJCA) and Future Carriers.

The Strategic Defence Review (SDR) included a commitment to establish JFH, building on the success of Royal Navy and RAF Harrier aircraft operations in joint carrier air groups. This was a radical initiative to form a truly joint, flexible and deployable force optimised for the demands of the new strategic environment. JFH currently operates two aircraft types—Sea Harrier FA2, an air defence aircraft flown by RN personnel, and Harrier GR7, a ground attack/reconnaissance aircraft flown by RAF personnel. The plan has been for both the Sea Harrier FA2 and Harrier GR7 to be replaced by a common aircraft type. This is currently designated the FJCA with an In-Service Date of 2012.

Work has been taking place on a migration plan to take forward JFH into the era of the FJCA and the future aircraft carrier. We have concluded that JFH should migrate to an all Harrier GR force, maximising investment in one aircraft type. It is planned to upgrade the GR7 to GR9 standard to ensure a credible expeditionary offensive capability until the aircraft leaves service. To achieve this, aircraft systems will be enhanced to ensure their longevity and give the Harrier the capability to operate with smart weapons.

Given the Harrier GR9' s ability in future to employ smart weapons world-wide by day and night from land and sea and the increased emphasis on carrier based offensive air-power in the SDR and confirmed by the emerging conclusions of our post-11 September work, the Sea Harrier FA2 will be withdrawn earlier than planned, by 2006. The Sea Harrier entered service in 1979, and will start to become obsolescent as this decade progresses.

As a consequence of its earlier withdrawal from service, the planned relocation of Sea Harrier FA2 aircraft from RNAS Yeovilton to RAF Cottesmore and RAF Wittering in 2003 will not now proceed. However, the relocation of RN personnel will go ahead but slightly later than currently planned, over the period 2004 to 2006. By 1 April 2007, JFH will have migrated to an all Harrier GR9 force by roughly equal numbers of RN and RAF personnel. These proposals will be subject to consultation with the trade unions in the normal way.

This plan will significantly enhance the offensive strike capability of our aircraft carriers pending the introduction to service of the FJCA.

Colchester Garrison

28. **Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he last had discussions with the preferred PFI bidder for the Colchester garrison about the delays in building the new garrison. [58698]

Mr. Ingram: My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence met with the preferred bidder on the Colchester Private Finance Initiative Project, RMPA Services, in January of this year, when he went to view the excellent Single Living Accommodation mock-ups at Colchester garrison. The MOD PFI project team and RMPA Services are now co-located in offices in central London where they meet daily.

BAE Systems

30. **Mr. Liddell-Grainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the continuing contracts awarded by his Department to BAE Systems for the manufacture of ordnance in the United Kingdom. [58700]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence currently has a number of contracts with Royal Ordnance Defence (ROD), a wholly owned subsidiary of BAE Systems, for the manufacture of munitions. These requirements and contracts fall under the umbrella of the MOD/ROD Framework Partnering Agreement. Contracts are placed with ROD as the prime contractor and the sourcing of materials or manufacture of components is a matter for the company, provided that they meet the MOD's stringent safety and quality requirements.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what meetings his Department has had with representatives of BAE Systems since June 2001. [62264]

Dr. Moonie: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

BAE Systems is the largest supplier of equipment to the United Kingdom armed forces. As such, the Ministry of Defence maintains an ongoing dialogue with the company at all levels on a wide range of strategic and equipment related issues.

Gibraltar

31. **Bob Spink:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with EU partners regarding the future of the British base in Gibraltar. [58702]

Mr. Hoon: I have had no such discussions.

Shoeburyness

32. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of the new ranges in Shoeburyness. [58703]

Dr. Moonie: The Shoeburyness ranges are included in the arrangements being negotiated with QinetiQ for the delivery of a long-term test and evaluation capability to the Ministry of Defence.

Falkland Islands

34. **Mr. Blizzard:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to visit the Falkland Islands to discuss the security of the islands; and if he will make a statement. [58705]

Mr. Ingram: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence visited the Falkland Islands in March this year and had discussions with the Governor and members of the Falkland Islands Legislative Council on a range of issues, including the security of the islands. I visited the islands last week to represent the Government at commemorations to mark the 20th anniversary of the conflict. The United Kingdom remains fully committed to the security of the Falkland Islands and to the right of the Falkland Islanders to determine their own future.

Rapid Reaction Force

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the Turkish/US/UK Joint Paper on the Rapid Reaction Force. [58775]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary to the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) on 23 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 478W.

Advertising

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much was spent on press and advertising campaigns in 2001–02; and what the planned expenditure is for 2002–03. [60916]

Dr. Moonie: Expenditure for press and advertising campaigns is spread among many different budgets and budget holders within the Ministry of Defence, and is not recorded centrally. However, outturn figures for advertising and publicity are published in the annual departmental performance report. Figures for financial year 2001–02 are currently being collated and will appear in the departmental performance report for 2001–02 which is due to be published later in the years.

Forecast information for financial year 2002–03 could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Suez Medal

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many representations he has received in the past 12 months requesting that a medal be awarded for the 1951–54 Suez Canal Campaign; and if he will make a statement. [61265]

Dr. Moonie: Since 1 June 2001, the Ministry of Defence has received a number of representations from right hon. and hon. Members and the general public on the subject of a retrospective campaign medal for service in the Canal Zone during the period 1951 to 1954. From available records it has been determined that the Ministry of Defence has received at least:

One parliamentary question for oral response, five parliamentary questions for written response, 122 letters from MPs on behalf of constituents and recorded as ministerial correspondence, two early-day motions, two Adjournment debates and four letters to a Defence Minister from other than a MP, which were answered direct by him or on his behalf by his office. The Ministry of Defence has also received 88 letters from members of the public which were variously addressed to the Prime Minister, a Defence Minister, or to the Queen and were answered by an official on behalf of the Ministry of Defence. A small number of veterans have written many times on this subject.

National Rail Academy

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what discussions he has had with *(a)* Railtrack, *(b)* Network Rail, *(c)* the Strategic Rail Authority and *(d)* the Rail Regulator for the Defence Rail Executive land at Bicester to be used for the National Rail Academy; and if he will make a statement; [61782]

(2) what plans he has for the Defence Rail Executive to help with the setting up of the National Rail Academy; and if he will make a statement. [61779]

Dr. Moonie: The Defence Rail Executive, which is responsible for the operation and provision of Defence Rail capability, is liaising with the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) regarding the potential for using assets and land at Bicester so support SRA plans to form a National Rail Academy. Discussions are at an early stage, and no commitment has been made.

Service Accommodation

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of his Department's personnel houses have been sold in *(a)* each of the last five years and *(b)* in 2002; and how many were sold *(i)* to private developers and *(ii)* to social landlords. [62429]

Dr. Moonie: Most of the Families Quarters estate in England and Wales was sold to a private company, Annington Homes Ltd. (AHL) 1996, on a 999 year lease, and the Ministry of Defence leases back the houses required for service families. Properties for which the MOD has no long term requirement are handed back to AHL, under the terms of the sale agreement, for disposal. The means by which AHL chooses to dispose of the surplus properties they own is a matter over which the MOD has no influence. AHL rents out or sells the properties as a commercial organisation.

The number of properties passed to AHL in England and Wales for the years in question are:

	Properties handed back to AHL
1997	8
1998	1,375
1999	1,195
2000	2,688
2001	2,656
2002	1,890

Some houses, including all family quarters in Scotland, are still owned by the MOD and disposals are handled by Defence Estates. The figures for such properties covering the whole of the UK are:

	Social landlords	*Other sales*
1997–98	132	569
1998–99	125	325
1999–2000	35	142
2000–01	395	186
2001–02	148	214
2002[1]	4	9

[1] to date

The figures include sales of MOD-owned houses apart from Family Quarters. "Other sales" include sales of individual houses to private purchasers.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of his Department's personnel housing units have been sold in the Twickenham constituency in *(a)* 2000, *(b)* 2001 and *(c)* 2002 so far; to whom they were sold; for what purpose; and at what price. [62430]

Dr. Moonie: All the Service Families Accommodation in the Twickenham constituency, along with most of the Service housing in England and Wales, was sold to a private company, Annington Homes Limited, in November 1996. Ministry of Defence leases back from Annington the properties required for service families and these are administered and maintained by the Defence Housing Executive.

Properties for which the MOD has no long term requirement are handed back to Annington under the terms of the sale agreement, for disposal. No service housing in Twickenham was released for disposal in 2000 or 2001, but 24 properties in the constituency were passed to Annington for disposal in March 2002. The MOD has no influence over the manner of disposal of these properties; whether they are rented out or sold is a commercial decision taken by Annington. If they are sold, the price is arrived at in consultation with local agents and in the context of the local housing market at the time of sale.

Joint Strike Fighter

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the likely preferred variant type of Joint Strike Fighter for the future aircraft carriers. [58677]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence is currently undertaking a detailed evaluation of the Short-Take-Off/Vertical Landing and Carrier Variants of the Joint Strike Fighter to establish which would best meet our needs. A decision is planned to be taken by autumn this year and an announcement will then be made.

Princess Royal Barracks

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has had from the families of soldiers killed at the Princess Royal Barracks at Deepcut, Surrey; and if he will make a statement. [62279]

Dr. Moonie: I met with the family of the late Private Geoff Gray on 15 May 2002. A number of written representations from Mr. and Mrs. Gray have been received by Ministers and other right hon. and hon. Members. There have also been a number of other representations made by Members on behalf of constituents.

The Surrey police investigation into the deaths of Private Geoff Gray and Private James Collinson is continuing. It would, therefore, be inappropriate for me to comment further at this stage.

The deaths in 1995 of Private Sean Benton and Private Cheryl James have both been subject to coroner's inquests and Army Boards of Inquiry (BOI). Privates Benton and James' next of kin have received copies of the respective BOI reports.

Powers of Arrest

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what powers of arrest military authorities will have in assisting civilian authorities in the event of a terrorist attack as described in 'The Role of the Reserves in Home Defence and Security'; and if he will make a statement. [62627]

Mr. Hoon: Except where specifically authorised by statute, the armed forces have no powers of arrest over and above those of an ordinary citizen. There are no proposals to add to existing armed forces powers. This does not, however, rule out the possibility of the armed forces being asked by the police for assistance in maintaining law and order.

'The Role of the Reserves in Home Defence and Security' discussion document proposes that the Reserves should play a greater role than is currently the case in support of the police and the civil authorities. They would do so at the request of the police and in close co-operation with them.

Gulf War Syndrome

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the submission of his Department to the War Pensions Appeal Tribunal in the case of Mr. Shaun Rusling, with an explanation for the change in description of his illness from Gulf War Syndrome; and if he will make a statement. [61872]

Dr. Moonie: As the papers submitted by Veterans Agency to the Pensions Appeal Tribunal contain details of personal and medical information relating to Mr. Rusling it would not be appropriate for the Ministry of Defence to publish them. I am therefore withholding them in accordance with Exemption 12 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. Mr. Rusling was sent a copy of these papers prior to the tribunal hearing.

Decisions on war pensions are medically certified and aim to reflect case specific facts, the relevant standard or proof and contemporary medical understanding.

Mr. Rusling first claimed war disablement pension in December 1993 for post-traumatic stress disorder and "Gulf Syndrome", described as a list of non-specific symptoms. Various disorders/symptoms were certified as attributable to service with an award paid but "Gulf Syndrome" was rejected as "not found".

In December 1996 Mr. Rusling appealed against the rejection of "Gulf Syndrome". Mr. Rusling's case was governed by the relevant war pensions legislation which requires disablement to be accepted unless it can be shown "beyond reasonable doubt" that there is no service link. His case was reviewed and to reflect then emerging evidence and medical understanding of Gulf illness and the war pension standard of proof, the rejected "Gulf Syndrome" was replaced by the WHO International Classification of Diseases 10th ed. diagnostic category, Signs, Symptoms and ill-defined Conditions. This included the symptoms previously claimed under "Gulf Syndrome". Mr. Rusling's award of war disablement pension was increased accordingly. Mr. Rusling was notified of the details of the decision at that time.

Mr. Bree[illegible] To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many G[illegible] war veterans have been awarded war pensions for *(a)* c[illegible]nic fatigue and *(b)* post viral fatigue syndromes. [61807]

Dr. Moonie: As at [illegible] June 2002, 114 war pension awards in respect of chronic fatigue syndrome and three in respect of post viral fatigue syndrome have been made to Gulf war veterans.

Sri Lankan War Veterans

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the Government plans to *(a)* reward financially Sri Lankan soldiers who took part in the Second World War and *(b)* otherwise assist financially surviving Ceylonese War veterans. [62654]

Dr. Moonie: We acknowledge the valuable role played by Sri Lankan veterans in the Second World War. However, we have no plans to provide financial assistance or recognition. Responsibility for the welfare of such veterans passed to the Government of Sri Lanka when the country became independent.

BioReliance

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contact was made between his Department and BioReliance after the visit of his Department's officials in late 2001. [57315]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 23 May 2002]:* Following the visit by representatives from Dstl Porton Down and the Medical Supplies Agency to BioReliance on 4 December 2001, contact with BioReliance in the form of a series of e-mails was instigated by Dstl Porton Down on 14 January 2002.

There has been no contact between BioReli[illegible]ce and Dstl Porton Down since that date.

Bullying

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many payments he has made in the past three years to members and former members of HM Armed Forces in compensation for ill-treatment, bullying or harassment experienced while serving; and what the total cost was in each year. [59694]

Dr. Moonie *[pursuant to the answer 10 June 2002, c. 743]:* The table given in the answer was printed under the wrong headings. The correct answer is reprinted.

The number of claims settled and the total amounts paid in the past three years to members and former members of HM Armed Forces in compensation for ill-treatment, bullying or harassment experience while serving are set out in the table.

Year	*Bullying/ill treatment*	*Sexual harassment*	*Racial harassment*
1999–2000	9 claims settled, £34,533 paid	2 claims settled, £31,000 paid	No claims settled
2000–01	6 claims settled, £49,165 paid	3 claims settled, £15,000 paid	1 claim settled, £50,000 paid
2001–02	17 claims settled, £132,373 paid	1 claim settled, £37,500 paid	1 claim settled, £20,000 paid

PRIME MINISTER

Honours

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if the Government issues policy guidelines to the Committee on the Grant of Honours, Decorations and Medals; and to whom it is accountable; [59829]

(2) when he expects Sir Richard Wilson's review of the case for the award of a medal for veterans of the Suez campaign 1951–54 to report; [59828]

(3) what the terms of reference are of Sir Richard Wilson's review of the case for the award of a medal for veterans of the Suez campaign 1951–54. [59827]

The Prime Minister: The terms of reference of the Committee are to consider general questions relative to the Grant of Honours, Decorations and Medals; to review the scales of award, both civil and military, from time to time, to consider questions of new awards, and changes in the conditions governing existing awards.

The Committee is the permanent standing committee to which the sovereign looks for advice about the honours system. It is chaired by the Secretary of the Cabinet, and its members are certain permanent secretaries and the private secretaries to the sovereign and the Prime Minister.

The Committee of Honours and Medals is aware of the past history of the case and of the representations currently being made for a medal. It is considering these representations very carefully.

China

Mr. MacDougall: To ask the Prime Minister when he last met the Chinese *(a)* Premier and *(b)* President to discuss Tibet. [59596]

The Prime Minister: I raised Tibet with the Chinese Premier, Zhu Rongji, during his visit to the UK in March/April 1998 and with President Jiang Zemin during his visit to the UK in October 1999. I also discussed Tibet with Vice President Hu Jintao when we met on 29 October last year.

The Government remain of the view that a long-term political solution in Tibet can only be found through dialogue between the Chinese authorities and the Tibetan people, including the Dalai Lama. We continue to urge the Chinese to develop such a dialogue, at both ministerial and official level, including at our biannual UK/China Human Rights Dialogue, the last round of which took place in Beijing on 15 May.

United Nations Security Council

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Prime Minister what his policy is on giving up Britain's seat on the United Nations Security Council in favour of collective representation by the European Union; and if he will make a statement. [60586]

The Prime Minister: Under the Charter of the United Nations only states may be members of the organisation. Therefore, a Security Council seat for the European Union would not be possible. The responsibility and duty of permanent membership of the UN Security Council is accepted by the United Kingdom and welcomed by its partners and allies.

European Commission

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Prime Minister what his policy is on the call by the President of the European Commission that Britain should give up its place on the IMF and G7 to a representative of the Commission; and if he will make a statement. [60585]

The Prime Minister: The Articles of Agreement of the International Monetary Fund are based on the principle of membership by and representation of national Governments. Membership of the G7/8 is also based on this principle. The European Commission is not represented at the Board of Governors of the IMF, although does participate in G7/8 meetings on some issues. While the Government will continue to cooperate with European Union partners, and others, to promote growth, stability and poverty reduction world wide, the UK does not support a role for the Commission as the sole representative of the European Union in the IMF and G7.

Social Issues

Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the conclusions of the report prepared by the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on Social Issues in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [60777]

The Prime Minister: We are carefully studying the concluding observations of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. We will take the committee's views into account when we submit our next periodic report and point out to them any inaccuracies in their latest conclusions. The UK has an excellent record of co-operation with UN mechanisms and takes its international obligations very seriously. We will continue to fulfil our reporting obligations under UN human rights treaties we are party to.

Sport

Lynne Jones: To ask the Prime Minister when the Performance and Innovation Unit will publish its report on the future of sport; and if he will make a statement. [61290]

The Prime Minister: The Performance and Innovation Unit's joint study with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport examining long-term sports policy will be published in due course.

Former President Mandela

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will meet former President Mandela to discuss his visit to Barlinnie Prison in Glasgow and meeting with Abdul Bassett al Megrahi. [61135]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* I have no current plans for a meeting with former President Mandela.

Beef Imports

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Prime Minister when he next plans to meet the French President; and if he will raise the issue of the ban imposed by the French Government on imports of beef from the UK. [61328]

The Prime Minister: I expect to meet the French President shortly. The Government continue to make it clear to the French Government that their ban on UK beef exported under the Date-based Export Scheme is illegal and should be lifted immediately.

Regulatory Reform

Brian Cotter: To ask the Prime Minister which Ministers have direct responsibility for regulatory reform within each Government Department. [61335]

The Prime Minister: Each Department involved in regulatory activity has a Minister who is charged with removing any regulations that are outdated or burdensome, and ensuring that new regulations are truly necessary and involve the least burden to business.

The current Ministers are: Dr. Kim Howells MP (Department for Culture, Media and Sport); Lord Whitty (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs); Lord Hunt of Kings (Department of Health); Lord Falconer of Thoroton (Home Office); Baroness Scotland of Asthal (Lord Chancellor's Department); Nigel Griffiths MP (Department of Trade and Industry); John Spellar MP (Department for Transport) Dawn Primarolo MP (HM Treasury); Ian McCartney MP (Department for Work and Pensions).

The Ministers for the Department for Education and Skills and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minster have yet to be decided following the recent reallocation of ministerial duties.

Special Advisers

Mr. Collins: To ask the Prime Minister if he will publish the correspondence between the Ministry of Defence and the Cabinet Office concerning the special adviser to the Secretary of State for Defence to which he referred at Prime Minister's questions on 12 June; and if he will make a statement. [62410]

The Prime Minister: I have nothing further to add to the answers I gave the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West (Mr. Kennedy) on 12 June 2002, *Official Report*, columns 858–59.

Rail Summit

Mrs. May: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the attendees at the rail summit he held on 28 May. [62574]

The Prime Minister: I have meetings with a wide range of organisations and individuals. As with previous Administrations it is not my practice to provide details of all such meetings.

Radioactive Waste

Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister what matters in respect of the sea bed disposal of radioactive waste from the United Kingdom in the Hurd Deep near the Channel Islands were discussed during his visit to Jersey on 14 June. [62082]

The Prime Minister: This issue was not raised during my visit.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Centre for Tropical Veterinary Medicine

Mr. Russell Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she will take to ensure the continued operation of the Centre for Tropical Veterinary Medicine in Edinburgh. [59298]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* The Centre for Tropical Veterinary Medicine is part of the University of Edinburgh and is reliant on funding from a wide range of sources for both research and training. DEFRA is not a significant funder of CTVM. DEFRA is interested in aspects of veterinary training and funds Veterinary Fellowship programmes at three Veterinary Schools—including one at Edinburgh. We are awaiting the Royal Society Inquiry report which may make recommendations about training.

Countryside Stewardship Scheme

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of farms with countryside stewardship scheme agreements have had their scheme compliance checked during the first year of the agreement by farm visits from her Department's Rural Development Service. [60672]

Mr. Morley: The Rural Payments Agency is responsible for carrying out compliance inspections of countryside stewardship agreements in accordance with EU requirements. EU rules require at least 5 per cent. of agreements to be inspected and selected using a risk based selection criteria. The risk based selection criteria is not specifically related to the year of agreement.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of countryside stewardship agreements the Rural Payments Agency has visited in each year since the scheme began. [60671]

Mr. Morley: The Rural Development Regulation requires member states to undertake on-the-spot compliance checks on at least 5 per cent. of agreements each year. Between 1996 and 2000, just over 5 per cent. of agreements were subject to such checks by MAFF staff each year. The Rural Payments Agency assumed responsibility for these checks in April 2001, after the Regional Service Centres of MAFF were disbanded. Since then, no compliance checks have been undertaken on Countryside Stewardship agreements. The foot and mouth epidemic prevented Agency staff undertaking any checks during the majority of the last calendar year and the early part of 2002. Arrangements for resuming checks on Countryside Stewardship agreements are well advanced.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 15 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 654W, on the Countryside Stewardship Scheme, if she will outline how the risk-based selection system works; and what monitoring is in place to identify risks. [60674]

Mr. Morley: Risk selection of on-the-spot compliance checks is laid down in the Rural Development regulation, which requires member states to take account of the following factors:

the amount of aid involved;

the number of agricultural parcels and the area or number of animals for which aid is requested;

changes from the previous years;

the findings of checks made in past years;

cases of non-compliance;

those farmers who are either just above or just below ceilings or limits relevant for the granting of aids;

replacement of animals.

Data on risk factors are accumulated for each agreement and fed into a selection programme, which identifies the requisite number of agreements to be inspected for each year's compliance monitoring round. A proportion—currently 75 per cent. to 80 per cent.—of the total number of agreements selected for compliance checks are identified through this risk selection process. The remainder are randomly selected, as required by the Rural Development regulation.

Ragwort

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if ragwort is covered by the Injurious Weeds Act 1959. [60679]

Mr. Morley: I can confirm that common ragwort is one of the five injurious weeds covered by the Weeds Act 1959.

Biosecurity (South Korea)

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what advice on biosecurity she has issued to British tourists visiting South Korea. [60269]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* We have increased the number and improved the locations of posters explaining our import controls at the major UK airports. The Football Association agreed to target football fans travelling to the World Cup with advice about the risk of importing foot and mouth disease from South Korea. These initiatives are part of our work to increase public awareness of the current regulations and their importance.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what advice she has given to port health officers about the risks of foot and mouth disease being introduced to the United Kingdom by *(a)* travellers and *(b)* goods from South Korea. [60270]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* We have notified enforcement authorities and Her Majesty's Customs and Excise of the outbreak of foot and mouth disease in South Korea so that they take this into consideration when undertaking checks of cargo and passenger baggage. On, 22 May, enforcement officers' search powers were extended to include personal baggage and all commercial containers, whether or not described as food.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps are being taken by HM Customs and Excise to reduce the risk of foot and mouth disease being brought into the United Kingdom by travellers from South Korea. [60273]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* HM Customs and Excise support the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and their enforcement agencies in their implementation of import controls designed to protect animal and human health. Customs staff have been alerted to the outbreak of foot and mouth disease in South Korea and have been directed to bring any consignments discovered in Customs checks to the attention of the appropriate local health officials.

Icebergs

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on *(a)* the hazards to shipping, *(b)* the impact of global warming and *(c)* changes in sea levels in connection with the floating away of iceberg numbers (i) C19 and (ii) C10 from Antarctica. [58214]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* C19 broke away from the west Antarctic in the last few weeks and is currently drifting slowly north. C10 broke away about five years ago and is currently located at approximately 64 degrees south, 99 east.

There is an obvious risk to navigation, especially when we consider that a vessel undertaking a "great circle" sailing in the southern ocean will be drawn into high latitudes. However, the risk is minimised by knowledge of the location, size and movement of the icebergs from satellite remote sensing devices, the provision of Maritime Safety Information (MSI) services to ensure that mariners are aware of the danger and the contribution from modern navigation systems.

The breaking away of C10 and C19 will not have an impact on global warming. While the break-up of ice shelves is consistent with a warmer world, it is still not clear the degree to which global warming has contributed to the recent break-up of parts of the Antarctic ice shelf.

C10 and C19 will not cause sea levels to change as the ice was floating in the sea prior to breaking off the ice shelf.

Departmental Policies (Isle of Wight)

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the activities pursued by her Department that have had a particular impact on the Isle of Wight since 7 June 2001. [57675]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* 'FMD Signposts to Recovery' conference, held (in Berkshire) at the end of June 2001, covered the Isle of Wight interests. This was one of two seminars held in the regions to assist rural businesses in the recovery process from the impacts of foot and mouth disease and the precautionary measures required to contain it. Conference was targeted at advisers and advisory organisations in public and private sectors that regularly provide support, advice or information to rural businesses. Organised from Government Office South East for DEFRA, with, SEEDA (Regional Development Agency), Countryside Agency, SE Tourist Board, NFU and Farm Crisis Network, et.al. Information was provided on a variety of Government sponsored resources from Departments, agencies and partner organisations, e.g. Rural Business Recovery Fund, Farm Business Advisory Service, Countryside Agency Grants etc.

A seminar on 'Planning and Rural Diversification' was held in January 2002 to cover the two counties of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight (held at Sparsholt College near Winchester). Representatives from the Isle of Wight Unitary Authority as the local planning authority were invited to attend. There were four seminars held in total across the region, in a series resulting from the Government's Action Plan for Farming. The seminars focused on farm diversification and rural business development issues and brought together relevant partners at the regional and local level, to take account of regional needs and variations.

The Isle of Wight adopted its unitary development plan in May 2001, which had received input from the former MAFF. Any further input on behalf of DEFRA for a review will be made through the Government Office for the South East (GOSE), in conjunction with the interests of other Departments. Some dialogue is expected in respect of implementing national Planning Policy Guidance, notably PPG3 on housing and PPG7 which sets out the Government's objectives for rural areas.

The South East Rural Affairs Forum has been set up following recommendations in the Rural White Paper. The First meeting of the Group was on the 15 April in Guildford. This Forum gives the opportunity for Rural Stakeholders across the South East to give their views on how rural policy is being delivered in the region. Cllr Harry Rees is a member, who is also a Member of the Isle of Wight Council Executive and other local bodies on the Island.

The Countryside Agency, English Nature, Forestry Commission and other Agencies sponsored by DEFRA work with the Isle of Wight AONB which covers a third of the Island. Representatives of the Government Office for the South East Department have attended meetings of the Joint Action Committee on behalf of DEFRA to contribute to the action programme of the AONB.

Applications for the England rural Development Programme (ERDP) have been received from within the Island constituency. There have been four successful Rural Enterprise scheme projects agreed to date and one Vocational Training Scheme project. There are over 70 hectares supported under the Farm Woodland Premium Scheme. There are currently seven countryside Stewardship Scheme agreements covering collectively over 225 hectares Approximately 67 ha. are managed with the benefit of Organic Farming Scheme payments.

Clinics for the promotion of good quality applications under the ERDP are held regularly by the DEFRA Rural Development Service in Reading and Guildford, and have been attended recently by potential applicants from the Isle of Wight who are bringing forward new schemes for rural development.

In addition to the ERDP there are continuing CAP payments supporting most farms in the constituency.

Under the Market Towns Initiative a partnership development programme for the Island has recently been supported, including information and advice on Rural White Paper policies in the context of the developing Local Strategic Partnership, and the Vital Villages grant scheme run by the Countryside Agency.

The Isle of Wight is one of five areas in the South East region that has been awarded new funding under the LEADER+ programme, with European Union support, for experimental development of rural projects and community initiatives. The Local Action Group is currently preparing its plans, under the DEFRA national guidance and with local contracts at the Government Office for the region.

Fisheries

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proposals she has to protect fisheries in British inshore waters from January 2003; and if she will make a statement. [60157]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* I welcome the Commission's proposal to renew without any time limitation the current access arrangements for the six and twelve mile limits and their statement that these provisions have reduced fishing pressure in the most biologically-sensitive areas of the sea and provided economic stability for small-scale fishing activity. The proposal would apply from 1 January 2003 and a decision is due to be taken by the Fisheries Council during the course of this year's review of the Common Fisheries Policy. There remains a consensus among Member States in favour of renewing the limits.

Wildlife Projects

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much was spent, by project, on the Flagship Species Fund in 2001–02. [61170]

Mr. Meacher: In November 2001, the Department allocated £80,000 to the Flagship Species Fund, to be run by Fauna & Flora International. A total of £70,500 was allocated to nine projects, of which £54,455 has already been spent and the remainder will be spent in the next few months. The grants are as follows.

Vietnam Primates

£20,000 towards the conservation of endangered primate species in a National Park in Vietnam, including a feasibility study on mechanisms to establish a community-based ecotourism project.

Ecuador Spider Monkey

£15,000 for the conservation of a threatened spider monkey in northwest Ecuador through production of an Action Plan and a series of community-designed conservation awareness materials.

Pau Brasil

£8,000 for an educational campaign to support the conservation of Brazil's endangered national tree.

Mexican Oaks

£8,000 for the development of conservation initiatives for over 30 oak species that are threatened with extinction in Mexico.

Bushmeat

£7,500 to build a guard post to monitor the trade in bushmeat between Nigeria and Cameroon.

Philippine Teak

£4,000 for a conservation programme to re-establish a stable natural population of Philippine teak.

Nigeria

£4,000 for the conservation of forests in the Taraba and Adamawa States

Russia

£2,500 for the conservation of two threatened bat species

Thailand

£1,500 for the conservation of the endangered Siamese crocodile.

£9,500 has been used towards the administration costs of the Flagship Species Fund. The Fund has already attracted donations totalling £100,000 from BP and Rio Tinto. Negotiations are continuing with a number of other potential corporate sponsors.

Scientific Working Group on Wild Birds and Nature Conservation

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will place in the Library the minutes relating to the Scientific Working Group on Wild Birds and Nature Conservation. [61164]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* I understand this question to relate to the Scientific Working Group which supports the ORNIS Committee which assists the European Commission in an advisory capacity on a range of issues concerning implementation of the EC Wild Birds Directive. This committee is supported by a Scientific Working Group which acts in a consultative capacity on technical matters.

Any requests for documents produced by the European Commission, including requests for the minutes of the Scientific Working Group, should be made directly to the European Commission. As part of a wider process, the Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Fly Tipping

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many convictions for fly tipping have been obtained in each of the last five years. [56971]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* Local authorities and the Environment Agency may prosecute for fly tipping offences. Between 1996 and 2001, the agency recorded prosecutions for general waste offences on a financial year basis. The data do not distinguish fly tipping offences from other waste offences. From 1 April 1999, the agency recorded whether an incident involves the unlawful deposit of waste and whether prosecutions led to convictions or acquittals. This information is given in the tables. No central register is kept of local authorities' prosecutions.

Prosecutions (England and Wales)

	General waste offences	*Unlawful deposit of waste*[1]
1996–97	241	—
1997–98	345	—
1998–99	367	—
1999–2000	342	219
2000–01	439	225
2001–02	—	264

Convictions (England and Wales)

	Unlawful deposit of waste[1]
1999–2000	211
2000–01	210
2001–02	253

[1] Prosecutions under section 33(1)(a) of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has had with district councils about fly-tipping; and if she will make a statement. [60098]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* I have had no recent discussions with district councils specifically about fly tipping. However, these councils are represented by the Local Government Association on the fly tipping stakeholders' forum. The forum, chaired by the Environment Agency, provides an important channel for views on fly tipping to be shared anmong a range of stakeholders, including Government.

I also attended recently the all party waste group's seminar on environmental crime, which discussed fly tipping, and which was attended by representatives from a number of local authorities.

Fridges

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what extra funding she is providing to local authorities to deal with the disposal of fridges; when this extra funding will become available; and if she will make a statement. [62561]

Mr. Meacher: In December 2001, we announced a payment of £6 million to go to local authorities to cover their costs up until March 2002 for the disposal of refrigerators. We realise local authorities are in need of further funding and intend to make an announcement as soon as possible.

Nitrates

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the compatibility of the Government's commitments concerning the EC Nitrates Directive made in the Action Plan for Farming of March 2000 and the proposal made in her recent consultation document on the Nitrates Directive. [62086]

Mr. Meacher: The Government are fully committed to minimising the extra burden on farmers, consistent with its legal responsibilities. Particular action that we have taken to implement the commitments set out in the Action Programme for Farming of March 2000 includes:

Consultation, through the consultation document "How should England implement the 1991 Nitrates Directive?". We are currently carefully considering all the issues raised in the responses to this consultation and will shortly announce which approach will be adopted.

Development of implementation support for farmers through working with stakeholder organisations to prepare workable guidance and advice, including updates to a series of free guideline booklets for farmers.

Giving farmers time to prepare for implementation through bringing the Action Programme measures into effect within the new areas on 19 December 2002. As a result, the first closed period, during which the spreading of manures is prohibited, will not be until August 2003.

We continue to operate a derogation which allows a higher limit than that set in the Directive for spreading nitrates on grassland. Steps are being taken to secure this derogation at EU level.

The grant rate under the Farm Waste Grant Scheme was increased from 25 per cent. to 40 per cent. of eligible expenditure on 30 November 2000.

The Government conducted bilateral meetings with member states and found that there is very little support for re-negotiating the requirements of the Nitrates Directive because of the widely held perception that re-examination of scientific evidence will result in tighter legislation.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make it her policy to commission and publish a veterinary risk assessment of the greater inter-farm movements of manure arising from the proposals in the Government's consultation document on nitrate vulnerable zones. [61594]

Mr. Meacher: There are no plans at present to undertake a veterinary risk assessment of the inter-farm movement of manure arising from implementing the Nitrates Directive, as such movements already take place and the veterinary risks are addressed in existing guidance for farmers. The general principles of decreasing the risk of spreading disease while transporting manure are included in the free guidance booklets "Guidelines for farmers in NVZs" and "Manure Planning in NVZs" which we intend to send to all farmers newly affected by the Nitrates Directive. They are:

(1) maintaining a leak and spillage proof vehicle;

(2) ensuring that the exterior of the vehicle is clean before leaving the farm;

(3) spreading manure on arable land or grassland used for forage conservation where possible;

(4) storing and spreading the manure as per recommendations of codes of good practice.

EU Meeting (Mallorca)

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 21 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 200W, if she will list the commitments that *(a)* the UK and *(b)* the European Union undertook and the timetable for meeting them. [62171]

Mr. Meacher: Neither the UK nor the European Union undertook any commitments at the informal meeting of Environment Ministers on 24–26 May in Mallorca. The presidency produced their own conclusions from the discussions on soil protection, which are as follows.

The Commission adopted their communication "Towards a Thematic Strategy for Soil Protection" on 16 April 2002, and this formed the background to the discussion at Mallorca. Member states have been considering both the communication and the Mallorca discussion in the Council working group and are likely to adopt conclusions at the June Environment Council to steer the Commission's development of the strategy.

National Vocational Qualifications

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many and what percentage of *(a)* large, *(b)* small, *(c)* medium and *(d)* micro businesses have succeeded in NVQ implementation in each of the last 10 years in rural areas. [60863]

Margaret Hodge: I have been asked to reply.

The information, in the form requested, is not collected centrally. However, the total number of NVQ certificates awarded since their introduction in 1988 is 3,568,046.

Working Time Directive

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her policy is on the application of the working time directive to fishermen. [61502]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

Fatigue is a factor in many fishing vessel accidents. My Department is working with the fishing industry to ensure the sensible implementation of the directive.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the costs to British fishermen of complying with the working time directive. [61503]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

My officials are discussing the implementation of the directive with the sea-fishing industry. Because of the nature of the fishing industry in the UK, it is not anticipated that the directive will impose unreasonable financial burdens.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

IT Contracts

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what has been the total expenditure of his Department on IT systems and support in each year from May 1997 to date; how many IT contracts have been let in each of those years; of the other main contracting party in each of those contracts, how many have been *(a)* companies whose registered office is in (i) England and Wales, (ii) Scotland and (iii) Northern Ireland and *(b)* foreign companies; and what are the names of the companies falling within category (a). [33675]

Clare Short: The total expenditure by my Department on IT systems and support in each year since May 1997 to date is shown in the table.

£

	IT support[1]	*IT goods*[2]	*IT contracts*[3]	*Total*
May 1997 to April 1998	1,935,324	2,060,607	834,804	4,830,735
May 1998 to April 1999	1,834,625	2,367,885	1,539,290	5,741,800
May 1999 to April 2000	2,865,038	2,703,506	1,001,945	6,570,489
May 2000 to April 2001	1,801,077	7,646,706	1,525,558	10,973,341
May 2001[4]	1,194,532	8,093,482	1,040,412	10,328,426

[1] Including salaries

[2] And services

[3] Contracts including maintenance

[4] To date

It is not possible to say without a disproportionate effort where the registered offices of the various companies are based.

CDC

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether she has exercised the powers conferred by the retention of a golden share in the CDC to direct the investment strategy towards the needs of poorer nations. [34757]

Clare Short: CDC's investment policy is focused on poorer developing countries, and cannot be changed without the approval of the Special Shareholder.

Departmental Sponsors

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) which hon. Members have been appointed as sponsors to her Department since 7 June 2001; and when each of them were appointed; [59967]

(2) what the duties are of hon. Members appointed as sponsors to her Department; and what assistance is given by officials in her Department to them in carrying out these duties. [59990]

Clare Short: We have made no such appointments.

Public Consultation

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the public consultations undertaken by her Department since June 2001, stating in each case the *(a)* number of respondents and *(b)* percentage of those specifically consulted who responded. [60148]

Clare Short: Since July 2001 the Department for International Development has completed one public consultation process on a strategy paper for achieving the Millennium Development Goal on hunger. The Department received *(a)* 119 written replies, which represented *(b)* about 10 per cent. of those specifically consulted. More than 1,000 people, in the United Kingdom and internationally, were sent copies of the consultation paper, which was also placed on the DFID website.

The Department is carrying out three further public consultations on policy papers on: "Energy for the Poor"; "Better Livelihoods for Poor People, the Role of Agriculture"; and "Infrastructure for Poverty Reduction". Responses to these consultations are still being received.

The Department pursues more focused consultation exercises with outside bodies and experts on particular issues. Recent examples include a strategy for the Department's partnership with the World Health Organisation, and a policy paper on research for poverty reduction. The Department is also participating in a joint international consultation exercise with the World bank, the United Nations Development Programme and the European Commission on policies for linking poverty reduction with environmental management.

The Department regularly makes available, via its website and through parliamentary and civil society networks, briefing notes on major international meetings in which it is involved, such as the United Nations Financing for Development conference in Monterrey in March, the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Children in May, International Monetary Fund and World bank meetings, and European Union development council meetings. Delegations also regularly consult representatives of civil society during the course of such meetings.

The Department is currently engaged in its third round of development policy forums across the UK, to share thinking and ideas on key development issues. Over 2,000 representatives from across society—including from NGOs, trade unions, private sector, faith organisations and universities—are participating in the 11 forums in 2002, which are focusing on globalisation and its potential to reduce world poverty. Specifically, participants are debating the themes of trade, environment and the private sector.

Africa

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what changes have taken place in the Government's policy and aims for development in Africa since 1 October 2001; and what action her Department has taken with regard to Africa since that date. [61400]

Clare Short: DFID's aim is the elimination of poverty. The framework for our action is set out in the 1997 and 2000 White Papers and the recent International Development Act. The UN Millennium Development Goals are the main yardsticks against which we continue to measure progress towards this aim.

At the country level we believe progress towards development goals is principally the responsibility of African Governments, in partnership with the donor community. The international community is working with developing countries, including in Sub-Saharan Africa, to promote country-led and participatory poverty reduction strategy processes. These processes are intended to develop coherent national policies, agree priorities, and help to develop an institutional framework in which Governments can be held to account by their own citizens and stakeholders. The role of donors is to provide financial and technical support to enhance Governments' capacity to develop and implement these strategies.

Last October the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) was formally launched. This is one of the most important initiatives to come from Africa in recent years, and has been strongly welcomed by the Government. We are currently working to try to ensure that the response to NEPAD from the international community is both positive and sustained. In particular, we are working within the G8 to develop an Action Plan for Africa which focuses on the key areas of conflict resolution, aid, debt, health, education and trade.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what estimate she has made of the number of people at risk of starvation in each country in sub-Saharan Africa; what steps her Department is taking to assist people at risk of starvation in each country in sub-Saharan Africa suffering food shortages; how much money her Department is allocating for humanitarian relief in each of the countries; and how much the spend on these countries has increased since the last financial year. [62091]

Clare Short: My Department is working with the international community and African Governments both to assess the number of people in sub-Saharan Africa who are hungry and to build capacity to assess vulnerability. FAO estimates from 1997 indicate that around 187 million people in sub-Saharan Africa do not have enough food. Excluding the on-going conflict in Angola, the immediate emerging crisis is in southern Africa where around 13 million people in six countries are estimated to be unlikely to grow or buy enough food by next March. My Department has recently published a strategy paper "Eliminating Hunger". This sets out our strategy to meet the millennium development goal for hunger and is relevant to the current problems in Africa. Humanitarian relief is only one part of our response, as the principal cause of hunger and starvation in Africa is poverty and the failure of institutions and Governments to provide for the poor and vulnerable and react to natural disaster. In the last complete financial year (2000–01) my Department provided £632 million to sub-Saharan Africa. Included within this figure was £44 million for humanitarian assistance. This represents an increase of 31 per cent. in funds allocated to sub-Saharan Africa from the previous financial year. In addition to this, DFID is providing £58 million specifically to help address the current crisis in southern Africa. It is, unfortunately, not possible to provide more detailed figures of the assessments of hunger and humanitarian expenditure in each country in southern Africa without disproportionate effort.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what measures she is taking to help alleviate the famine crisis in southern Africa; and if she will make a statement. [62083]

Clare Short: In addition to the £13 million already allocated to direct support for food import and distribution in Malawi and Zimbabwe, we have recently committed £45 million for further support through the World Food Programme and NGOs for food distribution and inputs for the next planting season in Zimbabwe, Malawi Zambia, Mozambique, Lesotho and Swaziland. These funds will also support information gathering and co-ordination. As well as making our national response, we are working with the relevant UN and regional organisations to ensure that policies are in place to allow commercial and aid imports to flow freely; and we are urging the Zimbabwe authorities through the UN to adopt measures to strengthen the national response in that country.

We have also provided £2.4 million for humanitarian aid in Angola this year.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action she has taken *(a)* to provide food, *(b)* to support agriculture and *(c)* to combat HIV/AIDS in (i) Lesotho, (ii) Mozambique and (iii) Zambia; and what action she has taken to reduce trade barriers with (A) Lesotho, (B) Mozambique and (C) Zambia. [62426]

Clare Short: The information is as follows.

Food Aid

In Lesotho DFID will be providing £1.5 million to the WFP emergency programme and another additional £1.0 million to support the longer-term rehabilitation of agriculture in the three worst affected districts. Mozambique has a surplus of maize in the north, although logistics and traditional trading patterns will result in most of this surplus being exported to adjacent countries mainly Malawi. Several donors are already funding food relief where it is needed in the south. DFID is assessing the needs, but it is likely that we can add more value in Mozambique by assisting with the management of food aid or by focusing on agricultural inputs to improve food security for the next harvest. At the moment we are not engaged in food aid in Zambia.

Agriculture

In Lesotho, we are supporting a three year Agricultural Policy and Capacity building Programme (£750,000) in collaboration with other donors to restructure the Ministry of Agriculture and improve its operational effectiveness. We are providing support to CARE (£1.9 million) in two districts where they have been developing a more appropriate extension model that meets the needs of the rural people and empower households and communities. We are providing support to a Pilot Agro-forestry Programme (£214,130), to strengthen the capacity of small-scale nurseries.

DFID is a key supporter of the Mozambique Government's sector programme in agriculture, ProAgri, which seeks to promote growth and poverty reduction by creating a dynamic agricultural sector. We have also been working for some years with NGOs in agricultural development in Zambezia Province. Much of the impact of the very successful feeder roads programme in Zambezia has also been felt in the agricultural sector, where transport and access to markets are key constraints on growth.

In Zambia we have provided support for civil society groups working in the drought-prone southern province.

HIV/AIDS

DFID has committed £7.6 million over five years to fund a Regional HIV/AIDS Programme channelled through the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Health Sector Co-ordinating Unit (HSCU), specifically earmarked for Botswana, Swaziland, Lesotho and Namibia. The programme focuses on developing the capacity within each country and across the region to mount an effective response to the epidemic. The initiative complements an EU funded programme also channelled through the SADC HSCU which is to benefit all member states.

Mozambique's national HIV prevalence is 12.2 per cent. 1.1 million people are HIV positive. DFID supports the Mozambique National AIDS Council in its multisectoral response (£3.8 million); supports key civil society organisations (£7.6 million), and is supporting the Government to work with young people in and out of school to prevent HIV infection. We are working with the Ministry of Health to provide a broader health sector response to HIV/AIDs (£1.85 million). Jointly with other donors, we are currently providing additional support (£25 million) to the health sector and this funds a significant proportion of Mozambique's essential medicines requirements.

In Zambia the main support to date has been through the health and education sectors, however, DFID is currently preparing a programme that will provide an additional £20 million to support the national strategic framework.

Trade

Considerable DFID effort is allocated towards trade capacity building for developing countries and lobbying for greater market access with EU member states and with the WTO.

Lesotho, as a member of the Southern African Customs University is part of the recently agreed SACU Free Trade Agreement, it is also a recipient of the Cotonou Agreement trade preferences. DFID has offered support to Lesotho in trade policy negotiations and capacity building through the Africa Trade and Poverty Programme.

Mozambique and Zambia as least developed countries, both benefit from duty and quota free access for their products into the UK under the EU 'Everything But Arms' initiative, the introduction of which the UK Government strongly supported. They also benefit from the Cotonou Agreement. DFID is working with the Governments in these countries in ways that will help them take advantage of these and new market opportunities.

Food Strategies

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether an agreed strategy has been reached by OECD countries, the World Food Programme and NGOs, both international and local, on the food strategies affecting southern Africa which take into account the region's political and economic dynamics. [61082]

Clare Short: Agreement was reached at a meeting in Johannesburg on 6–7 June on a series of short-term measures to improve availability of food in Zimbabwe, Malawi, Zambia, Mozambique, Lesotho and Swaziland in the period to the next harvest, including commercial food imports, food aid, winter cropping and inputs for the next main planting season.

The meeting also dealt with the particular problems of Zimbabwe, which accounts for over half of the region's food aid needs. Donors wish to continue supporting the people of Zimbabwe who have been so badly let down by the policies of the ruling party. They are prepared to continue funding food distribution through non-governmental channels, but it is clear that this can only provide part of the solution and that Government must take steps to allow greater participation in the import effort and make the necessary adjustments in economic policy for this to be effective.

In the longer term food security must be addressed through country level poverty reduction strategies which we are supporting in four of the six countries considered at the meeting.

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what work her Department is undertaking to ensure that there is *(a)* accurate information on the country specific food shortages in southern Africa and *(b)* adequate co-ordination of the humanitarian operation at both national and regional levels in southern Africa. [61087]

Clare Short: We are working closely with the relevant UN organisations and NGOs operating in the region. The main source of information at present is the series of crop and food supply assessments carried out by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation and the World Food Programme (available on www.fao.org). We are supporting continuing vulnerability and nutritional assessments to ensure information is available at sub-national level.

The World Food Programme has set up a unit in Johannesburg to manage the use of transport and regional supplies and to co-ordinate the international effort. We will provide financial and personnel support for the unit.

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what resources her Department will allocate to combat the food shortages in Southern Africa; and what time scale these resources will be intended to cover. [61088]

Clare Short: In addition to the £13 million already allocated to direct support for food import and distribution in Malawi and Zimbabwe, we have recently committed £45 million for further support through the World Food

Programme and NGOs for food distribution and inputs for the next planting season in Zimbabwe, Malawi, Zambia, Mozambique, Lesotho and Swaziland. This will be spent up to March 2003; the amount will be reviewed in the light of emerging needs and responses from others.

We have also provided £2.4 million for humanitarian aid in Angola this year.

Water

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had since January 2001 with UN and EU representatives regarding the global clean water supply. [61190]

Clare Short: I have had no direct discussions on this matter with UN and EU representatives since January 2001. However, I have worked on this issue with my officials who are in regular contact on water supply, sanitation and water resources issues with counterparts in EU member states, the EC and relevant UN organisations.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on plans to liberalise water services. [61933]

Clare Short: 1.1 billion people lack access to safe and affordable water supply and 2.4 billion lack access to sanitation. In developing countries poor people often pay far more than the better off for their water. We are committed to improving access to safe and affordable water supply and sanitation services. Partnerships involving the public and private sectors and civil society will be essential to achieve this. Our focus is to support the structuring of these partnerships in a way that responds to the needs of, and ensures benefits for, poor people through pro-poor contracts, good regulatory frameworks, and appropriate tariff structures.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps the Government have taken since 1997 to increase access to clean water in the Third World; and if she will make a statement. [61189]

Clare Short: My Department is committed to the Millennium Development Goal of halving, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water, and to a complementary target for access to improved sanitation.

DFID has an extensive programme of engagement in water supply, sanitation and water resources management through our bilateral support to developing countries. In 2000–01 DFID spent £90.6 million on improving access to water services, an increase of 7 per cent. on the previous year. At an international level we are actively engaged in encouraging policies and practices that will ensure that poor people benefit from improved access to water and sanitation services. DFID's priorities are set out in our strategy paper "Addressing the Water Crisis—Healthier and More Productive Lives for Poor People", which is available in the Library of the House.

Entertainment Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the cost was of the Department's 2001 staff Christmas Party; and how many people attended. [61654]

Clare Short: DFID did not hold a departmental staff Christmas party in 2001.

Members of Parliament (Personal Data)

Mr. Forth: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what information is held by her Department on each hon. Member in relation to *(a)* personal relationships, both current and past, *(b)* financial status and dealings, *(c)* connections with companies and interest groups, *(d)* connections with Governments and *(e)* published works; and what was held in January 2002. [61824]

Clare Short: With the exception of those details available publicly in DOD's Parliamentary Companion, none.

Development Council

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the outcome of the Development Council held on 30 May was; and if she will make a statement. [62896]

Clare Short: At its meeting on 30 May, the Development Council, by consensus:

> agreed conclusions on the external dimension of EU Sustainable Development Strategy and preparations for the World Summit on Sustainable Development;
>
> agreed procedural conclusions welcoming a proposal to define a common EU approach to democracy and governance in developing countries;
>
> debated the reform of EC Development Assistance and the Programme of Action 2002;
>
> agreed a declaration reaffirming its support for the work of UNFPA; and
>
> agreed joint resolutions with member states on education and training in the context of poverty reduction in developing countries, and on health and poverty reduction in developing countries; a resolution on water management in developing countries; conclusions on improving EU development response towards ACP crisis and conflict affected countries, and on information and communication technologies in development; and declarations on the World Food Summit, and on the food crisis in southern Africa.

There were also informal discussions of recent developments in Afghanistan and Sudan.

Pakistan

Dr. Naysmith: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the Government's policy is on the World bank loan to Pakistan agreed on 11 June. [62697]

Clare Short: The World bank board has voted in favour of the Second Structural Adjustment Credit ($500 million) to Pakistan. The loan is part of the international package of assistance to Pakistan's Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy, and supports reform measures that have already been taken. The UK made clear at the board meeting that we strongly support the Pakistan reform agenda but we expressed concerns about the risks posed by the threat of war, and the low levels of social and poverty-related expenditures.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Queen's Jubilee Medal

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will estimate the cost of awarding the Queen's Jubilee Medal to *(a)* Yeomen of the Queen's Bodyguard, *(b)* Gentlemen at Arms and *(c)* the Queen's Bodyguard for Scotland, The Royal Company of Archers. [59655]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* The medal is being issued to serving members of the armed forces, the Royal Fleet Auxiliary and the emergency services who completed five years or more reckonable service on 6 February 2002. The holders of the George Cross and Victoria Cross are also receiving the medal. The estimated cost is £7.8 million. The Yeoman of the Queen's Body Guard; Gentleman at Arms; and the Queen's Bodyguard for Scotland, The Royal Company of Archers are not eligible to receive the medal because they are not serving members of the armed forces or emergency services.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Castlereagh Break-in

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the *(a)* length of employment within a police establishment and *(b)* security vetting of the former chef who was recently arrested in the United States in relation to the breach of national security at Castlereagh police station. [48986]

Jane Kennedy: The criminal investigation into the break-in at Castlereagh is continuing and the Acting Chief Constable has advised me that the PSNI are actively pursuing lines of inquiry. It would not be appropriate for me to comment on the detail of the incident while the investigation is on-going.

Staff Pay

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what have been the total salary costs of each of the non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible in each of the last five years. [50299]

Jane Kennedy: The total salary costs of each of the non-departmental public bodies in each of the last five years:

	£
1997–98	
Probation Board	6,212,700
Juvenile Justice centres	4,980,382
Police Service	496,330,000
ICPC	539,000
1998–99	
Probation Board	6,578,309
Juvenile Justice centres	4,907,237
Police Service	502,800,000
ICPC	530,000
1999–2000	
Probation Board	6,877,930
Juvenile Justice centres	4,737,733
Police Service	495,052,000
ICPC	539,000
NI Human Rights Commission	404,595
2000–01	
Probation Board	7,142,880
Juvenile Justice centres	4,384,050
Police Service	489,152,000
ICPC	[1]319,000
Police Ombudsman	[2]760,000
NI Human Rights Commission	524,838
2001–02	
Probation Board	figures not yet available
Juvenile Justice centres	
Police Service	
Police Ombudsman	
NI Human Rights Commission	519,762

[1] 7 months

[2] 5 months

Recruitment

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many net additional staff his Department has recruited in each month since June 2001 at *(a)* executive officer level and *(b)* administrative level. [52437]

Dr. John Reid: In the absence of approved staff complements (approved staff ceilings) being held in the Northern Ireland Office the information as requested cannot be provided. Staffing levels are dictated by administration costs.

Ministerial Training

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how much has been spent by his Department on training in leadership skills for Ministers and officials in each of the last five years; [52731]

(2) how much has been spent by his Department on voice coaching for Ministers and officials in each of the last five years; [52707]

(3) how much has been spent by his Department on training by the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts for Ministers and officials in each of the last five years. [52746]

Jane Kennedy: Ministers in the Northern Ireland Office are able to take advantage of the programmes for Ministers organised by the Centre for Management and Policy Studies (CMPS) in the Cabinet Office. This programme has not delivered training by the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts or training in leadership skills or voice training.

Civil servants in the NIO have not received training by the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts or voice coaching. Civil servants have received training courses in leadership but this information has only been recorded separately since 1999–2000. The spend is as follows:

	£
1999–2000	33,274
2000–01	16,520
2001–02	23,750

External Consultants

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much expenditure his Department has incurred in each year since 1997 on employing external consultants to deal with the press and public relations of his Department. [59473]

Jane Kennedy: The Northern Ireland Office has not employed any external consultants in a press or public relations capacity within the period stated.

Police Board of Northern Ireland

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the attendance record for *(a)* elected and *(b)* non-elected members of the Police Board of Northern Ireland has been at (i) full Police Board meetings and (ii) Police Board sub-committee meetings since the Board went live. [60765]

Jane Kennedy: The information is provided (by alphabetical order) in the following tables. The reference to sub-committees of the Policing Board has been taken to mean committees of the board, established under paragraph 24 of schedule 1 to the Police (NI) Act 2000. Some committees have sub-committees, details of which have not been included.

Elected members of Northern Ireland Policing Board

	Number of attendances at:		
Full name	*Board meetings*	*Committees*	*Number of possible committee meetings*
Mr. Alex Attwood MLA	10	9	9
Mr. Joe Byrne MLA	10	12	12
Mr. Fred Cobain MLA	10	9	12
Mr. Sam Foster MLA[1]	6	2	4
Mr. William Hay MLA	10	6	8
Lord Kilclooney MLA	7	1	8
Mr. Alan McFarland MLA[1]	6	5	5
Mr. Eddy McGrady MLA	9	6	[2]14
Mr. Ian Paisley Jnr MLA	10	4	8
Mr. Sammy Wilson MLA	10	11	14

[1] Appointed from February 2002

[2] Substitutes nominated on six occasions

Non-elected members of Northern Ireland Policing Board

	Number of attendances at:		
Full name	*Board meetings*	*Committees*	*Number of possible committee meetings*
Mr. Denis Bradley	10	13	13
Viscount Brookeborough	9	8	9
Mr. Brian Dougherty	10	7	7
Mr. Barry Gilligan	10	13	14
Mr. Tom Kelly	8	4	5
Mrs. Pauline McCabe	9	15	16
Mrs. Rosaleen Moore	10	5	7
Professor Desmond Rea	10	9	12
Mr. Suneil Sharma	6	12	16

Early Release Scheme

Mr. Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many of those persons released from prison in Northern Ireland under the terms of the early release scheme have been *(a)* questioned regarding terrorist-related incidents that have taken place since their release, *(b)* charged with terrorist-related offences and *(c)* convicted of those offences. [62306]

Jane Kennedy: Information is not held centrally regarding the numbers of people specifically questioned or interviewed in relation to any type of criminal offence.

To date (14 June 2002), four individuals released early under the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998 have been charged with scheduled offences while on licence. Of the four, three have been convicted and one has yet to have had the charges against him dealt with.

TRANSPORT

Rail Network Management Strategy

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when Railtrack's Network Management Statement 2002 will be published. [62576]

Mr. Jamieson: This is a matter for Railtrack and the Rail Regulator.

London Underground

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 2 May 2002, *Official Report*, column, 900W, on London Underground, if he will list the appropriate regulatory clearances required by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* London Transport, *(c)* Transport for London and *(d)* the INFRACOs, in each case listing the date on which application (i) has and (ii) will be made; and if he will make a statement. [55843]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

(a) The Government submitted to the European Commission on 12 April a notification in accordance with Article 88(3) EC Treaty and Article 2 of Council Regulation (EC) No. 659/1999.

(b) I understand that:

(i) London Underground has undertaken interim reviews and intends to undertake a full review of the final transaction documents with regard to Article 81 EC Treaty when they are in their final form;

(ii) Satisfactory clearance under Council Regulation (EC) No. 4064/89 as amended by Council Regulation (EC) No. 1310/97 will need to have been obtained by one of the consortia before the relevant contracts can be implemented. London Underground will wish to know that the other consortium has obtained satisfactory clearance under the mergers provisions of the Fair Trading Act 1973;

(iii) London Underground submitted a revised railway safety case (Version 3.1) to the Health and Safety Executive on 19 December 2001;

(iv) London Transport requires no additional clearances.

(c) This is a matter for Transport for London.

(d) The Infracos are subsidiaries of London Underground.

Local Bus Services

Charlotte Atkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps the Government are taking to ensure that private bus companies continue to provide comprehensive local bus services to small communities. [59208]

Mr. Spellar: I have been asked to reply.

The provision of bus services to small communities is one of the issues we would expect local authorities to consider when drawing up their local transport plans. We encourage local authorities to work in partnership with operators to help meet the public transport needs in their area, and they may also, where necessary, provide funding for bus services that are not being met commercially.

My Department also provides support for bus services in small communities in rural areas by means of the Rural Bus Subsidy Grant and Rural Bus Challenge schemes. These two schemes have been allocated a total of £198 million over the period 2001–02 to 2003–04.

Additional support is provided by the Countryside Agency for small-scale rural transport projects through its Rural Transport Partnership scheme for which £32 million is available for the period 2001–02 to 2003–04.

Traffic Management

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will have discussions with his US counterpart on the measures used there to reduce traffic congestion without increasing taxation; and if he will make a statement. [59108]

Mr. Spellar: I have been asked to reply.

The United States, at federal and state level, have put in place or tested a range of measures aimed at tackling traffic congestion, such as controlling access to the freeway network and dedicating lanes for buses or high occupancy vehicles, and are investing in telematics to manage road space more effectively. They have also taken steps to improve the management of incidents on major roads. Their approach is broadly similar to that being developed here and in many other western countries.

There is regular dialogue between this country and the United States on transportation matters, including road traffic management, to share experience and exchange best practice. I look forward to discussing our respective approaches with my US counterpart when the opportunity arises.

Paddington Rail Crash

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the meeting between his Department and the Paddington Survivors' group on 12 September 2001; and if he will place copies of the minutes in the Library. [59879]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

The Secretary of State met the Paddington Survivors Group on 12 September to hear their views in advance of the publication on 20 September of part 2 of Lord Cullen's report into the Ladbroke Grove rail crash. Recent allegations that the Secretary of State suggested at this meeting that Railtrack would be taken into administration are without foundation.

It is not normal practice to place the minutes of ministerial meetings in the House Libraries.

Channel Tunnel

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the answer of 29 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 567W, on the channel tunnel, what recent discussions he has had with the French Government regarding the policing resources at Fréthun; what British policing resources are in place to support anti-intrusion measures; if he will claim compensation from the French Government for the companies affected by asylum seekers; and if he will make a statement. [60806]

Mr. Jamieson: We continue to discuss channel tunnel issues with France at the highest levels. On 17 May my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary spoke at length with French Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy. It was a constructive discussion which covered a range of issues, in particular illegal immigration and the policing of the SNCF site in Fréthun. M Sarkozy assured the Home Secretary that the existing policing resources would be maintained. Further bilateral meetings are planned.

There are no powers for British police to operate on French soil to support anti-intrusion measures at Fréthun. However, we have expressed our willingness in principle to help in any way we can with improvements to physical security. In particular we are willing to provide specialist detection equipment. In the UK, the British Transport Police attend the Dollands Moor freight depot as necessary to detain and process clandestines.

As far as compensation is concerned, freight operators can seek to enforce EU law on the free movement of goods in the French courts, and this could include a claim for losses caused by the breach of that law.

Airports

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 6 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 375W, on airports, what further research has been commissioned and when the research is due to be reported; to whom the results will be published; who has been commissioned to carry out the research; and if he will make a statement. [61531]

Mr. Jamieson: Further research has been commissioned by the Department to reassess attitudes to aircraft noise in England; their correlation with the L_{eq} noise index; and to examine (hypothetical) willingness to pay in respect of nuisance from such noise, in relation to other elements, on the basis of stated preference (SP) survey evidence.

The consultation document "The Future of Aviation" (DETR December 2000) explained that further research into the monetary valuation of the effects of noise may be needed to inform charging strategies. The research is designed to underpin the Government's stated principle set out in "A New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone" (Cm3950) that the aviation industry should meet the external costs it imposes.

The research contract was awarded to a consortium led by the MVA Consultancy last November and is expected to last approximately three years. The work is split into two stages with Phase I focusing on i) the development of the sampling strategy and assessment of the feasibility of using Stated Preference techniques and ii) an initial assessment of the L_{eq}/annoyance relationship. This phase is expected to last until the end of the year. A decision to proceed to Phase II will depend on the Phase I findings. The results of the research will be disseminated widely.

European Rail Systems

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what *(a)* terms and conditions, *(b)* terms of reference and *(c)* jurisdiction are planned for the European Rail Agency. [61145]

Mr. Spellar: According to the draft proposal, the purpose of the European Rail Agency is "to contribute, on technical matters, to implementation of the community legislation aiming at enhancing the level of interoperability of rail systems and at developing a common approach to safety on the European railway system". Its role would be to establish a source of neutral technical expertise at a European level. It would have no autonomous decision-making powers, but would provide advice and technical support to decisions made by the Commission and member states.

Consideration of the Agency proposal has not yet started in the Council and its proposed role and governance may change as a result of these discussions.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures he plans to promote the interoperability of EU rail systems; what their approximate cost is; and what timetable is planned for their implementation. [61144]

Mr. Spellar: The UK is involved in European discussions on the development of interoperability, and the Department, working closely with the Strategic Rail Authority and Health and Safety Executive, and in consultation with the rail industry, will continue to implement and ensure compliance with the relevant directives as appropriate.

Regulations to implement directive 96/48/EC on the interoperability of the high-speed trans-European rail network came into force on 16 May 2002. A Regulatory Impact Assessment, which addresses the cost of implementation of these regulations, was placed in the House Library on 25 April 2002. Guidance on the scope and application of the regulations has been published on the Department's website and is also available in printed form.

Directive 2001/16/EC on the interoperability of the conventional trans-European rail network is due to be implemented by March 2003. We shall in due course produce a further Regulatory Impact Assessment to accompany the necessary regulations.

There is no timetable for making rail systems interoperable. The directives do not require projects to be initiated—the obligation to comply with their provisions only arises where new projects are undertaken. Implementation will, therefore, be gradual.

Rail Safety

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consultation he has had with HM Railway Inspectors in regard to the findings of their inspections of driver management; how many companies were surveyed; what the results were; what changes he plans to the inspection regime; and what response has been received from the companies inspected. [61085]

Mr. Spellar: The Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) Railway Inspectorate (HMRI) inspected the driver management processes in 12 train operating companies (TOCs) and one freight operating company during 2000–01. The findings were published on the HSE's website on 23 January 2002 and were circulated to the Secretary of State, the rail industry and trade unions.

The findings were part of a planned three-year inspection programme covering all major TOCs in the Railway Group. The aim of the inspection programme was to assess the robustness of systems covering drivers' competence and fitness with reference to the requirements of the Railways (Safety Critical Work) Regulations 1994. Key areas included recruitment, training, ongoing maintenance of drivers' fitness and competence, safety briefing and monitoring and audit of systems.

Each TOC received a report containing agreed actions which HMRI required them to pursue. These TOCs are being visited by HMRI during 2002–03 as part of the normal inspection plan to ensure that they have adequately addressed the matters raised.

In general, the HSE reports that improvements have been made over the past three years in the area of driver training, a significant issue given the large numbers of drivers now being trained. The TOCs have produced action plans that they are working through. HMRI will check that actions agreed with the TOCs are completed as part of normal inspection activity.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 10 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 780W, on rail safety, if he will have discussions with the British Transport police on these and other incidents of vandalism on the railway. [62330]

Mr. Jamieson: This is an operational matter for the British Transport police, the Health and Safety Executive and the railways industry.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement regarding the proposal for the introduction of a community safety certificate as outlined in Council Document 5744/02. [60414]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government supports in principle the European Commission's proposals for a community safety certificate for railway undertakings, which are part of a wider package of measures to promote rail safety and facilitate access to the EU rail market. We will take into account the results of our consultation exercise on these measures before reaching a final position.

Piggyback Trains

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether the piggyback trains that won the SRA's freight innovation competition have passed the tests necessary for certification to ensure that they comply with the W6A loading gauge to *(a)* UIC and *(b)* Railtrack Group Standards; and when certification was granted. [61277]

Mr. Jamieson: The SRA have been assured by Babcock, the manufacturers of the wagon, that it will meet the criteria for W6A gauge. Certification takes place when manufacture is complete. This is expected by the end of September 2002.

Large Goods Vehicles

Phil Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the average age is of drivers of large goods vehicles. [61484]

Mr. Jamieson: The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency's latest statistics, for March 2000, indicate that the average age of drivers of large goods vehicles is 42.6 years.

Phil Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with representatives of the road haulage industry about projected shortages of large goods vehicles drivers. [61483]

Mr. Jamieson: The road haulage industry is responsible for recruiting, retaining and training the workforce it needs, including LGV drivers.

The Government has discussed on many occasions the challenges the industry is facing through the Road Haulage Forum, and set up over a year ago a separate training sub-group which includes representatives of the Freight Transport Association, the Road Haulage Association, and the Transport and General Workers Union. The sub-group, which is chaired by Edward Roderick, Chief Executive of Christian Salvesen, met most recently on 24 May.

Through the main Forum the training sub-group has access to funds from the Road Haulage Modernisation Fund. We have already committed an initial £5 million to a package of measures including an expansion of the Young Drivers Scheme, a demonstration project under Modern Apprenticeships and a feasibility study on transferable training loans. The measures are aimed at helping the industry recruit more young people and protecting employer investment in training.

Rail Capacity

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what his policy is for increasing capacity on the London, Tilbury Southend rail line to enable it to meet the Strategic Rail Authority target for passenger numbers; and if he will make a statement. [61097]

Mr. Jamieson: C2C, the current franchise operator, has introduced new rolling stock and is considering measures to increase the numbers of passengers travelling. The Strategic Rail Authority has commissioned work on a Capacity Utilisation Policy, which is intended ultimately to cover all rail routes. The objective of this work is to ensure that track capacity is used most effectively so that the optimum number of train paths is made available on each route, enabling the greatest number of trains to run.

Canvey Island

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will have discussions on the provision of an additional access road for Canvey Island passing over land to the west of Canvey Island controlled by Thurrock Unitary Authority. [61141]

Mr. Jamieson: Working out a satisfactory solution to the problems of Canvey Island is a matter for the local authorities in partnerships with the community, business, transport operators and others, as part of the Thames Gateway proposals. The Department is not in a position to promote schemes in areas where local authorities must take the lead. Therefore, at this stage, the Secretary of State has no plans to hold any discussions on the provision of a third access to Canvey Island.

Blue Badge Scheme

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many representations were received in response to the consultation discussion paper on the blue badge scheme by the Disabled Person's Advisory Committee; [61915]

(2) what recommendations were made to the Government by the Disabled Person's Transport Advisory Committee following its study into the blue badge scheme; and if he will make a statement; [61919]

(3) how many people were *(a)* charged and *(b)* convicted of fraud as a result of misuse of blue badge disability vehicle stickers in each year since 1995; [61913]

(4) when he expects to announce his conclusions on the operation of the blue badge scheme, following the investigation carried out by the Disabled Person's Transport Advisory Committee. [61916]

Mr. Jamieson: A total of 307 responses were received to the discussion paper on the blue badge scheme which was issued in December 2001. The Disabled Persons Transport Committee (DPTAC) were asked to look at those responses and they submitted their recommendations to Ministers at the beginning of May. We are currently considering their report and would plan to publish it when we announce a decision on the future shape of the Scheme during this summer. We will then be looking at the mechanics of implementation and consulting again on firm proposals.

General practitioners have never had the power to issue blue badges. They may be consulted as part of the assessment process but the final decision on eligibility is made by the issuing authority against the criteria listed in The Disabled Persons (Badges for Motor Vehicles) (England) Regulations 2000 [SI 2000/682]. The role of GPs in this procedure is being considered as part of the current review of the Scheme and I would not want to pre-empt our full consideration of DPTAC's report at this stage.

No records are kept centrally by my Department on the number of charges and convictions for misuse of disabled persons' parking cards. there is no legal requirement for local authorities to collate such data.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he is taking to reduce *(a)* abuse of the Blue Badge Scheme and *(b)* the use of disabled parking bays by unqualified users. [61343]

Mr. Jamieson: The Blue Badge Scheme only applies to on-street parking. Local authorities, who are responsible for administering the scheme, have a wide variety of powers available to tackle abuse.

In terms of the badge:

it is an offence under section 117 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 for the badge itself to be misused by a non-disabled person, the maximum fine on conviction being £1,000.

Local authorities have powers to withdraw a badge if the holder constantly misuses it or allows it to be misused by others.

In respect of disabled persons parking bays:

it is an offence under section 47 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 to park a vehicle which is not displaying a badge in a designated disabled persons' parking bay.

The issues of abuse and misuse of badges are a major part of a review of the scheme that we are currently undertaking. We have already held a wide ranging consultation and the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC, our statutory advisers on the transport needs of disabled people) have considered the responses and have put forward recommendations to Ministers. We are currently considering their report and we hope to be able to make a decision on the way forward during the summer.

In the meantime, it is open to anybody to bring instances of abuse to the attention of the police, traffic wardens or the appropriate local authority and we will continue to work with these bodies and with organisations representing disabled people to minimise the potential for abuse and misuse.

Rail Franchises

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the answer of 15 October 2001 from the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, *Official Report,* column 875W, on rail franchises, what progress has been made; and if he will make a statement. [61840]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority is continuing its negotiations with Stagecoach Group plc.

Braer

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the answers of 28 November 2001, *Official Report,* column 935W, on the Braer, what assessment his Department made of the Marine Accidents Investigation Board conclusion that the tanker Braer was seaworthy when it entered British territorial waters. [62250]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department has no reason to question the assessment made by the Marine Accidents Investigation Branch that the tanker Braer was seaworthy at the start of her final voyage.

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the answer of 28 November 2001, *Official Report,* column 935W, on the Braer, on what grounds the Chief Inspector of Marine Accidents decided that the logbooks did not constitute new and important evidence. [62251]

Mr. Jamieson: The Chief Inspector of Marine Accidents carefully examined the copies of the logbooks kept by the shore loading terminal and noted that reference was made to 'steam line problems'. The grounds on which he made his assessment was that while the entries would have been made based on information provided by the ship, the overwhelming evidence from every other source indicates that the problems on board were confined to feedwater pipework and not the steam system. This was freely admitted but did not constitute the vessel being declared unseaworthy.

The Chief Inspector has, therefore, concluded that the logbooks do not constitute "new and important" evidence to justify the re-opening of the Braer investigation.

A63

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the inspector's report of the public inquiry into the A63 Melton Junction will be published. [61624]

Mr. Spellar: The inspector's report will be published when the Secretary of State announces a decision. This is expected by the middle of July 2002.

Transport Expenditure

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much public expenditure was invested in *(a)* roads and *(b)* local transport in England and Wales in 2001–02; and what is planned for 2002–03. [61167]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* Provisional figures show that in 2001–02 total public expenditure on strategic roads was £1,685 million; and on local transport (which includes local roads) was £2,824 million. The latter figure includes spending in London, of which some will be funding for London Underground Ltd.

For 2002–03 planned public expenditure on strategic roads is £1,832 million and on local transport (which includes local roads) is £3,971 million. The latter figure includes spending in London, of which some will be funding for London Underground Ltd.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much has been spent on *(a)* roads and *(b)* other forms of public transport, in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available. [62160]

Mr. Jamieson: Figure for years up to 1999–2000 are published in Table 1.16 of Transport Statistics Great Britain (TSGB) 2001, a copy of which is available in the Libraries of the House. Figures for 2000–01 will be published in TSGB 2002 in October.

Wembley Park Tube Station

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on plans for the redevelopment of Wembley Park tube station. [62061]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the former Secretary of State to my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) on 12 March 2002, and printed in Hansard on 19 March 2002, *Official Report*, columns 237–38W.

Roads (Noise)

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the criteria for establishing priorities for the resurfacing of concrete trunk roads. [61321]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, West (Gareth Thomas) on 17 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 1228–29W.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage of the money allocated for noise reduction work on the motorway network for 2001–02 was spent. [61322]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency, Tim Matthews, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Tim Matthews to Mr. Mark Oaten:

I have been asked by the Transport Minister, David Jamieson, to reply to your recently Parliamentary Question about noise reduction work on the motorway network.

Traffic noise on the network as a whole is being tackled through programmes of quieter surfacing and noise mitigation measures, such as noise barriers. I regret that it is not possible to identify spend solely on the motorway network. However, last year we were asked to spend at least £5m to provide noise mitigation measures across the network as a whole as set out in Hansard (Column 682 in November 1999) and spent £7.2m. Funding for quieter surfaces is allocated as part of our Roads Renewals budget. Last year we spend £252.4m, marginally more than our allocation of £249.3m.

Roads (London)

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the vehicle capacity was of each leg of the junctions at *(a)* Vauxhall Cross, *(b)* Lambeth Bridge/Lambeth Bridge Road, *(c)* Westminster Bridge/Westminster Bridge Road, *(d)* Waterloo Bridge/York Road and *(e)* Trafalgar Square (i) in 1997 and (ii) at the most recent date for which information is available prior to the establishment of the GLA. [62006]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department does not hold this information. The relevant roads were the responsibility of either Westminster city council or Lambeth borough council before the establishment of the GLA. Further information can be obtained from:

Westminster city council

Martin Low
Head of Traffic and Transportation
Department of Planning and Environment
City of Westminster
Westminster City Hall
64 Victoria Street
London SW1E 6QP

Lambeth borough council

Michael Bridgeland
Head of Transport and Highways (Interim)
London Borough of Lambeth
Blue Star House
234–244 Stockwell Road
Brixton Hill
London SW9 9SP.

Passenger Carrying Vehicle Conversion

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he will take to ensure that conversions from commercial vans to passenger carrying vehicles, of all sizes, have been completed to meet legal requirements. [61809]

Mr. Jamieson: In common with purpose built vehicles, commercial vehicles that are converted to passenger carrying vehicles and are licensed as PSV's are subject to initial testing if they are to be used for hire and reward. All such vehicles are also subject to annual testing and random enforcement checks by either the police or officials from the Department's Vehicle Inspectorate Agency.

Sea Safety

Miss Begg: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to liaise with the *(a)* Secretary of State for Education and Skills and *(b)* the devolved Parliament and Assemblies to find new ways of promoting Sea Safety and the Sea Smart code. [62435]

Mr. Jamieson: The Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) as the executive agency with responsibility for Sea Safety and Sea Smart is currently developing new approaches to improve safety at sea and at the coast and will liaise with the Department for Education and Skills and also the devolved Administrations.

Within its current business plan the agency has three pilot projects in progress on accident prevention across the leisure and fishing industries to develop suitable methods to improve sea safety and to measure the impact of any new measures.

Pollution From Ships

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make an assessment of the National Audit Office report Dealing with Pollution from Ships published on 12 June; and if he will make a statement. [62548]

Mr. Jamieson: When read in its entirety, the Comptroller and Auditor General's report "Dealing with pollution from ships" is a soundly based, balanced and well rounded report which recognises the very substantial achievements of my Department and its Maritime and Coastguard Agency in minimising the risk of pollution of the marine environment from ships and, where pollution occurs, in minimising the impact of that pollution on UK waters, coastlines and economic interests.

The report has much to say that is positive, while also highlighting areas where it perceives that there is work to be done. I welcome the findings contained in the report, and am considering the best way to address the recommendations.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will amend the Merchant Shipping Act 1995 to remove the statutory defence against prosecution it confers upon masters of vessels who take reasonable steps to reduce or stop pollution after their vessels have been damaged. [62547]

Mr. Jamieson: In the light of the differences between the defences available under the Merchant Shipping (Prevention of Oil Pollution) Regulations 1996, applying to our Pollution Control Zone, and those available under the Merchant Shipping Act 1995 when offences take place in UK waters inside our baselines, the Department will consider the alignment of the defences that should apply in both areas. This may require subsequent amendment of the Merchant Shipping Act 1995 as the defences within the 1996 Regulations derive from an International Convention.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will amend the Merchant Shipping Prevention of Oil Pollution Regulations 1996 to extend their applicability to areas landward of the baseline designating the start of the UK's 12-mile territorial waters. [62546]

Mr. Jamieson: The Comptroller and Auditor General has recommended, in his report "Dealing with pollution from ships", that the Merchant Shipping legislation be revised to ensure that pollution incidents may be prosecuted under the UK's oil pollution regulations, wherever incidents occur within the UK Pollution Control Zone. This recommendation relates to the Merchant Shipping (Prevention of Oil Pollution) Regulations 1996, SI 1996/2154.

As the report explains, the 1996 Regulations are concerned with areas seaward from the baseline from which the United Kingdom's territorial sea is measured. Illegal discharges of oil in the internal waters landward of that baseline (including estuaries) can be prosecuted under section 131 of the Merchant Shipping Act 1995. Defences are available under both the 1996 Regulations and the 1995 Act. However those under the 1995 Act are different in some key details from those provided under the 1996 Regulations. In the light of the concerns raised by the Comptroller and Auditor General, the Department will consider the alignment of the defences under both the Regulation and the Act. This may involve subsequent amendment of the Merchant Shipping Act 1995 as the defences in the 1996 Regulations derive from an International Convention.

Vehicle Registration Numbers

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 10 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 770W, on vehicle registration numbers, whether he intends to extend the vehicle registration number facility to cater for third parties through a regulatory reform order; and if he will make a statement. [62531]

Mr. Jamieson: We are keen to introduce third party entitlement at the earliest opportunity. We are looking for a suitable legislative slot. The regulatory reform procedure is being considered along with other options.

Household Statistics

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many households there are in each fire authority area; and what the population is in each area; [60441]

(2) how many households he estimates include at least *(a)* one child under four and *(b)* adult over 65 in each fire authority area. [60446]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Pullinger to Mrs. Theresa May, dated 17 June 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent questions on (i) the population and number of households in each fire authority area, and (ii) the number of households in each fire authority area with at least one (a) child under four and (b) adult over 65. (60445 & 60446)

The latest available estimates, for the three month period ending February 2002, are given in the table attached.

These estimates are from the Labour Force Survey.

Fire authorities in the United Kingdom—Winter (December to February) 2001–02[1]

Thousand

		Households		
	Population[2]	*Total*	*Including at least one child under 4*	*Including at least one adult over 65*
United Kingdom	59,211	25,717	2,716	6,334
England and Wales	52,499	22,833	2,407	5,640
England	49,589	21,578	2,283	5,297
England non-metropolitan authorities	31,194	13,519	1,375	3,492
Avon	1,023	441	47	101
Bedfordshire	565	230	30	41
Berkshire	778	322	38	66
Buckinghamshire	687	286	29	61
Cambridgeshire	722	328	32	88
Cheshire	965	417	47	103
Cleveland	554	244	24	61
Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly[3]	495	217	20	60
Cumbria	476	216	19	56
Derbyshire	973	424	40	108
Devon	1,082	506	43	140
Dorset	682	301	26	103
Durham	595	263	24	65
East Sussex	753	346	29	107
Essex	1,631	700	74	182
Gloucestershire	558	244	23	66
Hampshire	1,627	713	74	175
Herefordshire and Worcestershire	701	309	29	92
Hertfordshire	1,052	442	51	113
Humberside	865	366	39	90
Isle of Wight	131	57	[4]—	18
Kent	1,597	689	75	181
Lancashire	1,406	626	61	158
Leicestershire	930	385	41	98
Lincolnshire	633	278	21	76
Norfolk	806	350	29	109
North Yorkshire	742	317	26	92
Northamptonshire	625	260	35	58
Northumberland	304	132	10	33
Nottinghamshire	1,017	447	46	107
Oxfordshire	634	275	30	60
Shropshire	433	199	19	52
Somerset	491	206	22	57
Staffordshire	1,044	443	52	113
Suffolk	675	288	29	70
Surrey	1,076	452	54	115
Warwickshire	505	216	19	49
West Sussex	757	332	32	102
Wiltshire	605	253	31	66
England metropolitan authorities	18,395	8,059	908	1,805
Greater Manchester	2,566	1,149	133	255
Merseyside	1,389	596	56	156
South Yorkshire	1,283	565	67	137
Tyne and Wear	1,076	481	51	123
West Midlands	2,578	1,084	130	272
West Yorkshire	2,107	904	95	209
Greater London	7,397	3,281	376	653
Wales	2,911	1,255	123	344
North Wales	651	277	29	70
Mid and West Wales	841	372	34	118
South Wales	1,419	606	60	156
Northern Ireland	1,683	646	92	156

Fire authorities in the United Kingdom—Winter (December to February) 2001–02 [1]

Thousand

		Households		
	Population [2]	*Total*	*Including at least one child under 4*	*Including at least one adult over 65*
Scotland	5,028	2,237	218	538
Strathclyde	2,221	1,005	105	238
Highlands and Islands	267	114	[4]—	31
Grampian	514	218	19	50
Tayside	374	175	14	49
Lothian and Borders	890	390	37	83
Fife	349	151	18	36
Central	274	121	11	32
Dumfries and Galloway	141	64	[4]—	18

[1] Not seasonally adjusted.

[2] The populations listed in this table are those used in the context of LFS estimates. They include people resident in private households, student halls of residence and NHS accommodation.

[3] The LFS does not provide for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly separately.

[4] Sample size too small for reliable estimate.

Source:

ONS Labour Force Survey

Fire Appliances

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many fire appliances were available in England and Wales on 31 March, broken down by *(a)* county and *(b)* London borough. [61375]

Mr. Raynsford: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 6 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 449–50W.

Departmental Policies (Wycombe)

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the activities pursued by his Department that have had a particular impact on the Wycombe constituency since 7 June 2001. [58622]

Mr. Raynsford: I have been asked to reply.

The former Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions was responsible for major programmes of capital investment in transport, housing and urban renewal, and implementing strategic policy objectives, many of which have long-term horizons—the transport 10-year plan, the programme for modernising local government, the urban renewal agenda.

Many of these programmes will impact on the hon. Member's constituency. For example: Wycombe district council received a Housing Capital Guideline allocation of £1,455,000 for 2002–03 plus an additional Basic Credit Approval of £100,000 based on performance. Wycombe district council received a Disabled Facilities Grant allocation of £228,000. The Secretary of State approved spending on the Cash Incentive Scheme of £154,162 for 2001–02 and £134,417 for 2002–03.

The hon. Member's constituency would also have benefited from a part of the local single capital pot allocation to Buckinghamshire county council for 2001–02, which totalled £15.171 million. It is for the county council to decide how best to use these funds and what proportion should be used within the hon. Member's consistency.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Women's Organisations

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the women's organisations that have been consulted over proposed legislation by her Department during *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02 sessions; and if their responses have been published. [44386]

Malcolm Wicks: This Department and its businesses comply with the guidelines set out in the Code of Practice on Written Consultation, which was published by the Cabinet Office in November 2000.

In the course of the 2000–01 and 2001–02 sessions, this Department consulted widely on proposed legislation. This consultation included the following women's organisations:

Women's National Commission
Townswomen's Guild
National Federation of Women's Institutes
Scottish Women's Aid
Welsh Women's Aid
Women's Aid Federation of England
Fawcett Society
National Board of Catholic Women
National Council of Great Britain
The Business and Professional Women UK Ltd.
WINVISIBLE (Women with Visible and Invisible Disabilities)
Southwark Muslim Women's Association
Waltham Forest Asian Mother's Group
Cardiff Women in Mind
Union of Women Teachers
Birmingham Women's Aid
National Women's Register.

All of these women's organisations have responded to one or more of the consultation exercises which covered proposed legislation including: the Child Support, Pensions and Social Security Act 2000; Pension Credit; the Occupational and Personal Pensions: Simplification of the

Disability Discrimination Act and "Towards Inclusion"—Government proposals in response to recommendations of the Disability Rights Task Force.

Means-tested Benefits

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the amount of each means-tested benefit which is unclaimed by *(a)* all age groups and *(b)* pensioners for each region within Great Britain. [60187]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* The information requested is not available by region. However, the latest estimates for Great Britain, including separate estimates for pensions where appropriate, of the amounts of unclaimed income-related benefits can be found in "Income Related Benefits—Estimates of Take-Up 1999–2000", a copy of which is available in the Library.

Benefits (Payment Methods)

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on his policy on drawing benefits weekly in cash at a post office. [60845]

Malcolm Wicks: I refer the hon. Member to the written answer I gave the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) on 11 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 878W.

Jobcentre Plus

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether every aspect of ONE is being transferred to Jobcentre Plus and will continue to function; and if he will make a statement. [48885]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The ONE pilots are significantly closer to the Jobcentre Plus model than other Jobcentres and social security offices. However, some changes will be necessary to enable them to deliver the full Jobcentre Plus service.

The main changes to ONE will be the introduction of new management structures and the movement from operating the ONE Work Focused Interview regulations to the Jobcentre Plus regulations that exclude housing benefit and council tax benefit from the range of benefits covered.

We are encouraging Jobcentre Plus and local authority managers to build on the framework of liaison and service level agreements that already exist. This will help to ensure that the efficient administration of housing benefit and council tax benefit, which is so important for many of the people using our services, not least in helping the transition to work.

Benefits Data (Electoral Roll)

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to ensure that computers processing benefit data contain a complete copy of the Electoral Roll; and if he will make a statement. [59211]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Electoral Roll is a source of information considered by the Department when developing its Information Systems in appropriate circumstances.

Departmental Policies (Wycombe)

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the activities pursued by his Department that have had a particular impact on the Wycombe constituency since 7 June 2001. [58621]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Department for Work and Pensions was formed in June 2001 from the former Department of Social Security and parts of the Department for Education and Employment. We are currently undertaking a fundamental overhaul of the welfare system, transforming it from a passive organisation paying out benefits to an active system that fights poverty, creates opportunity and helps people become self-sufficient and independent. This is making a significant contribution to the Government's overall objectives of eradicating child poverty in 20 years, and halving it within 10; promoting work as the best form of welfare for people of working age while protecting the position of those in greatest need and combating poverty and promoting security and independence in retirement for today's and future pensioners.

Child benefit is now worth £15.74 a week for the eldest child and £10.55 a week for other children; nationally about 7 million families receive child benefit, and in Wycombe 12,220 families benefit.

The number of people in work is at record levels of 28.4 million. Nearly three quarters of working age people are in employment and in Wycombe the proportion in employment currently stands at 80.5 per cent. Unemployment is around its lowest level since the mid 1970s. Our New Deals have helped lone parents, the young unemployed, the long-term unemployed, disabled people, the over 50s and partners of the unemployed to move from benefit into work. Nationally well over 600,000 people have been helped into work by the New Deals and in Wycombe over 550 have been helped into work.

Through Jobcentre Plus we are delivering a single, integrated service to people of working age claiming benefits, with a clear focus on work. In addition to the 56 integrated Jobcentre Plus offices which are already open, we intend to introduce around 225 more integrated offices by April next year including offices in the Wycombe constituency.

Older people are disproportionately affected by fuel poverty. This winter (2001–02) we have made available a winter fuel payment of £200 for each eligible household to help with their heaviest fuel bill. We estimate that around 17,000 older people in Wycombe have received a payment this winter.

We want all pensioners to have a decent and secure income in retirement and to share fairly in the rising prosperity of the country. Our first priority has been to help the poorest pensioners.

From April 2002 we will be spending an extra £6 billion a year in real terms on pensioners as a result of our policies. This includes £2.5 billion more on the poorest third of pensioners.

2,000 pensioner families in Wycombe are receiving the minimum income guarantee which helps our poorest pensioners. Some 14,700 pensioners in Wycombe will benefit from this year's increases in the basic state pension of £3 a week for single pensioners and £4.80 for couples. Those over 75, of whom we estimate there are about 6,000 in Wycombe, may qualify for free TV licences.

Other reforms include the new pension credit in 2003 designed to ensure that pensioners benefit from their savings and the introduction of the state second pension from this April. Both of these initiatives will help provide greater security for tomorrow's pensioners. We have also announced that from October 2003 benefits currently reduced after a hospital stay of six weeks will not be reduced until 13 weeks. This will benefit both pensioners and people of working age.

Advertising

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much his Department has spent on advertising in 2001–02; which advertising campaigns *(a)* are running and *(b)* will begin before the end of the financial year; and what is the estimated final cost of his Department's advertising during 2001–02. [42517]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Department for Work and Pensions was formed in June 2001. Since that time a total of some £25 million has been spent on major campaigns either educating people or alerting them to their rights and responsibilities. The following campaigns began before the end of the 2001–02 financial year and have run into 2002–03:

Pensions Education

State Second Pension

Inherited SERPS.

An accurate estimate of the Department's final marketing spend for 2001–02 is not yet available.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the publicity and advertising campaigns run by his Department in each of the last four years, specifying the *(a)* purpose, *(b)* cost to public funds, *(c)* number of staff involved and *(d)* method of evaluation in each case. [39105]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Department for Work and Pensions was formed in June 2001. Since that time the following major campaigns costing over £250,000 have been run:

New Deal for Disabled People—£850,000

> A national campaign to launch NDDP, covering press advertising in national and regional titles, supported by a helpline, website and publicity material.

New Deal 50 Plus—£500,000

> A regional campaign to encourage more of the over-50s into work and to increase their awareness of the local help available.

New Deal 25 Plus—£500,000

> A national campaign to inform the public about changes to the programme through radio advertising, a video and printed materials, supported by research.

Age Positive—£500,000

> PR (including direct mail and partnerships with regional newspapers, sponsoring an award, exhibitions, research and promotional material) to raise employers' awareness of the business benefits of employing an age-diverse work force.

Work Incentives—£450,000

> Advertising campaign on local radio to raise awareness of the range of financial initiatives available to those moving from benefits into employment if they meet the qualifying criteria.

Pension Education—£7,188,000

> A publicity campaign to encourage people to save for their retirement and understand the pension options available to them.

Second State Pension—£463,000

> Development and implementation of publicity to inform carers about how new state pension rules could help them—linked to the overall pensions education campaign.

Pensioners' Guide—£729,000

> Production and distribution of a guide on cross-Government help and services for pensioners.

Winter Fuel Payments—£718,000

> Information for people aged 60 plus and advisers about winter fuel payments and activity reminding them to claim and telling them how to claim for winter 2001 and relevant previous winters.

Changes to rules on inherited SERPS—£459,000

> Publicity about change to the rules on inheriting the State Earnings-Related Scheme.

Targeting Fraud—£9,000,000

> A national advertising campaign on television, radio, press and posters to deter dishonest behaviour, reinforced by regional press advertising showing that benefit fraudsters are regularly caught and punished.

Disability Discrimination Act Awareness—£3,000,000

> A national, regional and trade press advertising campaign to raise the public's awareness of the DDA and specifically to encourage service providers to ensure that disabled people have access to their services.

Staff number information is not held in the format requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Evaluation of all campaigns is routine procedure. Methods of evaluation vary and reflect the objectives of each individual campaign. Programme or product take up and contact data, e.g. telephone calls, e- and white-mail, coupons, website visits are sued to measure shifts in interest and demand. General shifts in awareness, attitude and behaviour are measured through pre- and post-campaign data, as well as tracking research.

Benefit Statistics

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many families receive child dependency increases for *(a)* retirement pension, *(b)* bereavement benefit, *(c)* incapacity benefit and *(d)* invalid care allowance. [58763]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The information is in the table.

Claimants in receipt of child dependency increases

	Numbers in receipt of CDI
(a) Retirement pension[1,3]	16,700
(b) Bereavement benefit/widow's benefit[1,3]	50,600
(c) Incapacity benefit[2,3]	94,400
Severe disablement allowance[2,3]	5,800
(d) Invalid care allowance[4]	46,725

[1] RP/BB/WB Source: Pensions Strategy Computer System at 30 September 2001 based on 5 per cent. sample. Numbers are rounded to the nearest 100, and exclude the Channel Islands and overseas cases. Figures for bereavement benefit are for those receiving widowed parent's allowance or widowed mother's allowance (42,000).

[2] Figures are for IB/SDA recipients at 30 November 2001, and are taken from a 5 per cent. sample of the benefit computer system, which excludes a small number of cases held clerically. Numbers have been rounded to the nearest 100.

[3] All 5 per cent. samples are subject to sampling variation.

[4] Figures from the Invalid Care Allowance Computer System based on a 100 per cent. extract as at 31 December 2001. Figure has been rounded to the nearest five.

New Deal

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will review the administration of the *(a)* New Deal and *(b)* Environmental Task Force in Darlington and Doncaster. [53747]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The administration of New Deal, which includes the Environmental Task Force provision in both Darlington and Doncaster, is reviewed at regular intervals as part of the contract review process. Environmental Task Force provision in Doncaster is currently delivered by Doncaster metropolitan borough council. The contract expires in September 2002, having been extended by six months to allow time for competitive tendering for a new three year contract. Environmental Task Force provision in Darlington is currently delivered by YMCA Training Ltd. (Darlington). The contract expires in March 2003.

Benefits Agency

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many letters *(a)* he and *(b)* the chief executive of the Benefits Agency have received from hon. Members about clients of each Benefits Agency local office; and how many (i) clients were dealt with and (ii) residents are covered by such local offices in the most recent year for which information is available. [55182]

Malcolm Wicks: Ministers received 12,698 letters from hon. Members during 2001 on both Benefits Agency and other matters relating to the Department for Work and Pensions and the former Department of Social Security. The chief executive of the Benefits Agency received 2,529 letters from hon. Members in 2001. The other information sought is not held in the format requested.

Consultation

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many consultation documents and consultative drafts of legislation have been issued by his Department since January 2001; and what proportion of these have observed Criterion 5 of the Code of Practice on Written Consultation. [57008]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Department for Work and Pensions was formed in June 2001 from the former Department of Social Security and parts of the Department for Education and Employment. Eighteen consultation documents have been issued since June 2001. These relate to matters which have a national impact, and therefore fall under the remit of the Code of Practice on Written Consultation. All bar two of these consultations was able to give a full 12 weeks for interested parties to respond.

Relocation (Scotland)

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to relocate executive agencies and non-departmental public bodies under the remit of his Department to Scotland. [47977]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* My right hon. Friend has no plans to relocate executive agencies or non departmental public bodies under the remit of his Department.

Flexible Retirement

Mr. Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what recent research he has carried out into flexible retirement. [62796]

Mr. McCartney: A research report, "Flexible Retirement—a snapshot of large employer's initiatives" has been published today and copies placed in the Library.

The report was produced on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions by the Employers Forum on Age. It explores early steps taken by a number of large employing organisations to introduce more flexible retirement policies.

It forms part of the research carried out for the Age Positive campaign. The campaign promotes to employers the benefits of an age-diverse workforce, and encourages the recruitment and retention of older workers and the adoption of flexible working practices. Evidence from the campaign shows that the business benefits of employing older workers include reduced absenteeism, reduced shrinkage, reduced staff turnover and higher productivity.

Winter Fuel Payments

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answers of 12 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 959W and of 10 April 2002, *Official Report,* column 242W, on winter fuel payments, if he has now concluded his discussions with the European Commission about the extent of the United Kingdom's legal obligations under European regulations on winter fuel payments; and if he will make a statement. [62428]

Mr. McCartney: I refer the hon. Member to the written answer I gave her on 12 June 2002, column 1286W.

Motability

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the *(a)* operations and *(b)* finances of the Motability Scheme. [61347]

Maria Eagle: Motability is an independent charitable company incorporated by Royal Charter. It has overall responsibility for all operations of the Motability Scheme. Finance for the vehicle programmes is provided by Motability Finance Ltd. (MFL), an independent service provider to the charity. MFL is owned by a partnership of six of the major clearing banks, Bank of Scotland, Royal Bank of Scotland (incorporating National Westminster), Barclays, Lloyds TSB, and HSBC, who provide finance for the Motability Scheme at preferential rates.

Departmental Policies (Isle of Wight)

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the activities pursued by his Department that have had a particular impact on the Isle of Wight since 7 June 2001. [57671]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* The Department for Work and Pensions was formed in June 2001 from the former Department of Social Security and parts of the Department for Education and Employment. We are currently undertaking a fundamental overhaul of the welfare system, transforming it from a passive organisation paying out benefits to an active system that fights poverty, creates opportunity and helps people become self-sufficient and independent. This is making a significant contribution to the Government's overall objectives of:

eradicating child poverty in 20 years, and halving it within 10;

promoting work as the best form of welfare for people of working age while protecting the positions of those in greatest need; and

combating poverty and promoting security and independence in retirement for today's and future pensioners.

Child benefit is now worth £15.75 a week for the eldest child and £10.55 a week for other children; nationally about 7 million families receive child benefit, and in the Isle of Wight 14,550 families benefit.

The number of people in work is at historically high levels of over 28.2 million, and in the Isle of Wight the proportion of working age people in work currently stands at 70.9 per cent. Unemployment in the Isle of Wight has fallen by 2.5 per cent. over the last year while the number of long-term unemployed, has been cut by over a quarter. Our New Deals have helped lone parents, the young unemployment, the long-term unemployed, disabled people, the over-50s and partners of the unemployed to move from benefit into work. Nationally well over 600,000 people have been helped into work by the New Deals and in the Isle of Wight over 1,900 have been helped into work.

Older people are disproportionately affected by fuel poverty. This winter (2001–02) we have made available a winter fuel payment of £200 for each eligible household to help with their heaviest fuel bill. We estimate that around 33,000 older people in the Isle of Wight have received a payment this winter.

We want all pensioners to have a decent and secure income in retirement and to share fairly in the rising prosperity of the country. Our first priority has been to help the poorest pensioners.

From April 2002 we will be spending an extra £6 billion a year in real terms on pensioners as a result of our policies. This includes £2.5 billion more on the poorest third of pensioners.

4,600 pensioner families in the Isle of Wight are receiving the minimum income guarantee which helps our poorest pensioners. Some 31,400 pensioners in the Isle of Wight will benefit from this year's increases in the basic state pension of £3 a week for single pensioners and £4.80 for couples. Those over 75, of whom we estimate there are about 14,800 in the Isle of Wight, may quality for free TV licences.

Other reforms include the new pension credit in 2003 designed to ensure that pensioners benefit from their savings and the introduction of the state second pension from this April. Both of these initiatives will help provide greater security for tomorrow's pensioners. We have also announced that from October 2003 benefits currently reduced after a hospital stay of six weeks will not be reduced until 13 weeks. This will benefit both pensioners and people of working age.

Medical Services Contract

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer to the right hon. Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke) of 22 May 2002, *Official Report,* column 374W, on the Medical Services Contract, if he will list *(a)* each of the key performance targets and the levels of performance against each of those targets, *(b)* each of the other performance measures and the levels of performance against those measures, *(c)* each of the further set of quality improvement measures, *(d)* each of the contractual milestones that have been agreed for each of the key improvement projects, *(e)* each of the other contractual improvements that have been secured and *(f)* for each of the last 12 months, the number of occasions on which a financial remedy has been applied to SchlumbergerSema, and the amount on each of those occasions. [60477]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* A copy of the information requested has been placed in the Library.

Service credits for failure to meet contractual service level targets have been applied in each of the last 12 months. Precise details are commercial in confidence and not disclosed under part 2, paragraph 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Performance Targets

Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the performance targets that his Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies are required to meet, apart from those set out in the public service agreements for 1999 to 2002 and 2001 to 2004; and if he will specify for each target *(a)* who sets it and *(b)* who monitors achievement against it. [60465]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Department's public service agreement is supported by a number of lower level performance targets. These are set out in our service delivery agreement (SDA), the business plans of our agencies and, where appropriate, in the business plans and annual performance agreements of the non-departmental public bodies that are sponsored by the Department.

The SDA and agency targets are set by the Secretary of State and are rigorously monitored using a process that includes external challenge. The arrangements for monitoring performance against targets are set out in the planning and performance section of the departmental framework.

The Department sponsors 10 non-departmental public bodies, which perform a number of executive, advisory and tribunal functions at arms-length from the Department. Each of the four executive bodies and one tribunal body has a senior accountable official within the Department who agrees targets and monitors performance against them. The work of the Department's advisory bodies is reported in ad hoc papers or their annual reports.

A copy of the SDA has been placed in the Library. Copies of the departmental framework, which includes details of the agencies and the non-departmental public bodies, and the other documents are available in the Library.

State Second Pension

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what estimate he has made of the number of persons likely to contract out of the state second pension scheme within three years of its inception in April; and how many people are contracted out of SERPS; [32877]

(2) on what basis estimates of future contracting-out from the second state retirement scheme are prepared; and what the confidence limits are for such estimates. [32879]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 6 February 2002]:* As a basis for future financial projections, the Government Actuary has assumed that in 2001–02 there were 13.3 million people contracted out of the additional state pension, rising to 13.7 million people in 2004–05. However, many factors can effect the actual level of contracting out and this assumption will be reviewed and updated as necessary as further data become available.

Projections of national insurance contribution income and benefit expenditure require assumptions of the future level of contracting out from the state second pension. The assumed level of contracting out is estimated by considering data on the level of contracting out through different routes in past years and potential influences on the numbers contracting out in future years, such as the introduction of stakeholder pensions. As with any projections, the assumptions used should not be regarded as precise forecasts of future experience. The potential for change in the projections resulting from variability in the future level of contracting out is considered through sensitivity analysis where appropriate, rather than the use of confidence intervals.

Source:

The Government Actuary's Department and "Second Tier Pension Provision 1995–96"—Department for Work and Pensions' Analytical Services Division.

Press Releases

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many press releases were issued by his Department or its predecessor *(a)* between 1 May and 31 December 1997 and *(b)* in each year from 1998 to 2001 inclusive. [40040]

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many press releases were issued by his Department *(a)* in each month between May and December 1997 and *(b)* in each year from 1998 to 2001 inclusive. [59469]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Department for Work and Pensions was formed in June 2001. This involved the amalgamation of parts of the Department for Education and Employment (including the Employment Service) with the Department for Social Security.

It is not possible to disaggregate those press releases issued by DfEE relating solely to employment issues in the period requested. However, the press releases issued by the former DSS and the DWP are as follows:

	Number of press releases
1997[1]	197
1998	311
1999	270
2000	411
2001	260

[1] Between 1 May and 31 December

Pension Service

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what preparations have been made for the switch-over from the Benefits Agency to the Pension Service on 1 April. [48580]

Mr. McCartney: The Pension Service was formally launched on 1 April 2002 and will comprise pension centres working with a national local service. The pension centres will roll out in a staged approach over the next few years and some have already opened for business with customers' cases moving out of local offices into the pension centres.

The pension centres will replace the service that we previously offered through local social security offices and our customers will be able to contact the centres by telephone, post or e-mail.

Our pension centre in Stockton pension centre Burnley will begin to take minimum income guarantee work from local offices in the Middlesbrough area during June 2002.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will provide the address of each Pension Service call centre; and, where possible, the date on which each call centre is expected to open for business. [56411]

Mr. McCartney: The Pension Service will operate from a streamlined network of telephony based contact centres. Design and planning work is progressing to deliver the pension centres to rigorous timescales.

At 10 June eight pension centres have begun to take on pensions work from local offices. These centres are starting to establish operations on contact centre lines as planned. The complete service delivery model will not be achieved until the movement of customer cases is complete. Movement of work is scheduled to the end of September. Plans beyond September are still being developed.

The addresses of the pension centres and the dates from which the first cases transfer from the local offices into these centres are as listed in the table.

Pension centre site	*The day the first case moves into the new site*[1]
Burnley pension centre, Blackburn Road, Simonstone, Burnley BB12 7TG	4 February 2002
Dundee pension centre, Claverhouse Industrial Park Estate, East Dundee DD4 9FF	22 April 2002
Bath pension centre, Kingsmead House, James West Street, Bath BA1 2DG	29 April 2002
Wolverhampton pension centre, Temple Street, Wolverhampton WV2 4AU	29 April 2002
Plymouth pension centre, Crownhill Court, Tailyour Road, Crownhill, Plymouth PL6 5UE	6 May 2002
Nottingham pension centre, 57–59 Upper Parliament Street, Nottingham NG2 3BZ	6 May 2002
Birmingham pension centre, 2104 Coventry Road, Sheldon, Birmingham B26 3LQ	10 June 2002
Norwich pension centre, Baltic House, Mountergate, Norwich NR1 1QB	10 June 2002
Stockton pension centre, Tees Building, 10–16 Bridge Road, Stockton TS18 3BU	17 June 2002
Glasgow pension centre, Northgate, 96 Milton Street, Glasgow G4 0DX	17 June 2002
Warrington pension centre, Hilden House, 103 Sankey Street, Warrington WA1 1LA	15 July 2002
Blackpool pension centre, Mexford House, Mexford Avenue, Blackpool FY2 0XN	22 July 2002
Swansea pension centre, Waterside Business Park, Swansea SA6 8AH	22 July 2002
Cwmbran pension centre, Glyndwr House, The Mall, Gwent NP44 1XR	5 August 2002
Wrexham pension centre, 15–17 Grosvenor Road, Wrexham, Clwyd LL1 1BL	19 August 2002
Motherwell pension centre, Trigon Building, Airbles Road, Motherwell ML1 3FA	3 August 2002
Dearne Valley pension centre, Unit 2 Callflex Business Park, Dearne Valley, South Yorkshire	12 August 2002
Derby pension centre, Holburn House, Wyvern Business Park, Stanier Way, Chaddesden, Derby DE21 6BF	12 August 2002
Stockport pension centre, Millennium House, Wellington Road South, Stockport	16 September 2002
Leicester pension centre, Yeoman Street, Leicester LE1 1UU	23 September 2002
Seaham pension centre, Lighthouse View, Dawdon Business Park, Seaham, County Durham	30 September 2002
Walsall pension centre, Government Buildings, Lower Hall Lane, Walsall WS1 1RP	—[2]
York pension centre, Triune Court Office Development, Plot 4, Monks Cross Office Park, York YO32 9GZ	—[2]
Liverpool pension centre, 58 Breckfield Road South, Liverpool L6 5JF	—[2]
Tyneview Park pension centre, Whitley Road, Benton, Newcastle-upon-Tyne NE98 1BA	—[2]

[1] Refers to the date the first case actually transfers into the pension centre—this is then followed by a phased transfer of cases into the pension centre.

[2] To be confirmed.

In addition to these there will be another pension centre in the Norwich area.

As customers cases move a letter is sent to them to let them know that a pension centre is now handling their case and is open for business. Customers should continue to deal with their local social security office until they receive a letter.

Pensioner Poverty

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the answer of 16 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 367W, on pensioner poverty, how many pensioners are living in poverty in the Midlothian constituency. [60804]

Mr. McCartney: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows.

As at February 2002 there were 1,600 customers in receipt of minimum income guarantee in the parliamentary constituency of Midlothian.

Around 12,000 winter fuel payments were made last winter to people 60 and over in the parliamentary constituency of Midlothian.

In addition there were 4,500 people over 75 years old who may have benefited from a free television licence in the parliamentary constituency of Midlothian.

Source:

Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry, February 2002.

Matching Intelligence Data Analysis Service Winter Fuels Payment.

Client Group analysis of the population over state pension age at May 2001.

Pension Entitlement

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the answer of 15 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 680W, on pension entitlement, how many cases have been referred to the *(a)* OPRA, *(b)* PAS and *(c)* pensions ombudsman since 1997. [60805]

Mr. McCartney: The Pensions Advisory Service (PAS) and the pensions ombudsman can deal with inquiries or complaints that arise from the situation where a public sector employee has had their accrued pension entitlement withdrawn, but they do not keep records that would enable such cases to be individually identified. The Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority has no power to intervene against any employer that has lawfully withdrawn pension entitlements from employees.

National Insurance

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what his estimate is of the cost in the next 12 months of the Budget changes to employers' national insurance contributions to *(a)* his Department, *(b)* agencies of his Department and *(c)* local government carrying out functions within the responsibility of his Department; [52073]

(2) what his estimate is of the cost in the next 12 months of the Budget changes to employers' national insurance contributions to charities working in areas within the responsibility of his Department. [52074]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I refer the hon. Member to the written answer given by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, my right hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith), on 29 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 544W.

Fraud

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the estimated level of losses to fraud and corruption was in *(a)* his Department's Vote 1 budget and *(b)* his Department's Vote 2 budget for (i) 1999–2000 and (ii) 2000–01. [54705]

Malcolm Wicks: In 1999–2000 the estimated level of loss to internal fraud recorded in the Department's Vote 1 Account was £210,000. Information on the estimated level of loss to external fraud is not available in the format requested.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of ordinary written questions for his Department were answered within a week of tabling in each month since June 2001; and what proportion of questions for named day received a substantive answer on that day in each month since June 2001. [58980]

Maria Eagle: Since the House returned in October we have received double the number of the previous session and by the end of this session we anticipate having dealt with significantly more questions than in any of the last five years. This does of course have an impact on our ability to deal with questions speedily. We are confident that in deciding to table questions hon. Members take into account the impact of their requests on the ability of colleagues to secure answers to their inquiries. Many hon. Members secure information from other sources such as publications by the Department which are available in the Library.

The information requested is in the tables.

Proportion of ordinary written questions answered within five working days

	Number of questions received	*Per cent. answered within five working days*
2001		
June	73	53.42
July	166	66.48
September	7	71.43
October	256	19.53
November	364	15.93
December	201	38.81
2002		
January	258	21.32
February	245	13.06
March	274	20.44
April	147	19.73
May	74	50.00

Proportion of named day questions given a substantive answer on that day

	Number of questions received	*Per cent. given a substantive answer on that day*
2001		
June	27	96.30
July	103	73.79
September	2	100.00
October	100	81.00
November	189	60.32
December	89	62.92
2002		
January	154	54.55
February	79	54.43
March	142	35.92
April	78	44.87
May	42	71.43

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the guidance notes prepared for his officials on answering written parliamentary questions, for what reason officials are advised to consider whether the question is friendly; whether considerations of friendliness affect the content of written replies; and if he will revise this guidance. [61773]

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will place in the Library the guidance provided to departmental civil servants for the preparation of written answers to parliamentary questions. [62002]

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will place in the Library a copy of the guidance for officials on answering parliamentary questions, *(a)* before and *(b)* after recent amendments. [62005]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Guidance notes have been produced for many years to assist officials who help prepare answers to parliamentary questions. Until now they have been produced by officials without clearance by Ministers. The reference in the guidance notes to the question being "friendly" is not appropriate and has been deleted. I have also reviewed the guidance and some amendments have been made.

Copies of the guidance, before and after this change was made, have been placed in the Library.

Correspondence

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many letters were received by each Minister in his Department in each month since June 1997. [59305]

Maria Eagle: The Cabinet Office publishes a report to Parliament each year on the volumes of correspondence received by Departments. For information for 2001, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Leslie) on 24 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 677W. Copies of previous reports are available in the Library.

Press and Public Relations

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much expenditure his Department has incurred in each year since 1997 on employing external consultants to deal with the press and public relations of his Department. [59468]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Department for Work and Pensions was formed in June 2001. Since that time there has been no expenditure on external press and PR consultants specifically to raise the profile of the Department, only to assist in the marketing of important Welfare to Work programmes such as New Deal and Age Positive.

Refurbishment Projects

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the refurbishment projects that *(a)* are in progress and *(b)* will start within the next six months; and what action is being taken to ensure that these will procure certified timber. [59770]

Malcolm Wicks: Within DWP there are over 100 refurbishment projects either in progress or likely to start within the next six months. The vast majority of these are connected with the introduction of Jobcentre plus and involve the refurbishment of offices to meet Jobcentre Plus requirements.

To ensure that these projects procure only certified timber that is obtained lawfully from sustainable sources we are following guidance issued by DEFRA. We have requested that documentary evidence be supplied to us by contractors to support all statements made concerning the supply of timber. We intend to audit such information to ensure compliance with Government policy.

Departmental Recruitment (Older People)

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what percentage of those employed in benefit offices are over 55. [48705]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* From April 2002, benefits are paid through Jobcentre Plus and the Pensions Service. The percentage of staff aged over 55 in these agencies is 7.32 per cent. and 7.48 per cent. respectively.

Since the Department's creation last year, staff in DWP, (other than senior civil service) have had the opportunity to continue their employment beyond the age of 60 up to 65.

The Department's Diversity and Equality policy statement makes an explicit commitment to non-discrimination on age grounds. DWP is keen to make the most of the talents and experience of older staff and offers a range of working arrangements such as flexible working hours, part-time working patterns and other options which may suit their needs.

We have been looking at ways of further encouraging the recruitment of older workers. At the end of last year the Employment Service worked with colleagues in the Benefits Agency to develop a customised "gateway" to prepare New Deal 50plus customers for jobs in DWP. The initiative proved successful with 20 of the 21 participants subsequently taking up jobs in DWP with the Benefits Agency. The success of the initiative has been widely communicated internally throughout the Department, and promoted to other civil service Departments. Under the new Deal 50plus programme we are able to specifically target people from that age group and give them fixed term contracts with us, and permanent posts subject to them passing a fair and open recruitment competition.

In July 2002 DWP will be extending its use of the New Deal 50plus programme to support its staff recruitment. Guidance will be issued across DWP to raise the profile of the programme and to encourage managers to use this alternative form of recruitment.

Reviews, Task Forces and Advisory Groups

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer on 17 December 2001 to the hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon) *Official Report*, column 151W and to the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) on 22 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 62W, what *(a)* reviews, *(b)* task forces and *(c)* advisory groups have been established by his Department since May 1997; what their membership is; and what reports they (i) have published and (ii) are preparing to publish. [63042]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The information is given in tables, copies of which are in the Library. They show all reviews, task forces and advisory groups with external members which have been established since May 1997.

Members of Parliament (Personal Data)

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will place in the Library a copy of the profile of the hon. Member for Northavon referred to in section 4.3 of his Department's guidance notes on replies to written questions. [61774]

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will place the dossier of personal details held by his Department relating to the hon. Member for Linlithgow in the Library. [61882]

Mr. Forth: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what information is held by his Department on each hon. Member in relation to *(a)* personal relationships, both current and past, *(b)* financial status and dealings, *(c)* connections with companies and interest groups, *(d)* connections with Governments and *(e)* published works; and what was held in January 2002. [61825]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Department does not compile personal profiles on MPs.

We do have access to parliamentary reference works such as Dod's and in order to provide, in a cost-effective way, such reference information to the large number of officials drafting parliamentary answers we subscribe to Parliamentary Monitoring Services Ltd. (PMS).

Copies of the career profiles from PMS for the hon. Member for Northavon and my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow and the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst have been placed in the Library.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how much and what proportion of the departmental expenditure limit for 2002–03 had been spent by 31 May; what the figures were for 2001–02; and if she will make a statement. [61000]

Yvette Cooper: The hon. Gentleman is referred to the answer given by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 17 June 2002, at column 130W.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how much and what proportion of the departmental expenditure limit for 2002–03 will be accounted for by staff costs; what the figures were for 2001–02; and if she will make a statement. [61028]

Yvette Cooper: Information relating to financial year 2002–03 is not available.

The information requested for the financial year 2001–02 is in The Lord Chancellor's Departments, Departmental Report 2001–02 Cm5408, which was published on 13 June 2002.

Patricia Austin

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on the reasons given by Mr. Justice Burgess for awarding exemplary damages to Patricia Austin of Belfast in May. [60858]

Ms Rosie Winterton: A civil bill was issued on behalf of Patricia Austin in respect of a claim against the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, for assault and battery. The case came on for hearing, at Belfast County Court, on 30 April 2002 before His Honour Judge Burgess. Judgment was reserved.

On 14 May 2002 a written judgment was delivered in open court. The judgment included the following statement: "It is also a case where exemplary damages are appropriate, absorbing the role of aggravated damages".

The plaintiff was awarded a Decree for £8,500.00.

Nether party to the proceedings has lodged an appeal against the order of the court.

The reasons for the Judge's decision are set out in that judgment. It would be in appropriate for me to comment further on the Judge's decision.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many staff there are in his Department, broken down by ethnicity. [60576]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Department and its agencies (the Court Service and the Public Guardianship Office) employed a total of 12,849 people as at 15 May 2002. The table shows the staff numbers broken down by ethnicity. The data the Department is representing is for the pre-census ethnic classifications. The Department has begun to incorporate the new ethnic background classification this year. All new employees are being surveyed using the new classifications and a re-survey of all staff is planned during the latter part of this year.

Number of employees

	Permanent	*Casual*	*Grant total*
White	9,741	134	9,875
Black	615	8	623
Asian	586	10	596
Other	104	6	110
Not given	1,324	321	1,645
Grand total	12,370	479	12,849

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what proportion of ordinary written Questions for her Department were answered within a week of tabling in each month since June 2001; and what proportion of questions for named day received a substantive answer on that day in each month since June 2001. [58978]

Ms Rosie Winterton: 340 of the 899 ordinary written questions that were tabled to the Lord Chancellor's Department between 1 June 2001 and 24 May 2002 were answered within one week of being tabled, the detailed breakdown of monthly figures are as follows.

Month	*Ordinary written question answered within a week of being tabled (per cent.)*
June 2001	71.43
July 2001	68.18
October 2001	70.07
November 2001	38.71
December 2001	81.14
January 2002	35.93
February 2002	25.25
March 2002	46.67
April 2002	9.09
May 2002	46.77

Performance in April 2002 was atypical because one hon. Member asked 122 questions which required a great deal of co-ordination. Unfortunately they we all answered two days late.

In addition the Lord Chancellor's Department answered substantively 226 of 413 Named Day questions on the nominated day, representing 54.72 per cent.

Age Discrimination

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if *(a)* her Department and *(b)* its agencies have a policy of not considering applications for employment by persons over a particular age. [59457]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Department and its agencies (the Court Service and Public Guardianship Office) are committed to equality of opportunity, and therefore have recruitment policies that ensure candidates are not discriminated against on grounds of age when being considered for jobs.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Credit Card Fraud

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement on trends in credit card fraud over the last 10 years; [59179]

(2) what steps he is taking to tackle credit card fraud. [59180]

Mr. Denham: The Government recognise that plastic card fraud has been a large and rapidly growing problem in the United Kingdom (UK) since the mid-1990s, with losses having increased from £165 million in 1992 to £411.4 million[1] in 2001. The steep rise has been caused by high levels of organised card crime alongside increases in the number and usage of payment cards.

Significant work is under way to combat plastic card crime. The Home Office has held discussions with the finance and retail sectors and the police to establish and promote best practice in protecting cards. A major initiative which has emerged is the planned introduction of microchips into payment cards to help authentication. This is to be combined with the introduction of PIN codes in place of signatures. The banking industry foresees that by 2005 the technology will have eliminated up to 80 per cent. of plastic card fraud in the UK.

The Government are pleased that the banks and retailers are committed to introducing new technology that is so vital in fighting plastic card fraud. The UK has been leading the world in creating a global standard for chip and design that guarantees very high levels of security whenever consumers use their cards. It is vital that we use this technology to combat fraudsters who find it all too easy to forge genuine cardholders' signatures.

The Home Office is also supporting a two-year pilot of a unique policing unit, the Dedicated Cheque and Plastic Crime Unit. The unit, based in London, is working closely with the banking industry to reduce organised card and cheque fraud across England and Wales. It is estimated that savings of up to £16 million per year may be achieved in each year of operation.

Source:

[1] APACS Fraud in Focus 2002.

Cycling

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action his Department is taking to deter adults from cycling on pavements in residential areas; and if he will make a statement. [59595]

Mr. Denham: Cycling inconsiderately or irresponsibly on the pavement is an offence under section 72 of the Highways Act 1835.

Enforcement of the legislation is an operational matter for individual chief officers of police. They are best placed to assess the nature and cause of specific local problems, to determine how most effectively to address them and to decide the best allocation of resources between different priorities. Short intensive enforcement campaigns are occasionally conducted to deal with persistent cycling offenders.

To help the police deal with cyclists who use the pavement inconsiderately or irresponsibly, we are taking powers in the Police Reform Bill to enable Community Safety Officers (CSOs) to issue fixed penalty notices for this offence.

We recognise that many cyclists, particularly children and young people, cycle on pavements because they are afraid to cycle on the road. The cycling infrastructure and environment are currently being improved as part of our National Cycling Strategy, and the improvements will help reduce the incentive to cycle on the pavement.

Crime and Disorder Partnerships

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will bring forward proposals to ensure that local partners in crime and disorder partnerships must be consulted by the chief constables on significant changes in policing practice; and if he will make a statement. [60593]

Mr. Denham: Under Section 96 of the Police Act 1996, police authorities, in consultation with their chief officers, are already required to obtain the views of the people in their area on its policing and their co-operation in crime prevention.

As one of the responsible authorities under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, charged with drawing up and delivering a local crime and disorder reduction strategy, I would expect the police, as a matter of good practice, to discuss with their local partners any significant changes in policing which might affect how the partnership delivers its crime and disorder reduction strategy.

Asylum Seekers

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons were granted leave *(a)* to enter and *(b)* to remain as refugees during March following a successful asylum appeal; and if he will make a statement. [60537]

Beverley Hughes: The information requested is not available and could be obtained only by examination of individual case records thereby incurring a disproportionate cost.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of persons granted leave *(a)* to enter and *(b)* to remain as refugees during March following a successful asylum appeal had had their asylum appeals disposed of as defined in section 94(4) of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 within (i) 28 days, (ii) two months, (iii) three months and (iv) more than three months prior to the issue of papers granting leave to enter or remain; and if he will make a statement. [60538]

Beverley Hughes: The information requested is not available and could be obtained only by examination of individual case records thereby incurring a disproportionate cost.

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of asylum seekers entered the United Kingdom lawfully in each year since 1997. [61333]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* I regret that information on the entry routes of asylum seekers, and whether they entered the United Kingdom lawfully, is not available. In 2001, 64 per cent. of applications for asylum were made in-country and 36 per cent. were made at port.

The 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees recognised that people trying to escape persecution often relied upon the use of false documents and unusual means of travel. Article 31 of the convention provides that refugees should not have any penalties imposed upon them as a consequence of entering the country of refuge illegally in order to seek sanctuary, provided that they travel to that country directly from their own country, present themselves to the domestic authorities without delay and show good cause for their illegal entry or presence.

Information on asylum applications is published quarterly. The next publication will be available from 30 August 2002 on the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for asylum were made at UK *(a)* airports and *(b)* ports in each year since 1997. [61330]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* The information requested for the periods April 2000—March 2001 and April 2001—December 2001 is shown in the table. I regret that this information is unavailable for previous years, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

At port asylum applications[1,2]

Period	*Airport*	*SeaPort*	*Rail*	*Total*
April 2000-March 2001	10,850	5,455	5,335	21,640
April 2001-December 2001	[illegible]35	1,740	5,790	17,165

[1] Figures rounded to the nearest five

[2] Principal applicants only

This information was taken from manual counts of asylum applications taken at port, which do not reconcile with the quarterly asylum statistics published on the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Asylum Accommodation Centres

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the offers he has received within the last two months of potential sites for asylum accommodation centres. [62422]

Beverley Hughes: Site searching for Accommodation Centres has continued since we made our initial announcement about the shortlist, as we said it would. In addition to the sites we have identified ourselves, a number have been put forward by potential bidders. We will not be putting into the public domain details of such sites unless and until they are considered to be a serious prospect for the siting of the Accommodation Centre.

Nottinghamshire Constabulary

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last visited the City of Nottingham Division of the Nottinghamshire Constabulary; and if he will make a statement. [60592]

Mr. Denham: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary (Mr. Blunkett) regularly visits police forces. His most recent visit to Nottinghamshire police was on Thursday 18 April 2002 and it included time at the central police station in Nottingham.

Cemeteries

Andrew Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when the research on burial space and the state of cemeteries will be published; and what follow-up action will be taken; [60809]

(2) if he will make a statement on the work of the Burial and Cemeteries Advisory Group; who is on it; what its terms of reference are; how many times it has met; when it will next meet; what it has discussed; what it has done; and when it will have completed its work; [60808]

(3) when the Government will publish the public consultation on burial legislation. [60810]

Hilary Benn: Details of the membership of the Burial and Cemeteries Advisory Group are listed. The Group has met three times, and has the following terms of reference:

> To provide good practice advice on the provision, management, and maintenance of burial grounds; and
>
> To produce advice on good burial practice and procedures, and to make recommendations for any appropriate policy and legislative change.

The agreed minutes of the Group's meetings will be published, and I will arrange for copies to be sent to the hon. Member. Consultation on burial legislation and related matters depends on approval of a draft document to be considered at the next meeting at the end of September. The Group is committed to reporting progress to Ministers by December 2002.

The research work was completed earlier this year. The report will be published shortly following peer review, and its findings will be used to inform further work. In addition, planning for the survey of burial grounds is well advanced, with a pilot exercise expected later this summer.

Burial and Cemeteries Advisory Group Membership

Association of Burial Authorities

Association of Private Crematoria and Cemeteries

Board of Deputies of British Jews

Cemetery Research Group, University of York

Churches Funerals Group

Commonwealth War Graves Commission

Confederation of Burial Authorities

Council for the Care of Churches

Cremation Society of Great Britain

Cruse Bereavement Care

Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions

Department for Culture, Media and Sport
English Heritage
English Nature
Federation of British Cremation Authorities
Health and Safety Executive
Home Office
Institute of Burial and Cremation Administration
Local Government Association
Muslim Council of Great Britain
National Assembly for Wales
National Association of Local Councils
National Association of Memorial Masons
National Federation of Cemetery Friends
Society of Local Council Clerks
Welsh Local Government Association.

Immigration and Nationality Directorate

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have made complaints about IND since 1 January. [60570]

Beverley Hughes: The Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) hold a central record of written complaints about staff conduct and since 1 January 2002 have received a total of 180 formal complaints concerning individual members of staff. The Directorate does not currently keep records of complaints made about operational matters. However, IND is in the process of setting up a single point of contact for all written and e-mailed complaints as part of a drive to improve the accessibility of information to customers generally. This will enable complaints to be accurately recorded, monitored closely and improvements made to the level of service provided, as a result.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the answer of 14 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 604W, on appeals, how many cases were sent from IND to the Immigration Appellate Authority in 2001. [60613]

Beverley Hughes: Data from the Immigration Appellate Authority (IAA) show that the IAA received 58,285 immigration and asylum appeals from the Immigration and Nationality Directorate in 2001. The majority (47,905) was asylum appeals.

Haslar Detention Centre

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many detainees have been allocated to Haslar Detention Centre in the last year; how many have been granted political asylum; how many have been given exceptional leave to remain; and how many have been deported. [60397]

Beverley Hughes: The latest available information on the number of persons detained under Immigration Act powers relates to 30 March 2002. As at that date, 135 persons (to the nearest five) were being detained at Haslar Immigration Removal Centre.

I regret that statistics showing the total number of detainees allocated to Haslar Immigration Removal Centre in the last year, and the requested information on the outcome of their cases could be obtained only at disproportionate cost by examination of individual case records.

Information on Immigration Act detainees as at 29 June 2002 will be published on 30 August 2002 on the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Age Discrimination

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for each NDPB or agency sponsored by his Department, whether they have a policy of not considering applications for employment by persons over a particular age, and that age. [59334]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* It is for individual non-departmental public bodies (NDPB's) to determine their own policies about age-limits of those they employ, in accordance with existing equal opportunities legislation and good practice guidelines, but no Home Office NDPB operates a restrictive policy on considering applicants for employment below retirement age.

Agencies are bound by the provisions of the Civil Service Management Code, section 2.1, which states

> "Civil Service equal opportunities policy provides that all eligible people must have equality of opportunity for employment and advancement on the basis of age, disability, gender, martial status, sexual orientation, race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin, or (in Northern Ireland) community background".

Correspondence

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the several letters from the hon. Member for Woking on DANGA, born 9 November 1973, ref. D1009062 and B554916. [60515]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* I wrote to the hon. Member on 10 June 2002.

Criminal Justice System

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the inter-departmental steering group working on the review of statistics on administration of criminal justice is expected to report; what the group's membership is; and what the members' sponsoring authorities are. [59339]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 12 June 2002]:* The report from the review of statistics on the administration of criminal justice in England and Wales is due to be published as a consultation document on the National Statistics website shortly.

The review is being conducted by Denis Allnutt, and is steered by a trilateral project board chaired by Andy Maultby (Lord Chancellor's Department). The project board includes officials from the Home Office (Research, Development and Statistics Directorate, Criminal Justice Joint Planning Unit, and Criminal Justice Information Technology Directorate), the Crown Prosecution Service, the Court Service, and an independent member—Professor Ken Pease (Huddersfield University).

The funding authority for the review is the Home Office.

Counter-terrorism

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the allocation to West Mercia constabulary for police activity on counter-terrorism measures of the extra funding announced on 10 June. [61282]

Mr. Denham: Forces in the West Midlands, including West Mercia police, received funding allocations based on careful assessments of their current requirements and commitments to provide an enhanced counter-terrorist capability. The overall level of funding allocated to police forces in the West Midlands region for counter terrorism purposes has been made public but to break this down further in public announcements could compromise security.

Fylingdales

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much of the funds he is allocating to police forces in Yorkshire for counter-terrorism measures will be given to North Yorkshire police in respect of the policing of Fylingdales. [61306]

Mr. Denham: Forces in Yorkshire, including North Yorkshire police, have received additional funding based on detailed assessments of their current requirements to provide an enhanced counter-terrorist capability. The overall level of funding allocated to police forces in Yorkshire for counter-terrorism purposes has been made public but to give specific information about resources for the policing of specific sites such as the Fylingdales could potentially compromise security.

Juvenile Crime

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of juvenile crime was linked to the use of *(a)* alcohol and *(b)* drugs in each of the last 10 years. [61102]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Information about the proportion of juvenile crime linked to alcohol or drugs misuse in each of the last 10 years is not available.

We are, of course, aware that both alcohol and drugs misuse can be a significant factor in juvenile offending. Studies, such as the MORI Youth Survey published by the Youth Justice Board, provide a useful picture of the association between frequent drinking, drugs misuse and offending behaviour among young people. The 2002 MORI Youth Survey, published in May, while showing that a large proportion of young people have tried alcohol, shows clearly that those who admit to committing a criminal offence are likely to drink more regularly than those who do not. The survey similarly shows that young people who have committed a criminal offence within the previous 12 months are significantly more likely to have taken illegal drugs than those who have not offended.

Street Crime Action Team

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* police forces and *(b)* basic command units have been asked to supply information to the Street Crime Action Team; on what topics and with what frequency. [61182]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* The Government are committed to reducing street crime.

In April 2002 the Government launched the 10 Force Robbery Reduction Initiative across the 10 police force areas with the highest levels of recorded robbery and snatch theft.

The 10 forces are: the Metropolitan police, West Midlands, West Yorkshire, Greater Manchester, Merseyside, Avon and Somerset, South Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire, Thames Valley, and Lancashire. 133 basic command units (BCU) fall within these force areas. 82 per cent. of all street crime was recorded in those areas in the 12 months to March 2001.

As part of the initiative the Home Office Street Crime Action Team is in regular contact with the 10 forces on the full range of topics affecting reaching the goal of a sustainable reduction in street crime.

Police Standards Unit

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what date the Standards Unit for the police was established; how much has been spent on the unit; how much he expects to have been spent within the first 12 months; and what the anticipated annual running costs thereafter will be. [61178]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* The first members of the Police Standards Unit started in post on 9 July 2001. To date £709,000 has been spent on the unit. It is anticipated that the cost of running the unit in the first 12 months will be around £789,000. The expenditure for 2002–03 has been forecast to be in the region of £3.1 million for running costs. Running costs for the unit thereafter have been forecast at £3.6 million per annum.

Immigration

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many immigrants have entered the United Kingdom and sought citizenship in each year since 1992. [61332]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* The available information relates to the total number of people who have applied for British citizenship each year.

The table shows the total number of applications for British citizenship received for the period of January 1992 to December 2000 inclusive. This includes a handful of applications made outside the United Kingdom.

I regret that it is not possible to identify the year in which these people entered the United Kingdom as immigrants, but in order to qualify for British citizenship almost all applicants will have been residing in the United Kingdom for at least three years, and in many cases longer.

Information on citizenship is published annually in the statistical bulletin "Persons Granted British Citizenship", a copy of which is available in the House of Commons Library and from the RDS website: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds

Applications for British citizenship received in the United Kingdom, 1992–2000

Number of persons

	Applications received[1]
1992	38,070
1993	42,680
1994	48,275
1995	53,390
1996	61,800
1997	66–000
1998	68,030
1999	67,400
2000	[2]62,475

[1] Includes a handful of applications made outside the United Kingdom

[2] Revised

Firearms

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many firearms, by category, were held by each police force in each of the last five years; [61849]

(2) how many firearms have been ordered by each police force over the last 12 months. [61848]

Mr. Denham: I am advised by the Association of Chief Police Officers that this information is not held centrally. It could be collected only at disproportionate cost.

People Trafficking (Sexual Exploitation)

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if it is his policy that persons who have entered the United Kingdom and are found to be victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation are automatically granted exceptional leave to remain. [60825]

Beverley Hughes: It is not our policy to grant routinely exceptional leave to remain to victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation. Each case is considered in the light of its own individual circumstances, including any compassionate factors which may be put forward. The fact that someone has been brought here against their will might be one such factor, but we will take into account all other relevant issues, including the age, health and length of stay of the applicant.

The White Paper "Secure Borders, Safe Haven" outlined proposals for supporting victims of exploitation. Where such people are willing to assist the authorities in bringing traffickers to justice, special arrangements may be made for their protection. The Government intends to develop "best practice" to distinguish victims in genuine need and to provide them with appropriate help and support, whether they are allowed to remain here or are returned to their own countries.

The Government is committed to tackling people trafficking and exploitation. The Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill (Clause 118) proposes a new 14 year penalty for a person convicted of facilitating the entry of an individual for the purposes of prostitution.

Pirated Entertainment

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions have been commenced against *(a)* sellers, *(b)* distributors and *(c)* producers of pirated (i) video cassettes, (ii) CDs and (iii) DVDs in each of the last five years; and how many have been successful. [59681]

Hilary Benn: The information requested is not available centrally.

Channel Tunnel

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures are being taken at the UK end to reduce the use by illegal immigrants of the channel tunnel to enter the UK. [60241]

Beverley Hughes: The Immigration Service deploys a range of new detection technology to combat clandestine entry through the channel tunnel and other routes. Carbon dioxide and heartbeat detectors are in operation in Dover and Coquelles and two x-ray scanners deployed there by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise for the purpose of detecting contraband have regularly found clandestine entrants during their searches. These two scanners are shortly to be supplemented by two gamma ray detectors purchased by the Immigration Service and all four scanners will be manned by joint Customs/Immigration Service teams.

In addition, the Immigration Service is about to begin the next phase of its procurement programme and is looking to deploy additional detection devices in the United Kingdom and some continental ports. Searches are already conducted in some of those ports by ferry and port operators and the Immigration service is currently considering how best to assist them in their efforts, possibly by lending additional detection equipment.

The recent resurgence of clandestine entry via the SNCF rail freight site at Frethun requires additional security measures to be taken to secure the site. Following discussions, SNCF have undertaken to introduce measures to improve security as a matter of urgency.

In the forthcoming Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill the Government are seeking to amend the Civil Penalty provisions of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 to bring about a more flexible, but enforceable penalty regime. The object of the Civil Penalty is to persuade those responsible for vehicles and other transport to secure and check them properly to prevent the carriage of clandestine entrants. The Civil Penalty provisions apply equally to rail freight and freight shuttle wagons operating through the tunnel and since its introduction in clandestine entry on the Eurotunnel freight shuttle service has reduced dramatically.

Departmental Functions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the functions of his Department that have been *(a)* market tested and *(b)* outsourced in each of the last five years, specifying the (i) money saving and (ii) percentage saving in each case. [43003]

Beverley Hughes: The available information on Home Office functions that have been market tested and outsourced in each of the last five years specifying the money and percentage saving in each case is as follows:

Function	*Year*	*Monetary saving (£)*	*Percentage saving*
Prison management	2000–01	4.5 million	18
Prison shop	2000–01	1 million	27
Security guarding services	1997	[1]380,000	[1]8.8

[1] Figures at net present value (NPV) over three years.

Note:

The calculation of net present value is intended to express all future cash flows associated with a procurement in their present day values.

I am sure the savings for the taxpayer occurred by this will be welcomed by the hon. Member.

Street Robbery (London)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give the figures for street robberies in London for the most recent year for which figures are available and the five preceding years showing separately how many such robberies in each year were of mobile phones. [46207]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* Details of robbery of personal property have been collected centrally at the police force area level since 1 April 1998. Details of robbery of mobile phones are not routinely collected centrally.

Offences of robbery of personal property for the Metropolitan police area

Year ending March	*Number of offences*
1998–99	23,062
1999–2000	32,068
2000–01[1]	37,023

[1] A boundary change on 1 April 2000 meant figures are not directly comparable with previous years.

The street crime initiative represents a step-change in cross-Government action to tackle street crime with a focused programme of action in the 10 police force areas where the problem is most acute.

Work that was already under way to support police in the 10 worst areas was brought forward to begin in April. This is supported by a cross-Government action group that works across the criminal justice system and the whole of Government in a concerted effort to tackle any obstacles to cutting street crime.The purpose of the group is to identify and support the implementation of actions which all the various agencies can take to tackling the problem of street crime, working together to bring about both an immediate and a sustainable long-term reduction.

Professional Indemnity Insurance

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many contracts the Home Office has with consultants; what level of professional indemnity insurance is standard in contracts with small consultants; whether he can make exceptions to the level of professional indemnity insurance; and what recent discussions he has had with other Government Departments about the level of professional indemnity insurance. [50843]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* The Home Office currently have in use 88 consultancy contacts.

The level of professional indemnity insurance set is commensurate with the level of risk and type and value of contract.

As with previous Administrations it is not Government practice to provide details of meetings with other Government Departments.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the internal structure of the HMIC with specific reference to the research, quality and analysis activity. [51631]

Mr. Denham: Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) is led by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary, Sir Keith Povey. The 43 forces in England and Wales are inspected by four Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs), based in regional offices covering the North, London and East, Wales and Central and South regions.

Of 128 staff, 61 are members of the regional teams. 38 of those are seconded police officers, the remainder being civil servants for seconded civilian support staff.

HMIC is funded directly by central Government and expenditure is controlled by the central unit at Queen Anne's Gate.

Regional HMIs direct the inspections in their areas following an annual risk assessment of all forces to determine how best use can be made of HMIC resources to help improve police effectiveness. All inspections are based on national standards-based protocols to ensure consistency.

Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in relation to criminal injuries compensation scheme applications on behalf of infants who have sustained catastrophic brain damage as a result of having been shaken by a third party in the last three years, how many applications are outstanding; of these how many have *(a)* outstanding decisions on liability and *(b)* decisions accepting liability in principle; what is (i) the longest delay and (ii) the average delay since the application was lodged; of payments made in each of the last three years, what was (A) the average value, (B) the lowest value and (C) the highest value; how many of those decisions which accept liability in principle are awaiting care reports from the applicants' advisers; what the average cost of a care report is; what contribution towards the cost of a care report is offered by the CICS; in cases where a decision has been made accepting liability in principle where a care report has been supplied (1) how many have resulted in additional care questions for the applicants' advisers, (2) what the average cost of the care report was and (3) what contribution was made towards the cost of the care report; what his policy is towards the requesting of additional expert evidence at the expense of the applicants; whether it may be accepted that a case clearly exceeds the maximum award without the need for a care report; and if he will make a statement. [57649]

Hilary Benn: With respect to questions *(a)* and (b), (i) and (ii), and A, B and C, the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority (CICA) advises that it does not have a classification on its casework database corresponding to these specific types of case. To answer those questions accurately would accordingly require the individual examination of every case where the victim was a young child at the time of injury. That could be done only at disproportionate cost.

It can take a considerable time to complete the assessment of compensation payable in individual cases that involve severe or complex injuries. However, once eligibility has been established in principle, CICA may make interim awards, for example in respect of the care needs of a severely injured child.

CICA obtains and meets the cost of all the reports it considers necessary to inform a fair and accurate assessment of an application. No applicant is required to provide reports. However, some do provide reports in support of their view of the award that they should receive. Where the Authority considers reports or other information submitted by an applicant to be inaccurate, inadequate, or out of date, it may propose that supplementary information be provided at the applicant's expense.

Generally, CICA does not reimburse the cost of care or other reports, commissioned by applicants or their representatives. However, CICA will make interim awards of compensation so that an applicant has the funds to pay for any specialist report that he or she may wish to obtain. The Authority is not routinely told the cost of care reports commissioned by third parties. And the records held by CICA of the cost of reports that it has paid for do not differentiate between care reports and others. Consequently CICA has no centrally held data from which to derive the average cost of a care report.

Where it appears that the combination of the tariff award and the assessment of special expenses is highly likely to exceed the Scheme limit of £500,000 per case, CICA will usually concentrate on the main heads of claim to shorten the process involved in reaching the determination. However, where the victim is a severely injured young child the process of assessment may be complicated by considerations such as life expectancy and difficulty in reaching a firm long-term prognosis.

In such cases the local authority's assessment of care needs and details of what it will provide free of charge are an essential part of the corresponding assessment of costs under the Tariff Scheme. This is because local authorities tend to provide services to children without charge, and paragraph 35(d) of the Scheme specifies that the reasonable costs of care services may be provided for in an award of compensation only where they are not available free of charge from the national health service, local authorities or any other agency.

Police Numbers

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers there have been in the *(a)* Avon and Somerset force and *(b)* the East Somerset force in each reporting period since 1980–81; and how many are planned for each reporting period to 2004–05. [56231]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* Information on police numbers for Avon and Somerset constabulary is set out at Table A. Details of strength for the East Somerset Division have been provided by the Chief Constable (Mr. S C Pilkington QPM) and are set out in Table B.

Mr. Pilkington has informed me that figures for the East Somerset division prior to 1996 have been archived and are not readily available.

He has further informed me that the planned strength for 2002–03 is 3,187 for the whole force, but that there is no separate figure for East Somerset. There are no predicted figures for years beyond 2003.

Police force performance does not depend solely upon the number of officers available. The proposals in the White Paper "Policing a New Century: A blueprint for Reform" set out a radical and ambitious programme of reform, with the overall aim of reducing crime and the fear of crime and to tackle anti-social behaviour. The test of success will be whether the measures being put in place will make a real difference to the quality of life of individuals and communities up and down the country.

Table A

Avon and Somerset—Police strength 1980–81 to 2000–02

As at 31 March	*Police numbers*
1981	2,953
1982	3,011
1983	2,970
1984	2,997
1985	2,982
1986	2,958
1987	3,009
1988	3,013
1989	3,014
1990	3,094
1991	3,092
1992	3,081
1993	3,068
1994	3,033
1995	3,000
1996	2,981
1997	2,989
1998	2,976
1999	2,999
2000	2,934
2001	2,960
2001 (30 September)	3,040

Table B

East Somerset division—police strength 1996–97 to 1999–2000

As at 31 March	*Police numbers*
1997	231
1998	243
1999	241
2000	235
2001	240
2001 (30 September)	249

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the mandate of the Committee on the system for comparison of fingerprints for the effective application of the Dublin Convention (Eurodac) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [58453]

Beverley Hughes: The Committee established by Article 23 of the EURODAC Regulation assists the Commission in accordance with Articles 5 and 7 of the Council Decision laying down the procedures for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission (199/468/EC).

Article 22 of the EURODAC Regulation specifies that the EURODAC Central Unit may be charged with carrying out statistical tasks on the basis of data processed at the Central Unit, other than those already specified in Article 3(3) of the Regulation. In these circumstances the additional statistical measures are to be adopted in accordance with the procedure of the Committee. All the important implementing powers were reserved to the Council, such as agreement on the EURODAC Implementing Rules, which were adopted by Council on 28 February 2002.

The EURODAC system is not yet operational. There are no immediate plans for the Committee to meet, but if it does the United Kingdom will be represented by a Home Office official and an official from the United Kingdom Permanent Representation in Brussels. The work of the Committee is funded by the European Community budget and travel costs to attend Committee meetings are met by the European Commission. The Home Office pays a subsistence allowance to cover attendance at a Committee meeting.

The Commission is required to prepare annual reports on the implementation work of the Committee, which are submitted to the Council and European Parliament. The reports are also published on the EUROPA internet website. I do not see a need for further measures to increase the Committee's accountability and transparency.

Data Protection

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to ensure that police force computers contain a complete copy of the electoral roll on their local force computers; and if he will make a statement. [59260]

Mr. Denham: The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR's) Electoral Legislation and Administration Branch, Democracy and Local Leadership Division have published, for consultation, draft Regulations under section 9 of the Representation of the People Act 2000 in relation to access to, and supply and sale of, electoral registers held and maintained by Electoral Registration Officers (EROs).

Under these regulations the police forces in Great Britain and Northern Ireland (including the National Criminal Intelligence Service, the National Crime Squad and the Police Information Technology Organisation (PITO)) will be able to request, free of charge, copies of the full electoral roll. The information contained may be used for the purpose of the prevention and detection of crime and the enforcement of the criminal law.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether individuals who consent to the police taking their *(a)* fingerprints and *(b)* DNA samples are informed that if consent is withdrawn then the fingerprints or samples might not be destroyed; and if he will make a statement. [59268]

Mr. Denham: The police have the power to take fingerprints and non-intimate DNA samples, with or without consent, from people in police custody who are charged with, informed they will be reported for, or convicted of a recordable offence. In these cases individuals are informed as part of the custody process that their DNA and fingerprints will be subject to speculative database searches and may be retained indefinitely.

DNA samples given voluntarily for the purposes of elimination are only retained if the volunteer has given written consent. In such cases, the volunteer signs a statement giving their consent. The statement also informs them that consent cannot later be withdrawn. Fingerprints taken for elimination purposes may also be retained if the volunteer has given written consent. Under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (as amended) retained fingerprints and DNA samples can only be used for the purposes related to the prevention or detection of crime, the investigation of an offence or the conduct of a prosecution.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* vehicle, *(b)* criminal record and *(c)* combined vehicle/criminal checks were undertaken on the Police National Computer in the last year; and how many checks in other categories were undertaken. [59267]

Mr. Denham: From April 2001 to March 2002 a total of 26,546,892 vehicle inquiries were undertaken on the Police National Computer (PNC). A further 136,966 Vehicle Online Descriptive Searches (VODS) were also made. VODS are searches based on partial information.

Over the same period, 32,337,776 inquiries on names were made, with a further 67,631 inquiries on names descriptive searches using QUEST, a PNC application that identifies criminal records from partial descriptive details.

The PNC database does not have the facility to carry out combined vehicle/criminal record checks.

Checks in other categories include stolen property inquiries (99,256 checks) and property descriptive searches (2,572 checks).

CCTV, Arthurs Hill

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when funding approval was given for a CCTV scheme in Arthurs Hill, Newcastle; and how much funding has been drawn down for it. [59195]

Mr. Denham: We announced funding approval for a project in the Arthurs Hill area of Newcastle under the second round of the Reducing Burglary Initiative in May 2000. The project, between the Northumbria police and Newcastle city council, received a grant of £137,000 to cover the costs of a range of interventions, including Close Circuit Television (CCTV) schemes and other target hardening measures. Out of the grant, a total of £133,493 has been claimed. The project has been highly successful, having achieved a 20 per cent. reduction in burglaries in the Arthurs Hill area and a 50 per cent. reduction in Richardson Road.

Street Crime

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many incidences of street crime were reported *(a)* to the police in Lancashire and *(b)* in each police authority area in Wales in each year since 1997. [58836]

Mr. Denham: Recorded offences of robbery between April 1997 to March 2001 for Lancashire and each police authority area in Wales are set out in the table.

Recorded offences of robbery 1997 to 2001 (April to March)

	Financial year April to March			
Police force	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Lancashire	887	982	1,058	1,224
Dyfed Powys	33	42	28	23
Gwent	160	173	216	244
North Wales	118	127	146	163
South Wales	475	511	519	460

Note:

New Home Office counting rules were introduced in April 1998. This change to recording practices is estimated to have added an additional one per cent. to the level of recorded robbery in England and Wales.

The Home Office routinely publishes statistics on recorded crime on a yearly basis including the offence of robbery (both against the person and against commercial premises). The latest publicly available recorded crime statistics cover the period April 2000 to March 2001.

Police Officers (Devon and Cornwall)

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of officers who were employed by the North Devon and Cornwall police force five years ago are Devon and Cornwall police officers this year; and if he will make a statement. [59302]

Mr. Denham: North Devon and Cornwall are constituent parts of the Devon and Cornwall Constabulary. I am told by the force that the precise information requested is not available, but 69 per cent. of officers in Cornwall and 60 per cent. of officers in North Devon were serving officers with Devon and Cornwall Constabulary five years ago. I am also told that, in the force as a whole, 73 per cent. of officers have more than five years service.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers have left the Devon and Cornwall police force in each of the past 10 years; and of those who have left, how many *(a)* retired, *(b)* left for medical/health reasons, *(c)* had their employment terminated and *(d)* left for other reasons; and if he will make a statement. [59367]

Mr. Denham: Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary collects information annually about wastage from the police service. Figures for Devon and Cornwall for nine years from 1992 to 2000–01 are set out in the table. Reliable figures are not available for years earlier than 1992.

	Ordinary retirements	*Medical retirements*	*Dismissed/ required to resign*	*Other reasons*[1]	*Total wastage*
1992[2]	56	40	4	14	114
1993[2]	64	49	4	10	127
1994–95	69	25	7	11	112
1995–96	98	27	0	9	134
1996–97	93	21	5	14	133
1997–98	88	22	9	14	133
1998–99	76	20	2	21	119
1999–2000	92	20	1	29	142
2000–01	94	15	4	25	137

[1] Other reasons includes deaths in service, transfers to other forces and voluntary resignations.

[2] 1992 and 1993 figures are for calendar years. Others figures are for financial years.

Special Constables

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average number of voluntary constables was in each of the past 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [59301]

Mr. Denham: The numbers of special constables in England and Wales from 1991 to 2001 are given in the table. From 1990 to 1995, statistics on the strength of the special constabulary in England and Wales were collected by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary. These were compiled at the end of the calendar year until 1993, and then for the financial year 1994–95. Since 1995, these statistics have been collected by the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate. They are compiled at the end of March and September each year.

	Number of special constables
December 1991	17,543
December 1992	19,035
December 1993	20,573
March 1995	20,026
September 1995	19,655
September 1996	19,451
September 1997	19,163
September 1998	17,296
September 1999	15,727
September 2000	13,487
September 2001	12,068

Sources:

Figures to March 1995 supplied by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC), figures from September 1995 supplied by Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate.

The Government are committed to reversing this decline in numbers. As we outlined in the White Paper, the current police reform process is an opportunity to achieve a stronger, increasingly professional special constabulary. Measures to achieve this include: a new headline role focusing on intelligence led patrolling and crime reduction initiatives; a new national foundation training package for special constables; joint Home Office/ Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) good practice guidance covering recruitment, management and deployment of specials; new conditions of service and conduct regulations.

In January 2002 we ran a press campaign targeting specials as part of the national recruitment campaign for the regular police service. As my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary recently announced at the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), we will also be working with employers to encourage them to support employees who are specials—in particular by giving them extra paid leave to carry out their police duties.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many special constables were actively working in Devon and Cornwall in each year since 1992; and if he will make a statement. [59300]

Mr. Denham: The numbers of special constables in Devon and Cornwall since 1992 are given in the table. From 1990 to 1995, statistics on the strength of the special constabulary in England and Wales were collected by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary. These were compiled at the end of the calendar year until 1993, and then for the financial year 1994–95. Since 1995, these statistics have been collected by the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate. They are compiled at the end of March and September each year.

	Number of special constables
December 1992	946
December 1993	1,067
March 1995	1,142
September 1995	1,079
September 1996	1,133
September 1997	1,079
September 1998	916
September 1999	908
September 2000	836
September 2001	780

Notes:

Figures to March 1995 supplied by HMIC.

Figures from September 1995 supplied by Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate

The Government is committed to reversing the decline in the number of special constables. As we outlined in the White Paper, the current police reform process is an opportunity to achieve a stronger, increasingly professional special constabulary. Measures to achieve this include: a new headline role focusing on intelligence led patrolling and crime reduction initiatives; a new national foundation training package for special constables; joint Home Office/Association of Chief Police Officers good practice guidance covering recruitment, management and deployment of specials; new conditions of service and conduct regulations.

In January we ran a press campaign targeting specials as part of the national recruitment campaign for the regular police service. And as my right hon. Friend, the Home Secretary recently announced at the Confederation of British Industry, we will also be working with employers to encourage them to support employees who are specials—in particular by giving them extra paid leave to carry out their police duties.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many special constables were employed in Hampshire in each year since 1992; and if he will make a statement. [60009]

Mr. Denham: The numbers of special constables in Hampshire since 1992 are given in the table. From 1990 to 1995, statistics on the strength of the special constabulary in England and Wales were collected by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC). These were compiled at the end of the calendar year until 1993, and then for the financial year 1994–95. Since 1995, these statistics have been collected by the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate. They are compiled at the end of March and September each year.

	Number of special constables
December 1992	587
December 1993	611
March 1995	598
September 1995	549
September 1996	519
September 1997	681
September 1998	747
September 1999	720
September 2000	500
September 2001	444

Notes:

Figures to March 1995 supplied by HMIC.

Figures from September 1995 supplied by Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate.

The Government is committed to reversing the recent decline in the number of special constables. As we outlined in the White Paper, the current police reform process is an opportunity to achieve a stronger, increasingly professional special constabulary. Measures to achieve this include: a new headline role focusing on intelligence led patrolling and crime reduction initiatives; a new national foundation training package for special constables; joint Home Office/Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) good practice guidance covering recruitment, management and deployment of specials; new conditions of service and conduct regulations.

In January 2002 we ran a press campaign targeting specials as part of the national recruitment campaign for the regular police service. And as my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary (Mr. Blunkett) recently announced at the Confederation of British Industry, we will also be working with employers to encourage them to support employees who are specials.

World Cup

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many football supporters resident in the West Midlands have been banned from travelling to the FIFA World cup. [59269]

Mr. Denham: Fifty-five of the 1,031 individuals currently subject to banning orders preventing travel to the 2002 World cup finals are resident in the West Midlands Police Authority area.

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many representatives of UK law enforcement agencies will be present in Japan and South Korea during the FIFA World cup. [59270]

Mr. Denham: The number of English police officers deployed in Japan and South Korea for the World cup finals cannot be revealed for operational reasons.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been refused permission to leave the United Kingdom to attend the World cup football matches in view of their possible involvement with violence. [60705]

Mr. Denham: 1,032 people have been prevented from travelling to the World cup in accordance with the conditions of their football orders.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Council House Transfer

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many council tenants voted *(a)* for and *(b)* against their home to be transferred from council ownership in the current year. [61153]

Mr. McNulty: There are 29 local authorities on the 2001–02 housing stock transfer programme. A total of 227,228 votes have been cast in tenants' ballots, with 132,567 voting for and 94,661 voting against transfer. 24 authorities hope to transfer as part of the 2002–03 programme. There has been one tenants' ballot so far, in which 3,038 tenants voted, with 1,721 voting for and 1,317 voting against transfer.

Homelessness

Bob Spink: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what his policy is on eradicating bed and breakfast accommodation for homeless people; if this will exclude the use of hotel accommodation; and when full implementation will be achieved. [61093]

Mr. McNulty: In March this year the then Secretary of State announced a £35 million programme to ensure that by March 2004 no homeless family with children is in a bed and breakfast hotel for more than six weeks. High using local authorities have submitted action plans showing how they will reduce numbers and length of stay for homeless families with children, including the applications resources to support them. These are currently under consideration and it is expected that announcements will be made shortly.

Bob Spink: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will give special financial assistance to Castle Point borough council to meet its statutory responsibility for statutory homelessness in the borough; and if he will make a statement. [61095]

Mr. McNulty: In responding to the March 2002 report "More than a roof", the Government announced that they would allocate £125 million in 2002–03 to tackle homelessness. The Government have already provided local authorities with an additional £8 million per annum in Revenue Support Grant to help them meet their new statutory obligations under the Homelessness Act 2002. All housing authorities will also receive a share of an additional £10 million in 2002–03 to enable them to deliver our proposed Order to extend the priority need groups under part VII of the Housing Act 1996.

On 14 March 2002, authorities were invited to submit proposals to the new Homelessness Directorate in my Department for funding for local homelessness strategies. These are being considered at the moment.

E-commerce

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what progress the Government have made towards meeting the objective that the UK be the best environment in the world for e-commerce by 2002. [55872]

Mr. Timms: I have been asked to reply.

In December 2001 the e-Minister and e-envoy published the second Annual UK Online report detailing progress made towards meeting this objective. This report is available on the office of the e-envoy's website—http://www.e-envoy.gov.uk.

Park Homes

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what provisions regarding Park Homes he plans to include in a housing Bill; and if he will make a statement. [61511]

Mr. McNulty: We are currently considering the options for changes to the law that would implement the undertakings given by the Government in their response to the Park Homes working party report.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what progress he is making in implementing recommendations of the Park Homes working party which do not require legislation; and if he will make a statement. [61510]

Mr. McNulty: The Government have, in the last two years, issued good practice guidance to local authorities on harassment and illegal eviction, and site licensing. Research is planned to review the model standards on which site licences are based, and consultation on this is likely.

We are closely consulting with bodies representing home owners and park owners on such matters as amending the industry's voluntary written statement to clarify and improve the terms of agreements between home owners and park owners.

A study of the economics of park homes, recommended by the Park Homes working party, is in its final stages and is likely to be published in late summer.

Permitted Development Rights

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what plans he has to change the regime of permitted development rights in so far as they affect the activities of the Land Access and Recreation Forum; and if he will make a statement; [61509]

(2) what plans he has to change the planning regime for game and clay pigeon shoots; and if he will make a statement. [61507]

Mr. McNulty: The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR) published research on 12 September 2001 on the impact of provisions relating to the temporary use of land, including land used for motorsports and game and clay pigeon shooting. It addressed matters such as impact on local amenity and the environment, for example in terms of litter, noise and relationships with other land uses in the area.

On 24 January 2002 DTLR issued a consultation paper on possible options for change to the current temporary use provisions. The paper put forward six options for change as well as inviting proposals for alternative options. The closing date for responses was 24 April 2002. Responses are currently being analysed. The views of all those who responded will be considered before any decisions are made on the future of the temporary use provisions.

Travellers

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what measures his Department is taking to tackle the problem of illegal encampments by travellers; and if he will make a statement. [61918]

Mr. McNulty: The ODPM is working closely with other Government agencies to develop policies and initiatives towards the management of unauthorised encampments by travellers.

New guidance, issued jointly with the Home Office, on Managing Unauthorised Camping is due to be published later this year.

Councillors' Interests

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what advice he gives to local authorities on public access to the register of interests of councillors. [61625]

Mr. Raynsford: The statute requires that copies of the register of members interests be kept available at an office of the authority for inspection by members of the public at all reasonable hours, and that the authority must publicise the address at which the register is kept and inform the Standards Board for England that such copies are available. Informal advice on conduct issues, including on where additional copies of the register may be kept by parish councils, is given in the new ethical framework bulletins, which until April were published by the Department and are now the responsibility of the Standards Board.

Millennium Dome

Chris Grayling: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what estimate he has made of the potential return to the Exchequer from the dome disposal agreement. [61996]

Mr. McNulty: As indicated when the deal agreed between English Partnerships and Meridian Delta Ltd. and Anshutz Entertainment Group was announced on 29 May, the expected value of the deal to English Partnerships is up to £550 million cash, over the whole period of the deal up to 2025, or around £240 million net present value, assuming the full scheme is developed.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if the Millennium Commission funded pier adjoining the dome site is included in the disposal agreement. [61997]

Mr. McNulty: No, it is not.

Fire Service (Traffic Accidents)

Bob Spink: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what proportion of fire service call-outs were to deal with road traffic incidents in each of the last five years. [61852]

Mr. Raynsford: The following table shows road traffic accidents as a percentage of all incidents attended by fire brigades. Figures relate to England and Wales.

	Percentage
1996	3
1997	3
1998	4
1999	4
2000[1]	4

[1] Provisional

Retail Premises

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will take steps to give local authorities the power to fine the landlords of retail premises that consistently fail to ensure that their shop-fronts are regularly cleaned and properly maintained. [61917]

Mr. Raynsford: The issue of local authorities' ability to intervene where shop-fronts are poorly maintained and unkempt is being considered by a cross-Government review of the powers and responsibilities that govern all aspects of public spaces and local environments. The review will publish its findings, with recommendations for specific reforms, as a consultation document in the autumn.

Furthermore, the draft Local Government Bill, on which we are currently consulting, contains provisions to allow local authorities and business rate payers to work together to put in place local improvements, such as to the street environment.

Local Government Employees (Code of Conduct)

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he expects to produce a code of conduct for local government employees; and if he will make a statement. [61990]

Mr. Raynsford: Following discussions with the Local Government Association, the Employers Organisation and public sector unions, we are now drawing up a draft code on which we intend to consult during the summer.

Cornish Language

Andrew George: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what discussions he has had with his colleagues in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on the case for the specifying of the Cornish language in the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. [62594]

Mr. Raynsford: I have had no discussions with colleagues in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on this issue but, as the lead Department for the Charter, they are aware of the position on the Government's assessment of the case for specifying the Cornish language.

Andrew George: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, pursuant to his answers of 20 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 216W, and 19 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 227W, on the Cornish language, when his Department will complete its assessment of the case for specifying the Cornish language within the provision of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. [62611]

Mr. Raynsford: I appreciate and share fully the hon. Member's interest in reaching a timely conclusion on this issue. Unfortunately, completion of the Government office for the south west's report was delayed but I expect finally to receive it before the end of this month. I can assure the hon. Member the report will receive urgent attention.

Second Homes

Andrew George: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what representations he received on his Department's consultation document on second homes and council tax since January. [62588]

Mr. Raynsford: We received 443 responses to our consultation.

Andrew George: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the response to his Department's consultation document on council tax and second homes this year. [62589]

Mr. Raynsford: We are considering the way forward in the light of these responses. An analysis of the responses has been placed on our website at www.local.odpm.gov.uk

Andrew George: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what timetable he has set for the implementation of a removal of the right of second home owners to council tax discounts; [62587]

(2) when he intends to bring forward legislation to allow local authorities the power to remove the 50 per cent. council tax discount for second home owners. [62590]

Mr. Raynsford: Our consultation paper "Council Tax: Proposed changes for second homes and long term empty homes" was published in November last year. The consultation period closed on 15 February. We are considering the way forward and hope to announce final decisions shortly.

Social Housing

Andrew George: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what financial and other incentives the Government have provided to social housing providers developing new accommodation units provided on a shared equity basis in each of the last five years for which records are available. [62591]

Mr. McNulty: Funding is provided through the Housing Corporation's Approved Development Programme (ADP) and Local Authority Social Housing Grant (LASHG) to assist registered social landlords in developing units for sale on shared ownership terms. The table shows the funding provided in each of the last five years.

£ million

	ADP	*LASHG*	*Total*
Outturn			
1998–99	83.74	8.52	92.26
1999–2000	72.92	13.71	86.63
2000–01	95.48	20.19	115.67
2001–02	85.72	30.95	116.67
Allocation			
2002–03	149.05	[1]—	149.05

[1] Not available

Architects

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to abolish the protection of the title of architect, as recommended by the 1993 Warne report; and if he will make a statement. [61881]

Mr. McNulty: The Government currently has no proposals to abolish the protection of the title, architect, as recommended by the 1993 Warne report. This would require amendment of the Architects Act 1997, and any future proposal to make such an amendment would require extensive public consultation.

Regional Government Finance

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what guidance his Department has given the North East Assembly on spending Government funds given to it under the Strengthening Regional Accountability Initiative. [62550]

Mr. Raynsford: The Department has awarded the North East Assembly £1.7 million under the regional chambers fund for strengthening regional accountability: £500,000 in 2001–02 and £600,00 in each of 2002–03 and 2003–04. In July 2001, the then Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions issued guidance to the North East Assembly on the operation of the fund. The guidance was updated and re-issued in February 2002; a copy is in the Library. The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions has also issued funding agreements to Northumberland county council, the North East Assembly's accountable body, in respect of 2001–02 and 2002–03 and 2003–04 combined.

TREASURY

State Aid Approvals

Mrs. May: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if funding for which state aid approval is granted is automatically included in the public sector accounts; [61271]

(2) if he will list the criteria by which it is determined whether funding for which state aid approval has been granted is included in the public sector accounts. [61270]

Mr. Boateng: Public sector accounts include the income and expenditure of all organisations classified to the public sector by the Office for National Statistics.

State aid approval does not affect how expenditure is recorded in public sector accounts.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what has been the *(a)* cost and *(b)* saving from the pursuit of the Department's Public Service Agreement targets in each year since they were introduced; [61042]

(2) what the *(a)* cost and *(b)* saving has been from the Department's pursuit of Service Delivery Agreement targets in each year since they were introduced. [61643]

Ruth Kelly: The Treasury's Public Service Agreement set out the key outcomes it is committed to deliver with the resources provided, and its Service Delivery Agreement set out the key steps towards delivery of those targets Each year the Treasury publishes performance against its targets—including on value for money—and the resources it has used, in its departmental report.

Staff Numbers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many staff were employed by his Department on *(a)* 2 May 1997 and *(b)* 31 May 2002. [60928]

Ruth Kelly: Data on staffing levels are not available for the dates requested as they are collected twice a year only as at 1 April and 1 October. We are currently in the process of collecting the data for 1 April 2002.

I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given by the Minister of State, Cabinet Office on 13 June.

Public Expenditure

Bob Spink: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the level of total public expenditure per head excluding defence was in *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* Wales for each of the last five years. [61858]

Mr. Boateng: Total identifiable public expenditure per head in England, Scotland and Wales is shown in table 8.1 of Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses 2002–03 (Cm 5401). Identifiable spending excludes defence and some other spending that is deemed to be for the benefit of the United Kingdom as a whole and not identifiable as for the benefit of a particular country.

Overseas Investment

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much UK overseas investment was in each year since 1996 broken down by each main region of destination. [61861]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Pullinger to Mr. Jim Cousins, dated 17 June 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question on UK investment abroad since 1996 by region of destination. I am replying in his absence. (61861)

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) does not compile a full geographical breakdown of the United Kingdom's financial account (which contains the United Kingdom's investment flows), although some information is available for the direct investment component. A geographical breakdown of UK foreign direct investment abroad is published annually in the Foreign Direct Investment Business Monitor (MA4), copies of which are available in the House of Commons Library.

BCCI

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent discussions he has had with the Governor of the Bank of England concerning the legal action of the liquidators of BCCI against the Bank of England. [62187]

Ruth Kelly: The Chancellor meets regularly with the Governor of the Bank of England to discuss a range of issues.

Consultation

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what new steps his Department took in 2001–02 to consult the users of its services about their wishes and expectations; and if he will publish the findings. [47306]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The main service provided directly to the public by the Treasury is the provision of information.

In 2001–02 the Treasury consulted the public on the development of our website—the main vehicle by which we provide information—the results of which were fed into the site relaunch in November 2001. In 2002–03 we intend to consult regular users (financial professionals, journalists and members of the general public) of the main Treasury website, specifically to find out how they would like the site to develop in the future.

The Treasury are currently consulting on the development, in conjunction with Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise, of a new website aimed specifically at young people, but also which should also be of general public interest, explaining the work of the Chancellor's Departments in a more general way than is possible via the main website.

The Treasury also provides information on topical subjects such as third world debt in response to letters from members of the public requesting this information.

Computers

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many computers were replaced in his Department in each of the past three years; how the replaced units were disposed of and by which companies; and at what cost. [60734]

Ruth Kelly: In the financial years 1999–2000, 2000–01 and 2001–02, HM Treasury replaced about 1,000 desktop computers.

Treasury attempts to sell off its redundant IT equipment wherever possible. The following details the sales over the last three years.

Year/company	*Value of sales (£)*
1999–2000	
Computers for U Ltd. (now CFU Ltd.)	26,000
Logstat Computer Services	8,500
London Computer Auctions	8,000
RD Computers	6,000
OCM Business Systems	3,000
Technologic LSI (Europe) Ltd.	1,000
2000–01	
Computers for U Ltd. (now CFU Ltd.)	8,500
JB Computer Brokerage	7,500

Year/company	*Value of sales (£)*
2001–02	
CFU Ltd.	5,000
JB Computer Brokerage	500

Over the last three years the numbers of HMCE PC and laptop replacements were as follows:

Year ended	*Replacements*
31 March 2000	1,850
31 March 2001	3,611
31 March 2002	16,395

Prior to 31 March 2000 disposals were at local management discretion. A national scheme was established whereby charities in each region were invited to request replaced equipment and collect it at their own expense. Unusable equipment was discarded. Security and environmental factors were taken into consideration at all times. The cost incurred in disposal was minimal and related mainly to the time of the departmental staff involved.

On 31 March 2000 ownership of HMCE desktop and laptop computers passed to ICL (now Fujitsu Services) under a PFI contract. The contracted service charge covers replacement and disposal costs as well as provision of the day to day services. Fujitsu Services operate a Second Time Around Replacement (STAR) system, whereby renovated equipment is deployed as far as economically possible to reduce costs. During 1999, the Inland Revenue replaced all its PCs, laptops, servers and printers under a major programme known as Infrastructure 2000 (i2K). The aims of the programme were to introduce a common, market-centred infrastructure platform and to meet Year 2000 security requirements. Some 60,000 terminals were installed during this period (the largest NT installation in Europe at the time). Under i2K, a large percentage of the Department's existing IT kit was upgraded, refurbished and redeveloped as part of the deals negotiated with equipment suppliers. Because of this and the massive scale of the i2K programme (cost over £200 million), specific costs on disposal of individual items for the financial year 1999–2000 would be available only at disproportionate cost.

Since the successful delivery of i2K, the Department has operated a rolling programme of replacing IT kit. During the last two financial years, we have replaced the following numbers of PCs:

2000–01: 4,957

2001–02: 23,297.

During this period, the Department has employed RD Computers Ltd. and DataServ-CES to dispose of IT equipment. The cost of disposals was:

2000–01: £55,158

2001–02: £199,751.

However, income from sales of redundant IT kit during the same period were:

2000–01: £204,886

2001–02: £635,758.

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much and what proportion of the departmental expenditure limit for 2002–03 had been spent by 31 May; what the figures were for 2001–02; and if he will make a statement. [61002]

Mr. Boateng: Reliable estimates for 2002–03 spending to 31 may are not available. Estimated outturn spending figures for 2001–02 can be found in Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses 2002–03, published in May 2002 as Command Paper 5401.

Financial Services Compensation Scheme

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his policy is on the exemption of voluntary organisations from the Financial Services compensation scheme. [61870]

Ruth Kelly: The purpose of the Financial Services compensation scheme is to mitigate the losses of eligible claimants when a firm is unable to meet claims against it. Whether a firm is "voluntary" is not a criterion for scheme participation.

National Air Traffic Services

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with representatives of the insurance industry concerning the availability of insurance cover for the National Air Traffic Service. [61104]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* Third party war and terrorism insurance for National Air Traffic Services is available through the Government's Troika insurance scheme. The scheme is currently due to come to an end on 30 June 2002. Discussions are continuing with the insurance industry and in Europe on arrangements beyond that date, although no discussions have been held with National Air Traffic Services themselves.

Ministerial Visits (Wales)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the *(a)* date, *(b)* location and *(c)* purpose was of visits by Ministers in his Department to Wales since 1997; and when he next intends to visit Wales. [62080]

Mr. Boateng: Treasury Ministers have visited Wales on a number of occasions since 1997. My right hon. Friend last visited Wales on 23 May, but has no immediate plans for a further visit.

Women (Employment Statistics)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how the total employment rate for women with dependent children aged *(a)* 0–4, *(b)* 5–10 and *(c)* 11–15 years has changed since 1989, broken down by (i) full and part-time work and (ii) women with (A) higher, (B) other and (C) no qualifications; and how the employment rate varies in each region. [61862]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Kidgell to Mr. Jim Cousins, dated 17 June 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about employment rates for women with dependent children. I am replying in his absence. (61862)

The attached tables provide estimates of employment rates for working-age women with dependent children, for the three month periods ending May 1998 and May 2001.

These estimate are from the Labour Force Survey and are not seasonally adjusted.

Table 1: Employment rates[1] of women by age of youngest child[2], by Standard Statistical Region[3]—Springs (March to May) 1989 and 2001; not seasonally adjusted

Employment rate (%)

	Women aged 16–59					
		With youngest dependent child aged				Without dependent children
	All	*0–4*	*5–10*	*11–15*	*16–18*	
Spring (March to May) 1989						
United Kingdom	65.9	39.6	65.0	73.1	74.9	72.8
Great Britain	66.2	39.5	65.4	73.6	75.3	73.2
England	66.9	40.0	66.5	74.2	76.3	73.9
Northern region	62.8	38.0	64.4	75.6	72.8	67.8
North West	64.2	42.9	65.7	72.4	73.0	70.1
Yorks and Humberside	63.3	38.3	66.7	71.3	75.0	69.2
East Midlands	68.5	44.2	68.3	77.9	67.2	75.2
West Midlands	64.4	34.6	62.4	73.4	75.4	72.3
East Anglia	70.1	44.9	68.3	82.2	70.2	76.3
Greater London	66.4	37.5	60.1	64.8	77.4	75.4
Rest of South East	70.9	39.8	71.0	78.9	82.9	78.2
South West	69.1	43.3	70.0	75.2	78.5	74.8
Wales	60.8	38.6	62.7	69.1	64.3	65.5
Scotland	62.7	35.4	56.9	71.1	70.9	70.3
Northern Ireland	53.5	41.0	52.3	52.7	63.7	58.8
Spring (March to May) 2001						
United Kingdom	69.3	53.9	69.9	75.0	80.3	72.3
Great Britain	69.6	53.9	70.1	75.3	80.6	72.6
England	69.9	53.7	70.3	76.0	80.2	73.2
Northern region	64.6	47.6	69.2	71.8	79.8	66.4
North West	68.9	57.7	71.2	72.8	78.9	70.7
Yorks and Humberside	69.2	55.4	72.1	77.9	75.2	70.7
East Midlands	70.0	56.3	72.8	77.5	81.7	71.7
West Midlands	68.3	51.3	68.5	72.6	84.3	71.8
East Anglia	74.9	56.1	78.2	77.2	85.8	78.3
Greater London	64.2	43.0	58.9	67.1	67.9	71.2
Rest of South East	74.1	57.8	73.1	81.1	80.2	77.7
South West	74.3	57.7	75.5	83.3	91.1	76.4
Wales	63.3	47.7	68.6	68.4	80.4	64.7
Scotland	69.8	60.6	68.2	73.3	84.9	71.3
Northern Ireland	60.0	52.5	65.5	65.7	73.8	59.1
Change, spring 1989 to spring 2001[4]						
United Kingdom	3.4	14.3	5.0	2.0	5.4	–0.6
Great Britain	3.4	14.4	4.7	1.7	5.3	–0.5
England	3.0	13.7	3.8	1.8	3.9	–0.7
Northern region	1.8	9.6	4.8	–3.9	7.1	–1.4
North West	4.7	14.8	5.5	0.4	5.9	0.7
Yorks and Humberside	5.9	17.1	5.4	6.6	0.2	1.5
East Midlands	1.5	12.2	4.5	–0.4	14.5	–3.5
West Midlands	3.9	16.6	6.1	–0.7	8.9	–0.5
East Anglia	4.8	11.2	9.9	–5.0	15.6	1.9
Greater London	–2.2	5.6	–1.2	2.3	–9.5	–4.2
Rest of South East	3.2	17.9	2.1	2.3	–2.8	–0.5
South West	5.3	14.3	5.5	8.1	12.6	1.6
Wales	2.6	9.1	5.9	–0.6	16.1	–0.8
Scotland	7.1	25.3	11.2	2.2	14.1	1.0
Northern Ireland	6.5	11.5	13.3	13.0	10.1	0.3

[1] Women in employment as a percentage of all women

[2] Children aged under 16 and those aged 16–18 in full-time education

[3] Estimates are given for Standard Statistical Regions (SSRs) as Government Office Regions (GORs) are not available prior to spring (March to May) 1992

[4] Percentage points

Source:

ONS Labour Force Survey

Table 2: Employment rates[1] of women by full-time/part-time status[2] and age of youngest dependent child[3]; United Kingdom; springs (March to May) 1989 and 2001; not seasonally adjusted

Thousands and per cent.

	Women aged 16–59					
		With youngest dependent child aged				Without dependent children
	All	0–4	5–10	11–15	16–18	
Spring (March to May) 1989						
All persons (thousands) (=100%)[4]	16,666	3,029	2,098	1,466	474	9,598
In full-time employment (%)	38.2	12.6	19.7	30.3	37.1	51.6
In part-time employment (%)	27.6	27.0	45.2	42.6	37.8	21.1
Spring (March to May) 2001						
All persons (thousands) (=100%)[4]	17,479	2,997	2,366	1,569	567	9,979
In full-time employment (%)	39.4	17.9	25.5	36.9	43.7	49.4
In part-time employment (%)	29.8	35.9	44.4	38.1	36.6	22.9
Change, spring 1989 to spring 2001[5]						
In full-time employment	1.2	5.4	5.8	6.6	6.7	–2.3
In part-time employment	2.3	8.9	–0.8	–4.6	–1.2	1.8

[1] Women in full-time/part-time employment as a percentage of all women

[2] The definition of full-time/part-time is based on respondents' self-assessment

[3] Children aged under 16 and those aged 16–18 in full-time education

[4] Base for percentages includes women who did not state their full-time/part-time status

[5] Percentage points

Source:

ONS Labour Force Survey

Table 3: Employment rates[1] of women by highest qualification level and age of youngest dependent child[2]; United Kingdom; springs (March to May) 1989 and 2001; not seasonally adjusted

Thousands and per cent.

	Women aged 16–59					
		With youngest dependent child aged				Without dependent children
	All	0–4	5–10	11–15	16–18	
Spring (March to May) 1998						
All persons (thousands)[3]	16,666	3,029	2,098	1,466	474	9,598
Higher qualifications[4] (%)	80.9	63.8	82.7	87.2	88.6	85.4
Other qualifications[5] (%)	69.6	40.2	68.7	76.9	78.4	78.6
No qualifications (%)	55.3	26.6	54.7	66.0	65.8	60.2
Spring (March to May) 2001						
All persons (thousands)[3]	17,479	2,997	2,366	1,569	567	9,979
Higher qualifications[4] (%)	84.7	73.3	85.6	88.6	88.3	87.0
Other qualifications[5] (%)	70.8	54.3	71.9	78.5	84.5	74.2
No qualifications (%)	55.3	26.6	54.7	66.0	65.8	60.2
Change, spring 1989 to spring 2001[6]						
Higher qualifications[4]	3.8	9.5	2.9	1.4	–0.2	1.6
Other qualifications[5]	1.2	14.1	3.2	1.6	6.1	–4.4
No qualifications	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

[1] Women with each qualification level who are in employment as a percentage of all women with the relevant qualification level

[2] Children aged under 16 and those aged 16–18 in full-time education

[3] Includes women who did not state their qualifications

[4] Higher qualifications are those above GCE A-level or equivalent

[5] Other qualifications are those of GCE A-level or equivalent or lower and includes miscellaneous qualification which cannot be classified

[6] Percentage points

Source:

ONS Labour Force Survey

Ministerial Attendance (Select Committee)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will reply to the First Special report from the Transport, Local Government and the Regions Committee Session 2001–02, on the attendance of a Minister from the Treasury before the Transport and Local Government Committee. [61086]

Mr. Boateng: The Government expect to respond to the report soon.

Privatised Industry Regulators

Mrs. May: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what responsibility he has for setting Government policy with regard to the independence of the economic regulators of the privatised utilities. [62301]

Mr. Boateng: Primary responsibility for the Government's policy on specific regulated industries rests with the relevant Secretary of State.

Mrs. May: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received from *(a)* the DTLR, *(b)* the SRA, *(c)* the Office of the Rail Regulator and *(d)* train operating companies with regard to the Government's policy towards the independence of the economic regulators of the privatised utilities. [62302]

Mr. Boateng: Treasury Ministers receive representations from a variety of organisations and individuals on a regular basis.

Responsibility for the Government's policy on railways rests with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport. I refer the hon. Member to an answer the Secretary of State gave on the subject of rail regulation on 12 June.

Advertising

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much was spent on press and advertising campaigns in 2001–02; and what the planned expenditure is for 2002–03. [60907]

Ruth Kelly: There has been no expenditure for HM Treasury for press and advertising campaigns in 2001–02, there is no planned expenditure for 2002–03.

Inland Revenue (Penalties)

Brian Cotter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what level of penalty is charged against those failing to submit returns to the Inland Revenue; how many businesses have received these penalties against them over the past three years; and what the total amount received by the Exchequer as a result of these fines was. [61312]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue charges late filing penalties for Self Assessment (SA), Corporation Tax Self Assessment (CTSA) and Pay As You Earn (PAYE) tax. SA taxpayers failing to submit returns by the filing date are charged a £100 penalty and a second £100 penalty if they have not filed six months after the due date. The Inland Revenue can also seek penalties of between £10 and £60 a day at the discretion of the Tax Commissioners on SA taxpayers who persist in not filing a return. Employers and contractors failing to submit a PAYE return are charged a penalty of £100 per month the return is later for each 50 employees or subcontractors. Companies that are late in filing their CTSA returns are charged £100 if they file less than three months after the filing date, £200 if they are between three and 18 months late (if the company files late on three consecutive occasions, these penalties increase to £500 and £1,000 respectively), 10 per cent. of their unpaid tax if they are 18 months to two years late and 20 per cent. of their unpaid tax if they are more than two years late in filing. Businesses may be liable to submit a return as employers, or under the SA or CTSA regulations. But these regulations also include non-business taxpayers such as employees taxed at the higher rate who are within SA. The Inland Revenue does not distinguish between penalties charged on businesses and other types of taxpayers, so the figures that follow are for all penalties within SA, CTSA and PAYE.

The first table shows the number of penalties raised by the Inland Revenue from late filing penalties on returns over the last three financial years.

Head of Duty	*Penalties raised in the financial year ended:* 1999	2000	2001
PAYE[1]	130,000	120,000	150,000
SA[2]	1,400,000	1,600,000	1,500,000
CTSA[1]	170,00	180,000	220,000

[1] Rounded to the nearest 10,000

[2] Rounded to the nearest 100,000

The second table shows the total amount paid in respect of penalties over the last three account years (these run from November to October and are periods over which the Department's annual accounts are calculated).

Head of Duty	*Penalties paid (£) in the account year ended:* 1999	2000	2001
PAYE[1]	14,200,000	14,400,000	15,100,000
SA[1]	29,400,000	33,000,000	36,200,000
CTSA[1]	14,400,000	18,000,000	25,300,000

[1] Rounded to nearest £100,000

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to prevent the issuing of penalty notices for £0 by the Inland Revenue. [61880]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue have no plans at present to stop issuing penalty notices for nil.

Page 1 of the tax return states that the return should reach the Inland Revenue by 'the later of 31 January and 3 months after the date the notice [to make the return] was given, at the latest, or you will be liable to an automatic penalty of £100'.

The issue of a penalty notice lets the customer know that a penalty has been incurred. The nil penalty notice gives the customer who knows the return is late (and has no tax liability) confirmation that the penalty is capped at nil. As the penalty may not remain at nil (if, for example, the customer amends the return or tax becomes payable following an inquiry) it is important that the customer is aware that a penalty has been incurred.

Basic State Pension

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the additional *(a)* income tax and *(b)* VAT which would be paid if the basic state pension was raised to £120 a week for the single pensioner and £150 for married couples in (i) 2002–03 and (ii) 2003–04. [61256]

Dawn Primarolo: The estimated income tax yield wold be some £2.8 billion in 2002–03 and £3.3 billion in 2003–04. The VAT yield would depend on what pensioners decided to do with the increase.

Grants

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which organisations and outside bodies which were in receipt of grant in 1997–98 are no longer; what the annual saving is *(a)* individually and *(b)* in aggregate;

which organisations and outside bodies which were not in receipt of grant in 1997–98 now are; and what the annual cost is (i) individually and (ii) in aggregate. [62047]

Mr. Boateng: The aggregate figure for government grants to private organisations and individual was £28.6 billion in 2000–01 (the last year for which full outturn data are available) compared with £24.8 billion in 1997–98. This excludes social security payments classified as grants in the national accounts as grants and includes lottery grants.

Detailed analysis of departmental spending is contained in Departments' annual reports. Comprehensive data on individual grant recipients are not centrally available.

Corporation Tax

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he proposes to extend the reduction in corporation tax for incorporated companies announced in the Budget to unincorporated businesses; and if he will make a statement. [61790]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Djanogly) on 20 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 106W.

Pricing Agreements

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many advanced pricing agreements *(a)* have been made and *(b)* were in force with multinational companies in each year since 1996; and in how many cases each year enforcement action or penalties were taken in transfer pricing disputes. [62024]

Dawn Primarolo: The information requested is in the following table.

Advanced pricing agreements

Year to 31 March	*Agreements made*	*Agreements in force*
1996	3	8
1997	2	10
1998	3	13
1999	2	15
2000	10	25
2001	11	36

Transfer pricing issues are dealt with across the IR network, and a variety of enforcement action is taken or proposed, but in most instances information is eventually provided voluntarily, without the need of formal proceedings. Specific records are not maintained. No penalties were taken in respect of transfer pricing disputes.

Financial Action Task Force

Harry Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which countries are listed as non co-operating countries and territories under the Financial Action Task Force process; which countries have been identified as not co-operating with the new recommendations to tackle terrorist financing; how he estimates that non-compliance will affect the UK's relationship with such countries; and if he will make a statement. [62326]

Ruth Kelly: The following countries and territories are currently listed as non co-operative in the fight against money laundering: Cook Islands, Dominica, Egypt, Guatemala, Hungary, Indonesia, Israel, Lebanon, Marshall Islands, Myanmar, Nauru, Nigeria, Niue, Philippines, Russia, St. Kitts and Nevis, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines. The list will be reviewed and updated at the forthcoming FATF plenary to be held 18 to 21 June. The FATF has issued a self-assessment questionnaire concerning observance of the eight special recommendations on terrorist financing to both FATF and non-FATF members and will be considering the results at its forthcoming meeting. Countries and territories on the FATF's list have generally worked positively with the FATF to improve their anti money laundering systems and the UK has provided help and support on a bilateral basis to several countries on the list.

Self-employment Tax Claims

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate has been made of the number of false self-employment tax claims in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [62343]

Dawn Primarolo: None. An individual's employment status for tax and national insurance purposes depends on the terms and conditions under which that person is engaged. Where the Inland Revenue discovers that someone is working on terms which should mean they are employed but are being treated incorrectly by their employer as self-employed then the employer may have to meet extra tax and national insurance liabilities for past years, interest and penalties. In cases of fraud or evasion, the Inland Revenue may prosecute.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures have been taken to deal with the level of false self-employment tax claims; how much has been spent investigating such claims in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [62342]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue aims to ensure that the law on employment status is applied even-handedly across all sectors of industry. As part of its compliance strategy, the Revenue's local employer compliance review teams consider employment status issues when undertaking reviews to ensure employers and contractors are compliant with the tax and national insurance laws generally. No accurate estimate of the cost of the employment status element of these reviews is possible.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate has been made of the cost of false self-employment tax claims in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [62340]

Dawn Primarolo: None.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he plans to take to combat the falsification of tax claims by the self-employed; and if he will make a statement. [62341]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue aims to ensure that the law on employment status is applied even-handedly across all sectors of industry. As part of its compliance strategy the Revenue's local employer compliance review teams consider employment status issues when undertaking reviews to ensure employers and contractors are compliant with the tax and national insurance laws generally.

Working Families Tax Credit

Mr. Michael Foster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the number of working families tax credit claimants *(a)* per constituency and *(b)* per head of population per constituency. [62645]

Dawn Primarolo: For the number of recipients of working families tax credit in each constituency, I refer my hon. Friend to my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Hepburn) on 16 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 293W.

I understand from the Office for National Statistics that they do not currently produce population estimates for parliamentary constituencies. I am therefore unable to estimate the number of recipients per head of population in each constituency.

Climate Change Levy

Brian Cotter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent assessment he has made of the impact of the climate change levy on businesses within the retail industry. [61313]

John Healey: All of the revenue from the climate change levy is recycled back to business through NIC cuts and support for energy efficiency. While the levy package is broadly revenue neutral to business as a whole, the effects on any specific sector will depend on a number of factors, including:

The future energy consumption of firms in the sector and the use they make of levy funded energy efficiency support.

Employment levels in those sectors and the benefits received from the levy-funded national insurance contribution cuts.

What use firms in that sector make of electricity generated from levy exempt renewable sources of energy and combined heat and power.

Customs (Coach Searches)

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many coaches returning from trips abroad have been stopped by Customs and Excise, in the past year for searches to be carried out; and what locations away from ports have been used for such searches. [62088]

John Healey: The information is not available in the format requested. Customs keep records on search of person and aggregate data on seizures but do not routinely record every instance in which an officer stops a person or vehicle.

The majority of Customs anti-smuggling searches of international traffic take place at the port, on Port Authority premises. Customs do, on occasions, undertake intelligence-led anti-smuggling work away from the ports (eg intercepting targets on motorways) usually working with the police.

NHS Auditors

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what functions will be fulfilled by the NHS auditors referred to in his budget statement; and how these will differ from the current functions, in respect of the NHS, of the *(a)* National Audit Office and *(b)* Audit Commission. [51935]

Mr. Hutton: I have been asked to reply.

It is proposed that the new commission for health care audit and inspection will include as its principal roles:

Inspecting all national health service hospitals;

Licensing private health care provision;

Conducting NHS value for money audits on a national basis;

Validating published performance assessment statistics on the NHS, including waiting list information;

Publishing star ratings for all NHS organisations with the ability to recommend special measures where there are persistent problems;

Publishing reports on the performance of NHS organisations both individually and collectively;

Independent scrutiny of patient complaints;

Publishing an annual report to Parliament on national progress on health care and how resources have been used.

In relation to the NHS, the main responsibilities of the Audit Commission currently are to:

Appoint auditors to audit the accounts of health bodies

Prescribe the way in which auditors act through a Code of Audit Practice

Set a scale of audit fees payable, and

Carry out 'value for money' studies on the provision of services by audited bodies.

The 'value for money' work is currently carried out at the national level by the Audit Commission and, as part of the local audit of NHS bodies, by auditors appointed by the Audit Commission.

In future the Audit Commission value for money work carried out at both the national and local levels will be transferred to the new body. The Audit Commission will retain responsibility for the financial audit of NHS bodies.

The current role of the National Audit Office in relation to the NHS will remain unchanged. They will continue to audit the summarised accounts of the NHS; to ensure that public money has been spent for the purposes which Parliament intended; to hold the Department accountable for the way it uses taxpayers' money, and to conduct a number of value for money investigations each year.

CABINET OFFICE

Non-departmental Public Bodies

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will list the non-departmental public bodies, covered by the "Quangos: Opening the Doors" document, indicating *(a)* those that hold annual open meetings, *(b)* those that release summary reports of meetings, *(c)* those that invite evidence from members of the public, *(d)* those that allow public access to their records and *(e)* those brought within the jurisdiction of the Parliamentary Ombudsman. [62271]

Mr. Alexander: The 1998 publication, "Quangos, Opening the Doors", set out proposals for all non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs), where appropriate, to be more open and responsive to the public. The information requested is not currently available but it is my intention to publish later this year in the Cabinet Office's publication "Public Bodies 2002" new information on: annual open meetings; release of summary reports of meetings; registers of members' interests; NDPB ombudsmen; whether annual reports are to be published; and whether the appointments to the NDPBs are regulated by the Commissioner for Public Appointments.

Performance Targets

Tony Wright: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will list the performance targets that his Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies are required to meet, apart from those set out in the public service agreements for 1999 to 2002 and 2001 to 2004; and if he will specify for each target *(a)* who sets it and *(b)* who monitors achievement against it. [60535]

Mr. Alexander: The Cabinet Office has no performance targets other than those public service agreements (PSA) agreed as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review and listed in document Cm 4181—Public Service Agreements 1999–2002. Some of these targets were subsumed into new public service agreements, agreed as part of the Spending Review 2000, and are listed in document Cm 5119. Copies of both documents are held in the House of Commons Library.

The Government Car and Despatch Agency (GCDA), which is an executive agency of the Cabinet Office, and the Central Office of Information (COI), which is an executive agency and separate Government department, both report through the Cabinet Office.

GCDA

The strategic performance targets for GCDA are published annually in the agency's annual report and accounts. Copies of these are held in the House of Commons Library, or can be accessed via the GCDA website.

Key performance targets for GCDA are set annually by the Minister when he approves the agency's corporate and business plans. These were announced on 24 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 677W.

The chief executive is directly responsible to the Minister for ensuring that the agency achieves its performance target. Quarterly performance reports are submitted to the Minister via the Agencies Unit of the Cabinet Office, and the Permanent Secretary.

COI

Details of performance targets for COI are listed in the COI's annual reports and accounts. Copies of these are held in the House of Commons Library, or can be accessed via the COI website.

Targets are formulated by the COI chief executive, submitted for approval by the Minister, and notified to Parliament.

The five-year corporate plan sets out the COI's main strategic objectives and the means of progressing towards them. This is rolled forward and updated each year by means of a corporate plan and annual business plan. These plans are commercially sensitive and are not published. However, published targets for 2001–02 were announced on 3 May 2001. Targets for the period 2002–03 will be announced shortly.

The chief executive is directly accountable to the Minister for ensuring that the agency achieves its performance targets. Quarterly performance reports are submitted to the Minister via the Agencies Unit, and the Permanent Secretary of the Cabinet Office.

The achievement against targets is audited by the National Audit Office as part of its audit of COI's annual report and accounts.

None of the non-departmental public bodies are executive; therefore they are included within the main departmental targets.

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how much and what proportion of the departmental expenditure limit for 2002–03 had been spent by 31 May; what the figures were for 2001–02; and if he will make a statement. [61005]

Mr. Alexander: I refer the hon. Member to the answer which my right hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) gave to the hon. Member on 17 June 2002.

Better Regulation Task Force

Mr. Allen: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office who the members of the Better Regulation Task Force are; what their other occupations are; and what the date of their appointment was. [58006]

Mr. Alexander *[pursuant to the answer 21 May 2002, c. 290]:* I regret that the information provided was incorrect—one member of the Better Regulation Task Force, Rex Symons, was not included.

A register of members' interests is available on the task force website at http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/regulation/TaskForce/members.htm.

PRIVY COUNCIL

Members' Travel Costs

John Mann: To ask the President of the Council what percentage of hon. Members' UK travel costs were for travel *(a)* by car, *(b)* by rail and *(c)* by aeroplane in the last financial year for which figures are available. [62357]

Mr. Robin Cook: For the financial year ended 31 March 2002, hon. Members' UK travel costs for *(a)* car, *(b)* rail and *(c)* aeroplane were £3,231,432 (50 per cent.), £1,784,303 (27 per cent.) and £1,507,598 (23 per cent.) respectively.

HEALTH

Paediatric Pathology

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many doctors were working in paediatric pathology in *(a)* March 1997, *(b)* March 1998, *(c)* March 1999, *(d)* March 2000, *(e)* March 2001 and *(f)* March 2002. [61456]

Mr. Hutton: The numbers of doctors working in paediatric pathology is not collected centrally. Census data are collected on 30 September of each year and the 2002 census will be available early 2003.

Paediatric pathology is a sub-specialty of histopathology. The numbers of doctors working in histopathology is shown in the table.

Hospital medical consultants within the histopathology speciality, England

At 30 September	*Number*
1997	770
1998	830
1999	840
2000	860
2001	920

Note:

Figures are rounded to the nearest 10

Source:

Department of Health medical and dental workforce census

We continually review future requirements for trained specialists as part of the national health service's new multi-disciplinary work force planning processes. These will look at the requirements for doctors alongside other staff focusing on the potential for new ways of working and developing new roles.

The children's care group work force team will be reviewing paediatric services as part of its role in supporting the children's national service framework team in developing the work force aspect of the new national service framework.

Hip Replacements

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average cost of an elective primary hip replacement in each NHS *(a)* trust and *(b)* hospital was in 2000–01. [61436]

Mr. Hutton: Details of national average costs related to specific treatments and procedures for 2000–01 are to be found in Reference Costs 2001, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Medical Education

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on medical education post reductions in relation to the strategic alliance between the Department of Health and the Higher Education Funding Council for England. [61466]

Mr. Hutton: The strategic alliance for health and social care was concluded between the Department and the higher education funding council for England in April 2002. It will build on existing arrangements for consultation and liaison between the Department and the higher education funding council for England.

Within the framework of the strategic alliance the Permanent Secretary of the Department and the chief executive of the higher education funding council for England will be meeting on 3 July 2002. Delivery of the medical school expansion programme, a key element of the NHS Plan, will be among the issues to be discussed.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what meeting he has had with the Secretary of State for Education and Skills to discuss the implications of staffing reductions at medical schools. [61463]

Mr. Hutton: Regular meetings take place at official and ministerial level between the Department of Health and Department for Education and Skills (DFES). I am scheduled to meet with my hon. Friend the Minister of State at DFES on 26 June and staffing levels at medical schools will be among the issues to be discussed.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what role medical schools have in implementing the National Plan's human resources priorities. [61469]

Mr. Hutton: Medical schools have an important role in implementing the NHS Plan human resources priorities. In particular, the implementation of medical school expansion will support the increase in the number of medical school places outlined in the Plan.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many medical students have graduated in each of the last five years; and how many in each year worked within the NHS upon graduating. [61433]

Mr. Hutton: The numbers of graduates from English medical schools in each of the last five academic years is shown in the table. The graduates referred to in the answer will almost all have entered medical school between autumn 1991 and autumn 1996.

Academic year	*Number of English medical school graduates*
1996–97	3,025
1997–98	3,261
1998–99	3,097
1999–2000	3,373
2000–01	3,286

In order to become fully registered with the General Medical Council, all medical school graduates need to satisfactorily complete a year as a Pre-Registration House Officer (PRHO). Virtually all graduates of English medical schools undertake their PRHO year in the national health service.

The number of PRHOs in the NHS in England in each of the last five years is shown in the table.

Academic year	*Number of PRHOs in post*
1996–97	3,356
1997–98	3,447
1998–99	3,543
1999–2000	3,641
2000–01	3,685

Birmingham Care Consortium

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he and Ministers in his Department have had with representatives of the Birmingham Care Consortium in the last two months. [61454]

Jacqui Smith: None. I wrote to Mr. M. R. Grimson of the Birmingham Care Consortium on 7 May 2002 about the consortium's negotiations with Birmingham city council on care home fees.

Career Grade Doctors

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many non-consultant career grade doctors are employed in the NHS in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales, *(c)* Scotland and *(d)* Northern Ireland. [61431]

Mr. Hutton: Available data are shown in the table.

Information relating to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland is a matter for the devolved Administrations.

Hospital, public health medicine and community health services (HCHS): Non-consultant career grades

England at 30 September 2001	*Number*
Associate specialist	1,630
Clinical assistant	5,030
Hospital practitioner	930
Staff grade	4,970

Source:

Department of Health 2001 medical and dental work force census

Nursing Applicants

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many overseas nursing applicants are awaiting admission to the UK nursing register; and if he will make a statement. [61156]

Mr. Hutton: There are currently 5,800 overseas applications awaiting a decision from the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) regarding entry to the UK nursing register. The NMC has a programme of action to clear these outstanding applications.

Foot Care

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 20 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 142W, on foot care, how many *(a)* professions and *(b)* projects were covered by the £3 million allocated for 2001–02. [61518]

Mr. Hutton: In August 2001, 13 universities and colleges, in partnership with 11 work force development confederations were identified as "first wave" sites for the modernisation of allied health professions education. The professions included in the first wave are:

Physiotherapy

Occupational Therapy

Radiography

Chiropody/Podiatry

Speech and Language therapy.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 20 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 142W, on foot care, what amount was spent on education and training programmes for podiatrists and chiropodists. [61517]

Jacqui Smith: The spend for England and also the South East on pre-registration training programmes for podiatrists and chiropodists, excluding bursaries, together with the student population figures, are shown in the following tables. Information on student bursary spend is no longer collected.

£000

	2000–01[1]	*2001–02*[2]
Total spend (England)	5,668	6,654
Spend (south-east)	1,296	1,677

[1] Actual spend

[2] Forecast spend

Note:

The forecast spend is subject to final outturn

Source:

Financial and Workforce Information Return (FWIR) November 2001

	2000–01[1]	*2001–02*[2]
Student population (England)	921	1,038
Student population (south-east)	251	278

[1] Actual student population

[2] Forecast student population

Note:

The forecast spend is subject to final outturn

Source:

Financial and Workforce Information Return (FWIR) November 2001

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Warrington, North (Helen Jones), of 24 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 691W, on chiropody, how many of the 6,500 proposed extra professionals will be chiropodists. [61941]

Jacqui Smith: As at 30 September 2001 there were 3,400 more qualified therapists and other professional staff than at 30 September 1999. Of these, 190 (6 per cent.) are chiropodists. We would expect this proportion of chiropodists to be broadly similar in 2004.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were waiting for an appointment with an NHS chiropodist, broken down by health authority, on 1 May in each year since 1996. [60724]

Mr. Hutton: The Department does not collect waiting times or numbers of people waiting for an appointment with an national health service chiropodist.

Residential/Nursing Home Beds

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many residential and nursing home beds were available in England, broken down by local authority, at the end of each year since 1996–97. [61776]

Jacqui Smith: Information on the total number of residential care beds, shown by local authority, and information on the total number of nursing care beds are shown in tables, copies of which have been placed in the Library.

National Health Service Pensions Agency

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action is being taken by the National Health Service Pensions Agency *(a)* to identify and *(b)* to pursue and recover overpayments. [61344]

Mr. Hutton: The National Health Service Pensions Agency operates internal controls to ensure the correct pension benefits are being paid, including periodic checks on entitlement to ongoing pension payments. As reported in the resource accounts for the NHS pension scheme the agency also takes part in the national fraud initiative co-ordinated by the Audit Commission, to ensure pension payments were still being made to the individual originally entitled to the pension.

Once overpayments have been identified, the agency has a special team who pursue recovery in accordance with the guidance in Government Accounting. Where necessary, cases are referred to solicitors for recovery, or, in cases involving fraud, to counter fraud specialists in the Department or the police.

Waiting Times

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the latest available figures for the number of people waiting more than six months for in-patient treatment in Dorset. [62569]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is collected centrally at trust level. The information for the Dorset area is shown in the table.

In-patient waiting list data for NHS trusts in Dorset, as of 30 April 2002

NHS trust	*Total waiting list*	*Number waiting over six months*
Dorset health care	0	0
Poole hospital	2,207	4
Royal Bournemouth and Christchurch hospitals	3,377	64
West Dorset General hospitals	1,856	5

Source:

DH monthly returns

April 2002 is the most recent month for which information is available.

Children in Care

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* agency staff, *(b)* positions unfilled for (i) one month and (ii) three months and *(c)* staff in children in care settings there were in each quarter of each of the last three years. [61368]

Jacqui Smith: We do not collect information on the numbers of agency staff who work in child care settings. Information about the number of child care positions unfilled is not collected on a regular basis. Ad hoc surveys have been undertaken in the past which have determined the vacancy rates in child care posts in social services departments or in the private sector. The last survey undertaken in this area was for 'Community Homes for Children Looked After' run by local authorities in England and Wales, and it was undertaken in 1999. This survey stated that in England the overall full-time and part-time vacancy rates were both 10.3 per cent.

However, local authority social services departments in England complete an annual return giving information about the staff they employ as at 30 September. The data from this return gives the number of whole time equivalent staff employed in child and family services as follows:

	Number of staff
1999	38,005
2000	38,505
2001	38,195

Notes:

The actual numbers of staff employed by local councils are greater than the above figures as some of these staff work only part-time.

The above figures do not take into account those central and strategic staff and certain other categories of staff who provide more generic services across a range of council responsibilities.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the *(a)* percentage and *(b)* number of children in care in each (i) region and (ii) health authority broken down by ethnic background, in each of the last five years. [61353]

Jacqui Smith: Data available at 31 March is shown in the following tables. Data is not available for any years prior to this.

Number of children looked after at 31 March 2001 by ethnic origin and Government region

			Ethnic origin			
	All children	*White*	*Mixed rate*	*Asian or Asian British*	*Black or Black British*	*Other ethnic groups*
England	58,900	48,200	3,800	1,100	4,000	1,800
North East	3,400	3,300	110	[1]—	10	[1]—
North West	7,300	6,600	410	120	100	60
Merseyside	2,400	2,200	90	[1]—	150	[1]—
Yorkshire and Humberside	6,500	5,800	420	150	70	20
East Midlands	4,100	3,700	350	60	70	20
West Midlands	6,500	5,200	450	220	380	170
South West	4,900	4,500	240	20	100	90
Eastern	5,200	4,700	260	70	100	100
London	11,000	5,700	1,100	410	2,800	900
South East	7,700	6,500	350	100	290	420

[1] Figure has been suppressed for reasons of confidentiality.

Notes:

Table excludes children looked after under a series of short-term placements.

All figures over a thousand have been rounded to the nearest hundred; other figures rounded to the nearest ten.

Percentage of children looked after at 31 March 2001 by ethnic origin and Government region

percentage

		Ethnic origin				
	All children (=100%)	*White*	*Mixed race*	*Asian or Asian British*	*Black or Black British*	*Other ethnic groups*
England	58,900	82	6	2	7	3
North East	3,400	96	3	[1]—	0	[1]—
North West	7,300	91	6	2	1	1
Merseyside	2,400	89	4	[1]—	6	[1]—
Yorkshire and Humberside	6,500	90	6	2	1	0
East Midlands	4,100	88	8	1	2	0
West Midlands	6,500	81	7	3	6	3
South West	4,900	91	5	0	2	2
Eastern	5,200	90	5	1	2	2
London	11,000	52	10	4	25	8
South East	7,700	85	5	1	4	5

[1] Figure has been suppressed for reasons of confidentiality.

Notes:

Table excludes children looked after under a series of short-term placements.

All figures over a thousand have been rounded to the nearest hundred.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will set out the *(a)* number of children placed and *(b)* reasons for children being placed in (i) foster care and (ii) care for each of the last five years for which figures are available. [61357]

Jacqui Smith: The available information is shown in the tables.

Number of looked after children who started one or more periods of foster placement during the years ending 31 March 1997–2000, by the reason for being looked after recorded for the first episode of the first foster placement started during the year

Reason for being looked after	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
All children	32,900	33,300	32,400	32,700
No parents	350	460	540	640
Abandoned or lost	940	980	1,100	1,300
Family or child homeless	250	230	240	250
Parent(s) in prison	440	400	430	410
Breakdown of adoptive family	90	70	70	90
Preliminary to adoption	460	500	480	440
Parent's health	3,900	4,000	3,500	3,000
Parents/families need relief:				
child with disabilities	230	260	250	200
other	7,800	7,300	6,100	5,700
Abuse or neglect	10,000	11,200	12,200	13,400
Concern for child's welfare	2,700	2,600	2,700	2,700
Own behaviour	1,400	1,300	1,200	1,100
Accused or guilty of an offence	710	800	740	690
At request of child	730	640	590	530
Other	2,900	2,500	2,200	2,400

Notes:

1. Figures are for England.

2. Year ending 31 March.

3. Table excludes children looked after under a series of short-term placements.

4. Number of children starting a new period of foster placement during the year exceeds the number of children starting to be looked after in the year in a foster placement. Some children starting a new period of foster placement in the year will actually have started to be looked after in a previous year.

5. All numbers over 1,000 have been rounded to the nearest 100; other figures have been rounded to the nearest 10.

Number of looked after children who started one or more periods of placements during the years ending 31 March 1997–2000, by the reason for being looked after recorded for the first episode of the first placement started during the year

Reason for being looked after	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
All children	44,300	44,900	44,800	45,800
No parents	520	600	810	1,100
Abandoned or lost	1,200	1,200	1,400	1,700
Family or child homeless	400	350	390	340
Parent(s) in prison	480	430	500	450
Breakdown of adoptive family	120	100	110	130
Preliminary to adoption	570	620	640	610
Parent's health	4,200	4,300	3,800	3,400
Parents/families need relief:				
child with disabilities	520	530	610	490
other	9,600	9,000	7,900	7,400
Abuse or neglect	13,600	15,300	16,800	18,200
Concern for child's welfare	3,500	3,400	3,600	3,500
Own behaviour	2,400	2,300	2,100	2,000
Accused or guilty of an offence	1,900	2,000	1,800	1,800
At request of child	1,100	930	760	760
Other	4,300	4,000	3,700	3,900

Notes:

1. Figures are for England.

2. Year ending 31 March.

3. Table excludes children looked after under a series of short-term place[illegible].

4. Number of children starting a new period of placement during the year exceeds the number of children starting to be looked after in the year, as some children starting a new period of placement in the year will actually have started to be looked after in a previous year.

5. All numbers over 1,000 have been rounded to the nearest 100; other figures have been rounded to the nearest 10.

Number of looked after children who started one or more periods of placements during the years ending 31 March 2001, by the recorded Category of Need for the first placement started during the year

	Type of placement	
Category of Need	*Foster placements*	*All placements*
All children	29,800	41,700
Abuse or neglect	15,800	22,000
Disability	610	1,100
Parent's illness or disability	2,700	3,200
Family in acute stress	3,200	4,100
Family dysfunction	3,800	5,200
Socially unacceptable behaviour	1,500	2,900
Low income	280	320
Absent parenting	1,900	2,900

Notes:

1. Figures are for England.
2. Table excludes children looked after under a series of short-term placements.
3. Number of children starting a new period of placement during the year exceeds the number of children starting to be looked after in the year, as some children starting a new period of placement will have started to be looked after in a previous year.
4. All numbers over 1,000 have been rounded to the nearest 100; other figures have been rounded to the nearest 10.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what *(a)* types and *(b)* number of prescriptions of medication that have been given to children in care over the last five years. [61361]

Jacqui Smith: The details of prescriptions given to individual children are contained in confidential health records which do not identify children as being in care. While individual carers will be aware of the type and number of prescriptions given to a child, this information is not available for aggregation.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the *(a)* percentage and *(b)* number of children in care in each (i) region and (ii) health authority broken down into *(a)* mental and *(b)* physical disability, in each of the last five years. [61352]

Jacqui Smith: Information on mental disability of children in care is not held centrally. The other information is not available in the form requested.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what *(a)* percentage and *(b)* number of children in care in each (i) region and (ii) health authority (A) had an abortion and (B) gave birth while in care in each of the last five years. [61359]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not currently collected at national level. One survey of care leavers showed that a quarter had a child by the age of 16. A robust method for collecting data on births among looked-after-children is being developed as part of the national indicator set for monitoring the teenage pregnancy strategy.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average length of stay in *(a)* foster care and *(b)* children in care settings has been in each of the last five years. [61356]

Jacqui Smith: The information available is shown in the table.

Average duration of placements, of looked after children, ceasing during the years ending 31 March 1997 to 2001, by type of placement

England	Average duration (days)	
	Type of placement	
	Foster placements	All placements
1997	216	210
1998	213	215
1999	231	223
2000	231	228
2001	256	248

Note:

The table excludes children looked after under a series of short-term placements.

Carers

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if his Department will develop a fund to help local authorities produce tailored care packages to back up the results of carers' assessments under the Carers and Disabled Children Act 2000. [62541]

Jacqui Smith: The development of carers services is being kept under review as part of the overall development of services for older people.

Fostering

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will set out for each local authority the average amount paid to a foster family per week for each child fostered in each of the last five years. [61338]

Jacqui Smith: This information is not available centrally.

Cardiac Surgeons

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many cardiac interventionists there were in the UK who are able to perform percutaneous coronary interventions using stints; and how many vacancies exist for *(a)* one month, *(b)* one to three months and *(c)* three months or longer; [61360]

(2) how many cardiac surgeons there are in the UK who are able to perform open heart surgery; and how many vacancies have existed for *(a)* one month, *(b)* one to three months and *(c)* three months or longer. [61367]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not collected centrally.

As at September 2001, the number of cardio-thoracic surgeons in England was 204. We are unable to ascertain how many of these surgeons perform percutaneous coronary interventions using stents or open heart surgery.

The three month vacancy rate for cardio-thoracic surgery is shown in the table.

Department of Health Vacancies Survey March 2001
Vacancies in England for consultants in the specialty—cardio thoracic surgery

	England
Three month vacancy rates (%)	1.6
Three month vacancies (wte)	0
Staff in post	
(wte)	180
(hc)	200

Notes:

1. Three month vacancies are vacancies as at 31 March 2001 which trusts are actively trying to fill, which had lasted for three months or more (whole time equivalents).
2. Three month vacancy rates are three month vacancies expressed as a percentage of three month vacancies plus staff in post from the September 2000 medical and dental work force census (whole time equivalent).
3. Vacancy and staff in post numbers are rounded to the nearest 10, 0 being between 0–5.
4. Percentages are rounded to one decimal place.
5. Due to rounding calculating the vacancy rates using the above data may not equal the actual vacancy rates.

Source:

Department of Health Vacancy Survey 2001

Department of Health medical and dental work force Census 2000

Music Therapy

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what support his Department gives for the use of music therapy to assist people with disabilities. [62090]

Jacqui Smith: The Department is happy to fund voluntary organisations who have an interest in the use of music therapy to assist disabled people. For instance, the Musicspace Trust received a two-year section 64 project grant in 1999–2000 to 2000–01.

In addition to this, the national health service and councils with social services responsibilities provide a wide range of services for disabled adults and children, and these can include, for example, music or art activities in day centres, but we do not keep detailed central records about these activities.

National Care Standards Commission

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health why the National Care Standards Commission has not dealt with requests made by Ravenscroft Nursing Home, Yelverton for dual registration. [61873]

Jacqui Smith: The National Care Standards Commission (NCSC) took over responsibility for the regulation of all care homes in England on 1 April 2002, including care homes not previously required to register.

In the case of Ravenscroft Nursing Home, I understand that the current provider is already registered with the NCSC and that a Mr. and Mrs. O'Carroll are applying for registration with the NCSC in order to take over the care home. I understand that there has been some delay in processing the application due to a number of factors. Partly because the original application was submitted on out-of-date registration forms and had to be resubmitted, and, regrettably, because the NCSC mislaid the revised application in the 11,000 received at that time. However, the documentation has now been received and is satisfactory. Mr. and Mrs. O'Carroll's interview with the NCSC has been arranged for 17 June and, once Criminal Records Bureau checks have been received, a final decision will be made about registration.

Adoptions (Macedonia)

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children have been adopted from Macedonia in the last 10 years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [62557]

Jacqui Smith: The Department does not collect figures on the total number of children being brought from overseas for adoption each year. Figures are only held for those adoptions involving a home study assessment in the UK.

Department records indicate that only one adoption application for Macedonia has been processed in the last 10 years.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the procedures involved in adopting children from Macedonia. [62558]

Jacqui Smith: The procedures for adopting a child from Macedonia are broadly the same as for adopting a child from any overseas country. Before any person may adopt a child they must first be assessed by an approved adoption agency as being suitable to adopt. As part of the approval process a home study report is prepared and presented to an adoption panel for approval. Following this, the report is then endorsed by the agency's decision maker and forwarded to the Department where a certificate of eligibility to adopt is prepared in line with the Adoption of Children from Overseas Regulations 2001.

In the case of an application to adopt a Macedonian child, the completed home study and the certificate of eligibility to adopt are sent to the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy in Macedonia. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy will then seek to identify a suitable child for the applicants. If a match is made, the applicants may then make arrangements to travel overseas and adopt the child. The applicants will then apply for entry clearance, in the normal way, to enable them to bring the child into the UK for the purposes of adoption.

On their return to the UK the applicants must notify their local social services department of their intention to adopt with 14 days. As Macedonia is not included on the list of countries whose adoption orders are recognised in the UK, an application will need to be made to a UK court to re-adopt the child.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for the old age psychiatry services for the Stockport NHS Trust by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative. [49521]

Mr. Hutton: The Stockport National Health Service Trust business case justifying the individual schemes estimated the annual net savings in present value terms (for example all future costs and benefits discounted to their present values) compared with publicly funding the scheme as follows:

Net present costs of public sector comparator (PSC) v. PFI option

	£000
Private finance initiative	3,350
Public	3,379
Annual savings in net present value terms	29
Percentage difference—0.9	

Correspondence

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the letter from the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden dated 19 February concerning cancelled operations in Hull and the East Riding. [50609]

Mr. Hutton: A reply was sent on 11 June.

Wanless Report

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he has to expand medical and nursing schools as a result of the Wanless report; what estimate he has made of how many extra doctors and nurses will be registered to be trained as a result of the report; and if he will make a statement. [52441]

Mr. Hutton: The report 'Securing our Future Health: Taking a Long-Term View' (the Wanless report) does not make any recommendations on increasing the number of students entering medical or nurse training. The Government and higher education institutions are midway through the process of delivering the increased numbers of students entering medical and nursing training that were announced in 1998 and the NHS Plan. By 2004 the number of students entering nurse training will be 5,500 a year more than in 1999 and by 2005 the number of students entering medical school will be almost 2,150 a year more than in 1997.

Following the spending review settlement announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the Budget, work force plans will be finalised once the public service agreement targets are agreed in summer 2002.

Smallpox Vaccine

Mr. Kevan Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which companies were approached with regard to the supply of smallpox vaccines; and what information was included in the specification sent to these companies. [53949]

Mr. Hutton: Detailed confidential discussions were held with five major pharmaceutical companies who were known to have vaccine manufacturing capability either in the UK or in Europe. The companies approached were Acambis, Aventis Pasteur, Glaxo Smith Kline, RIVM and PowderJect. Our requirements for vaccine strain, timing and delivery and the need to meet current vaccine manufacturing guidelines were made clear to each of the companies and confirmed in writing. Each of the companies was then given time to submit their responses.

Mental Health

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many elderly patients have received community-based psychiatric provision in each of the last five years. [56958]

Jacqui Smith: The number of first contacts with patients aged 65 and over by community psychiatric nurses is set out in the table.

Community psychiatric nurses—number of first contacts with patients aged 65 and over, 1996–97 to 2000–01

Thousand

	Number of persons
1996–97	146
1997–98	152
1998–99	162
1999–2000	158
2000–01	154

Further information about patient contacts with community psychiatric nurses is contained in the statistical report "Patient care in the community, Community Psychiatric Nursing, summary information for 2000–01, England". A copy of the summary is in the Library and also available on the Department website at www.doh.gov.uk/public/kc570001.

Older people also receive other community-based psychiatric services, either as well as or separately from services from community psychiatric nurses, but information is not available on the numbers receiving other services.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding is being made available to organizations in the voluntary sector working to promote employment of people with mental health problems as set out in the National Service Framework for Mental Health. [61323]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* Over the period 1998–99 to 2003–04 the Department has awarded funding of £627,428 through the Section 64 general scheme of grants to the following mental health voluntary organisations to support national projects that are designed to help improve employment opportunities for people with mental health problems.

£

Name of voluntary organisation	*Name of project*	*Amount*
SIGN	"Education and employment training for deaf people with mental health problems"	99,000
Turning Point	"Starting point: Routes to work for people with mental health problems"	286,428
Working Well Trust	"On Line"—Professional IT training and support for people who have mental health problems, including help with job search and vocational advice	92,000
Southside Partnership	"Mentally disordered offenders prison discharge support"—Includes help for mentally disordered offenders to find employment	150,000
Total		627,428

Primary Care Premises

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) on how many of the GP premises due to be modernised work will have been *(a)* started and *(b)* completed by 1 April; and what financial resources will be needed to complete this work by March 2004; [56942]

(2) how many of the new one-stop primary care centres will have been *(a)* started and *(b)* completed by 1 April; and what financial resources will be needed to complete this work by March 2004. [56945]

Mr. Hutton: Data are collected only on completed premises developments and associated capital spend. As set out in the NHS Plan, up to £1 billion will be invested in the primary care infrastructure to refurbish substantially or replace up to £3,000 general practitioners' (GP) premises and develop 500 one-stop primary care centres. Outturn figures for 31 March 2002 show that 1,098 GP premises were refurbished or replaced, and 70 one-stop primary care centres were in place.

Hospital Beds (Northumberland)

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the bed capacity was of each community and cottage hospital in Northumberland in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2001. [56935]

Jacqui Smith: Bed capacity data by individual hospital site are not collected.

Information on the average daily number of available beds for national health service trusts in England is on the Department website www.doh.gov.uk/hospitalativity.

Home Helps

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 28 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 616W, what information on home helps is held by his Department; and if he will publish it. [57470]

Jacqui Smith: The table gives the number of home helps (excluding home help organisers) employed by councils with social services responsibilities in England as at 30 September in each year between 1992 and 2001. Home helps employed by the private sector are not included, even if doing work contracted by councils.

Home helps employed by councils with social services responsibilities in England as at 30 September, 1992–2001 (whole time equivalents)

	1992	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Avon	1,275	1,050	1,100	1,075	—	—	—	—	—	—
Barking and Dagenham	245	220	220	225	210	255	0	245	210	210
Barnet	230	60	220	255	240	170	175	155	120	185
Barnsley	420	390	365	340	[1]—	260	240	225	225	[2]—
Bath and North East Somerset UA	—	—	—	—	135	130	125	140	145	130
Bedfordshire (old)	490	415	515	530	445	—	—	—	—	—
Bedfordshire (remaining)	—	—	—	—	—	235	225	200	180	180
Berkshire	590	515	580	505	680	680	—	—	—	—
Bexley	270	290	345	365	350	360	315	340	0	0
Birmingham	1,320	1,450	1,690	1,575	1,475	1,670	1,490	1,435	1,105	1,250
Blackburn with Darwen UA	—	—	—	—	—	—	155	175	120	100
Blackpool UA	—	—	—	—	—	—	195	155	130	100
Bolton	340	325	345	365	350	370	375	380	395	365
Bournemouth UA	—	—	—	—	—	140	145	140	110	110
Bracknell Forest UA	—	—	—	—	—	—	40	40	40	30
Bradford	695	715	725	665	625	590	600	655	540	475
Brent	110	315	310	275	250	250	570	0	0	0
Brighton and Hove UA	—	—	—	—	—	200	145	170	165	105
Bristol UA	—	—	—	—	465	460	535	555	555	570
Bromley	245	250	275	295	350	330	215	200	175	160
Buckinghamshire (old)	530	565	790	810	925	—	—	—	—	—
Buckinghamshire (remaining)	—	—	—	—	—	565	520	540	410	355
Bury	210	210	210	205	210	200	265	185	205	200
Calderdale	390	305	305	320	310	335	290	245	240	225
Cambridgeshire (old)	470	515	515	550	415	430	—	—	—	—
Cambridgeshire (remaining)	—	—	—	—	—	—	460	380	200	215
Camden	275	270	210	190	170	170	180	165	105	85
Cheshire (old)	865	815	775	750	625	585	—	—	—	—
Cheshire (remaining)	—	—	—	—	—	—	480	515	525	535
City of London	15	15	20	25	20	20	20	20	20	15
Cleveland	730	720	875	660	—	—	—	—	—	—
Cornwall	480	450	465	380	390	340	0	0	0	15
Coventry	360	240	345	315	315	270	260	200	180	170
Croydon	245	245	300	210	210	190	190	175	165	140
Cumbria	500	505	545	0	410	415	440	445	605	715
Darlington UA	—	—	—	—	—	75	70	65	30	30
Derby UA	—	—	—	—	—	325	300	295	295	280
Derbyshire (old)	1,405	1,135	1,130	1,090	0	—	—	—	—	—
Derbyshire (remaining)	—	—	—	—	—	930	930	945	930	900
Devon (old)	920	945	955	955	835	800	—	—	—	—
Devon (remaining)	—	—	—	—	—	—	505	425	395	440
Doncaster	465	510	545	515	510	505	370	385	335	250
Dorset (old)	535	515	605	580	610	—	—	—	—	—
Dorset (remaining)	—	—	—	—	—	265	220	260	255	215
Dudley	310	285	300	310	245	240	270	210	270	280
Durham (old)	945	860	920	725	740	—	—	—	—	—
Durham (remaining)	—	—	—	—	—	600	600	500	510	365
Ealing	225	250	260	250	200	130	75	110	110	100
East Riding of Yorkshire UA	—	—	—	—	400	250	190	125	110	80
East Sussex (old)	630	625	630	565	560	—	—	—	—	—
East Sussex (remaining)	—	—	—	—	—	275	260	265	265	250
Enfield	310	210	215	200	195	180	165	165	145	130
Essex (old)	1,405	655	525	555	1,480	1,150	—	—	—	—
Essex (remaining)	—	—	—	—	—	—	815	620	590	635
Gateshead	340	335	415	415	390	350	405	485	360	365

Home helps employed by councils with social services responsibilities in England as at 30 September, 1992–2001 (whole time equivalents)

	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Gloucestershire	495	500	550	545	415	300	295	295	305	295
Greenwich	290	285	260	260	220	235	190	170	170	160
Hackney	380	340	310	320	265	240	220	205	165	140
Halton UA	—	—	—	—	—	—	65	65	80	80
Hammersmith and Fulham	260	310	305	280	255	140	225	140	120	115
Hampshire (old)	955	990	1,010	875	855	—	—	—	—	—
Hampshire (remaining)	—	—	—	—	—	620	480	525	475	350
Haringey	255	195	195	0	45	215	145	165	100	120
Harrow	240	215	230	235	235	220	245	195	200	170
Hartlepool UA	—	—	—	—	0	115	115	100	85	50
Havering	255	290	265	320	155	150	135	125	105	95
Hereford and Worcester	655	670	630	520	405	365	—	—	—	—
Herefordshire UA	—	—	—	—	—	—	85	150	90	85
Hertfordshire	820	730	585	745	565	445	445	375	0	0
Hillingdon	285	320	320	285	0	275	210	160	175	330
Hounslow	225	140	160	150	125	105	100	95	90	85
Humberside	1,200	1,445	1,150	1,220	—	—	—	—	—	—
Isle of Wight UA	150	0	80	80	120	65	165	150	150	145
Isles of Scilly	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	0	0	0	0	0
Islington	250	235	235	425	330	330	0	155	135	80
Kensington and Chelsea	145	160	135	145	165	135	120	85	95	90
Kent (old)	660	140	125	105	85	[1]—	—	—	—	—
Kent (remaining)	—	—	—	—	—	—	5	180	160	135
Kingston upon Hull UA	—	—	—	—	405	215	175	165	155	155
Kingston upon Thames	95	90	80	80	70	70	50	0	65	65
Kirklees	545	480	545	170	285	295	270	255	425	445
Knowsley	90	95	95	120	0	0	60	120	110	115
Lambeth	450	375	150	340	340	235	160	105	0	95
Lancashire (old)	1,635	1,665	1,905	1,685	1,540	1,565	—	—	—	—
Lancashire (remaining)	—	—	—	—	—	—	795	0	0	10
Leeds	1,600	1,450	1,535	1,520	1,480	1,450	1,415	1,475	1,420	1,390
Leicester UA	—	—	—	—	—	255	215	185	155	140
Leicestershire (old)	690	815	890	710	700	—	—	—	—	—
Leicestershire (remaining)	—	—	—	—	—	395	310	335	425	275
Lewisham	370	345	350	325	295	290	225	225	220	210
Lincolnshire	525	520	550	550	625	555	485	200	255	160
Liverpool	845	840	900	1,040	955	900	865	865	780	690
Luton UA	—	—	—	—	—	120	115	100	125	135
Manchester	700	735	720	660	650	585	540	515	455	415
Medway Towns UA	—	—	—	—	—	—	45	55	35	25
Merton	215	205	210	205	190	170	170	155	140	0
Middlesbrough UA	—	—	—	—	185	155	140	135	110	110
Milton Keynes UA	—	—	—	—	—	235	230	200	190	135
Newcastle upon Tyne	515	435	425	415	470	395	440	465	470	420
Newham	385	335	270	190	215	230	245	205	35	100
Norfolk	985	1,025	1,190	1,095	1,130	1,075	1,010	975	910	880
North East Lincolnshire UA	—	—	—	—	255	250	185	190	130	95
North Lincolnshire UA	—	—	—	—	150	110	100	105	95	100
North Somerset UA	—	—	—	—	165	165	155	145	150	165
North Tyneside	360	360	360	350	345	310	325	345	345	335
North Yorkshire (old)	795	740	750	790	—	—	—	—	—	—
North Yorkshire (remaining)	—	—	—	—	625	525	515	560	535	535
Northamptonshire	375	375	385	385	225	220	165	50	165	125
Northumberland	485	525	610	570	445	475	335	320	405	430
Nottingham UA	—	—	—	—	—	—	240	320	315	260
Nottinghamshire (old)	1,200	1,245	1,280	1,150	1,245	1,010	—	—	—	—
Nottinghamshire (remaining)	—	—	—	—	—	—	745	610	550	540
Oldham	355	310	320	280	295	310	275	265	250	235
Oxfordshire	525	545	505	485	555	430	460	475	475	415
Peterborough UA	—	—	—	—	—	—	5	65	30	40
Plymouth UA	—	—	—	—	—	—	220	225	145	120
Poole UA	—	—	—	—	—	110	100	85	80	85
Portsmouth UA	—	—	—	—	—	125	120	115	105	95
Reading UA	—	—	—	—	—	—	95	90	80	70
Redbridge	225	[1]—	165	155	195	180	145	135	110	105
Redcar and Cleveland UA	—	—	—	—	180	220	195	180	[1]—	145
Richmond upon Thames	185	235	195	200	185	185	0	145	150	130
Rochdale	440	440	375	400	390	310	330	305	145	280
Rotherham	375	375	345	335	310	295	295	305	295	280
Rutland UA	—	—	—	—	—	30	25	25	15	15
Salford	375	505	510	505	520	485	495	505	330	300
Sandwell	420	410	430	365	450	440	350	320	335	165
Sefton	340	355	315	290	260	240	240	230	195	160
Sheffield	1,505	735	700	700	970	805	810	800	750	735
Shropshire (old)	265	245	235	235	200	180	—	—	—	—
Shropshire (remaining)	—	—	—	—	—	—	100	105	90	95
Slough UA	—	—	—	—	—	—	140	100	105	75

Home helps employed by councils with social services responsibilities in England as at 30 September, 1992–2001 (whole time equivalents)

	1992	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Solihull	185	190	200	185	185	170	140	130	120	105
Somerset	0	0	0	0	0	425	435	260	210	220
South Gloucestershire UA	—	—	—	—	170	160	165	160	145	125
South Tyneside	230	235	235	240	230	225	180	190	230	215
Southampton UA	—	—	—	—	—	140	135	180	110	110
Southend UA	—	—	—	—	—	—	135	150	120	100
Southwark	285	265	265	280	265	230	210	180	150	0
St. Helens	340	340	305	310	285	335	315	365	265	260
Staffordshire (old)	1,400	1,415	1,485	1,355	1,295	—	—	—	—	—
Staffordshire (remaining)	—	—	—	—	—	760	665	650	710	625
Stockport	370	350	280	365	360	310	295	280	280	245
Stockton on Tees UA	—	—	—	—	155	210	165	165	140	125
Stoke-on-Trent UA	—	—	—	—	—	245	240	225	205	205
Suffolk	555	655	705	625	600	540	555	620	385	400
Sunderland	480	480	515	455	475	585	715	540	345	410
Surrey	455	450	395	490	435	405	360	355	325	310
Sutton	210	165	170	170	155	155	145	120	115	95
Swindon UA	—	—	—	—	—	105	90	0	10	35
Tameside	390	350	365	310	290	260	225	215	205	125
Telford and Wrekin UA	—	—	—	—	—	—	65	45	40	35
Thurrock UA	—	—	—	—	—	—	95	105	50	50
Torbay UA	—	—	—	—	—	—	75	75	90	110
Tower Hamlets	165	165	160	160	225	165	145	145	150	140
Trafford	305	330	330	345	330	330	320	305	315	295
Wakefield	445	360	430	450	450	470	455	410	425	360
Walsall	245	240	235	230	210	215	205	215	195	185
Waltham Forest	445	335	360	355	325	285	285	235	225	215
Wandsworth	440	445	410	335	325	275	245	215	205	185
Warrington UA	—	—	—	—	—	—	95	90	75	65
Warwickshire	465	445	415	365	370	405	365	330	330	480
West Berkshire UA	—	—	—	—	—	—	150	150	120	40
West Sussex	750	775	870	865	815	815	795	540	595	485
Westminster	305	325	305	330	300	0	285	290	295	[1]—
Wigan	405	440	400	390	365	290	295	285	300	285
Wiltshire (old)	330	265	460	420	440	—	—	—	—	—
Wiltshire (remaining)	—	—	—	—	—	470	235	220	0	[1]—
Windsor and Maidenhead UA	—	—	—	—	—	—	80	85	80	45
Wirral	500	515	615	550	580	500	435	410	325	290
Wokingham UA	—	—	—	—	—	—	65	75	25	40
Wolverhampton	390	275	375	385	420	375	340	230	235	30
Worcestershire	—	—	—	—	—	—	255	265	300	265
York UA	—	—	—	—	210	210	200	150	135	120
England	54,255	50,745	52,685	49,810	47,750	46,315	42,885	39,775	35,630	33,020

[1] Not available

[2] Five or less

Note:

Due to local government reorganisation, not all authorities were in existence for the whole period covered by the table

Source:

Department of Health annual return SSDS001

Overseas Recruitment

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the annual *(a)* salary and *(b)* support costs are of his Department's director of international recruitment for health services. [58031]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* The director of international recruitment was on detachment from her post as executive nurse director at Hammersmith Hospitals National Health Service Trust. This secondment finished on 30 April 2002. The trust publishes salary details of its senior staff in its annual report. A budget of £154,000 was secured for 2001–02 to fund salaries, travel and support costs to the director.

Epilepsy

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what steps the Government are taking to ensure that epilepsy deaths and SUDEP are reduced as far as possible; [60085]

(2) if he will undertake a national confidential inquiry into sudden epilepsy deaths in order to obtain data on this condition; and if he will make a statement on the quantity of data he has collated on SUDEP. [60081]

Jacqui Smith: The Department recently welcomed the national sentinel audit of epilepsy-related death. The Government-funded project reviewed the official records of people who died from an epilepsy-related death in the UK between September 1999 and August 2000. During that period, 2,412 deaths were reported where epilepsy was mentioned on the death certificate.

The audit looked at investigations into epilepsy deaths, care provided prior to death and contact with bereaved families. The audit makes recommendations for improving epilepsy services. The Department has given a commitment to consider these and develop an action plan by September 2002 to try to reduce the number of epilepsy-related deaths.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the Government are doing to address the deficiencies they have identified in the care and management of people with epilepsy. [60083]

Jacqui Smith: The Government are undertaking a range of initiatives to improve services for the care and management of people with epilepsy. For example, we have:

Provided funding to the Joint Epilepsy Council (JEC) to develop a 'National Statement of Good Practice for the Treatment and Care of People who have Epilepsy', which was published in May 2002. The statement makes a series of recommendations for good quality epilepsy services. It is intended to facilitate commissioning and will be of use to national health service purchasers, providers and service users.

Provided funding for the national sentinel audit of epilepsy-related death, which was published in May 2002. The chief medical officer has given a commitment to develop an action plan to reduce the level preventable deaths from epilepsy within three months of publication.

Asked the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) to develop a clinical guideline (due in summer 2004) for the diagnosis, management and treatment of epilepsy to help address widespread variations in clinical practice and contribute to the improvement of services. This will be supported by a technology appraisal (due autumn 2003) of the clinical and cost-effectiveness of new anti-epileptic drugs in children and adults, to help promote appropriate uptake and equitable access.

Announced that the national service framework for long-term conditions (NSF) is expected to develop standards of care for specific neurological conditions, including epilepsy. The NSF is expected to be published in 2004. Implementation is expected to start from 2005.

Developed the expert patients programme, which aims to provide training in self-management skills for people with long-term chronic conditions. The first pilot phase will include people with epilepsy.

Provided funding to the National Society for Epilepsy for its 'Living Well' project. The project aims to promote independent living by providing locally based short-term courses for people with epilepsy to develop self-help and self-management techniques.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to improve the *(a)* monitoring and *(b)* prevention of sudden deaths owing to epilepsy. [61341]

Jacqui Smith: The Department has recently welcomed the publication of the Government-funded 'National Sentinel Audit of Epilepsy-Related Death'. The audit looked at investigations into epilepsy deaths, care provided prior to death and contact with bereaved families. The Department has given a commitment to consider the recommendations of the audit and develop an action plan by September 2002 to try to improve epilepsy services and reduce the number of preventable deaths from epilepsy.

The Department is also undertaking a range of initiatives to improve services for the care and management of people with epilepsy. For example, we have:

Provided funding to the Joint Epilepsy Council (JEC) to develop a 'National Statement of Good Practice for the Treatment and Care of People who have Epilepsy', which was published in May 2002. The statement makes a series of recommendations for good quality epilepsy services. It is intended to facilitate commissioning and will be of use to national health service purchasers, providers and service users.

Asked the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) to develop a clinical guideline (due in summer 2004) for the diagnosis, management and treatment of epilepsy to help address widespread variations in clinical practice and contribute to the improvement of services. This will be supported by a technology appraisal (due autumn 2003) of the clinical and cost-effectiveness of new anti-epileptic drugs in children and adults, to help promote appropriate uptake and equitable access.

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Provided funding to the National Society for Epilepsy for its 'Living Well' project. The project aims to promote independent living by providing locally based short-term courses for people with epilepsy to develop self-help and self-management techniques.

Newborn Hearing Screening

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) of 20 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 738, on neonatal screening, when his Department will make an announcement setting out a timetable for the national implementation of universal newborn hearing screening. [60107]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* The newborn hearing screening pilot was the first phase of a national roll-out of the service. The pilot phase has provided important information, about the impact on audiology and other support services, and has provided the data which will enable us to plan a national roll-out to a sensible, feasible time scale ending with full implementation by the end of 2004–05.

Care Homes

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what (1) representations the Department has received following the announcement that continence pads would be provided free of charge to all care home residents from October 2001; and if he will make a statement; [60094]

(2) what proportion of the amount made available for NHS continence services for 2003–04 will be earmarked for *(a)* continence adviser recruitment, *(b)* continence adviser training, *(c)* continence pads and *(d)* other continence products and services; [60093]

(3) whether an equivalent amount to the money made available in the period April 2002 to April 2003 for NHS continence services for self-funding residents will be made available for non self-funding residents post April 2003; and if he will make a statement; [60097]

(4) what factors were taken into consideration when deciding to allocate the initial £6 million for NHS continence care in the period October 2001 to April 2002 to all care home residents; [60095]

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funds will be made available for NHS continence services in the period *(a)* 2003–04, *(b)* 2004–05 and *(c)* 2005–06. [60092]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not available as specific budgets of health authorities and primary care trusts for continence services are not determined centrally. They receive unified allocations to cover the costs of hospital and community health services, discretionary funding for general practice staff, premises and computers and primary care prescribing.

The level of funding made available for continence provision is therefore a local decision. It is for health authorities in partnership with primary care groups/trusts and other local stakeholders to determine how best to use their funds to meet national and local priorities for improving health, tackling health inequalities and modernising services

The details of a transfer of resources from local authorities to cover nursing care/continence from 2003–04 will be the subject of a separate consultation over the summer.

No representations were received about continence payments for self funders.

The £6 million figure was arrived at on the basis that approximately two thirds of the population receiving nursing care in care homes (over 40,000) are incontinent and this figure represents an average cost to the national health service of providing continence services to them.

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what Government funding has been made available in the last 12 months to promote management of continence by *(a)* constituency and *(b)* region. [59114]

Jacqui Smith: Information requested relating to funding by constituency and region is not available centrally. Specific budgets of health authorities and primary care trusts for continence services are not determined centrally. They receive unified allocations to cover the costs of hospital and community health services, discretionary funding for general practice staff, premises and computers and primary care prescribing.

£6 million of the £100 million allocated to national health service funded nursing care from 1 October 2001 was for the continence needs of self-funders who had previously had to pay nursing homes for continence services. £12 million will be available to the NHS for this year's 2002–03 full year costs for this group.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the staffing establishment is at the National Care Standards Commission; what the annual costs are of running it; how many nursing and residential homes were inspected by the NCSC in April and May; and if he will make a statement as to the reasons for delays in dealing with applications; [61348]

(2) if he will place in the Library a copy of the application form for nursing and residential homes to be registered; and if he will explain what the procedure for registration is; [61350]

(3) what the estimated time is for the National Care Standards Commission to send out application forms for *(a)* residential and *(b)* nursing homes to register, if they are sent first or second class; how long on average it has taken to inspect (i) nursing and (ii) residential homes which have applied for registration; who carries out the inspection; what the criteria for inspection are; and how the criteria differ from the local inspection previously carried out by local authorities; [61351]

(4) if he will make a statement as to why the costs for registration and inspection of nursing and residential homes have risen since 1 April. [61349]

Jacqui Smith: The National Care Standards Commission (NCSC) took over responsibility for the regulation of all care homes in England on 1 April 2002, including care homes not previously required to register. The NCSC is responsible for regulating care homes in accordance with national minimum standards to ensure consistency and improve the quality of life and level of protection for the most vulnerable people in society.

The NCSC is currently dealing with a heavy load of applications under the new arrangements and there is some delay in dealing with some applications. The NCSC is taking steps to deal with this and expects the average time for processing applications to reduce as the number of applications comes down to more normal levels.

The NCSC's staffing establishment is 2,352 of which 1,874 staff are currently in post. As this is the NCSC's first year of operation, we have no historical data as yet on actual running costs of the NCSC. However, the NCSC is planning its work for 2002–03 on the basis of a budget of £131 million revenue and £1.5 million capital. The NCSC's programme of inspections was not expected to get fully under way before June 2002 due to factors such as completing office accommodation moves and information technology set-ups, transferring staff, finalising inspector training and giving due notice to providers of the inspections. Nevertheless, from the information currently available, 66 inspections were carried out in April and 612 in May. 2,034 inspections are planned for June.

Application forms for registration are usually sent out by first class post. Information is not available on the times taken to send out packs containing application forms. Requests for packs are responded to within two working days where possible, although some delays have occurred due to a higher than planned volume of demand requiring forms to be reprinted. Information is currently not available on the times taken to inspect nursing and residential homes which have applied for registration, but this will become available later this year.

Details of registration procedures and application forms for nursing and residential care homes are available on the NCSC's website www.carestandards.org.uk

Regulatory fees for care homes increased on 1 April this year. This is the first increase in fees since 1 May 1998. The increase reflects the effects of inflation on the value of fees but also our longer-term aim of moving to full cost recovery. Despite this increase, care homes currently only pay 31 per cent. of the actual cost of registration and inspection. We recognise that fees are not the only extra cost of the new regulatory system to care homes. We are increasing total resources available for social services by an average of six per cent. a year in real terms over the next three years (2003–04 to 2005–06). These increases follow average annual real terms increases of more than three per cent. between 1996–97 and 2002–03 including a 3.6 per cent. real terms increase this year (2002–03). These substantial increases in resources, in particular over the next three years, will enable local authorities to deliver the improvements to social services to which the Government are committed. It also means that local authorities have the resources they need to purchase services at realistic prices.

Under the previous regulatory system, care homes were inspected by around 250 local authorities and health authorities each applying its own, sometimes contradictory, local conditions for registration. This system had been criticised over several years for lacking independence, consistency and coherence. The NCSC will, by contrast, inspect care homes using national standards. Due to the large number of different standards set under the previous regulatory system, I cannot say in detail how national standards may differ from them. This will vary from area to area. However, national standards were widely consulted on and the finalised standards were set at a level already being met or exceeded by many providers and which others should be able to meet over time.

National Service Framework for Long-term Health Conditions

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if neurology will be included in the remit of the national service framework for long-term health conditions; and if he will make a statement. [60087]

Jacqui Smith: The Department has recently confirmed that the national service framework for long-term health conditions will focus on developing standards of care for specific neurological conditions and some of the generic issues relevant to people with a long-term condition.

Care Budgets

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what projections he has made of numbers of *(a)* long-term care beds, *(b)* nursing and residential beds and *(c)* acute care beds; what implications this will have for funding arrangements for care budgets (i) in general and (ii) with respect to continence care; and if he will make a statement. [60086]

Jacqui Smith: I refer the hon. Member to the reply which I gave him on 16 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 871W. The projections published by the Personal Social Service Research Unit also include projections of long-stay beds in hospital. Projections of general and acute beds are contained in "Delivering the NHS Plan", copies of which are available in the Library.

In planning expenditure on long-term care, we need to take into account a number of other factors beyond the numbers of beds. People generally prefer to be supported in their own homes and so we are developing services which promote greater independence. As announced in the Budget, we are increasing the resources for personal social services by six per cent. in real terms in each of the next three years. This will ensure that councils have the resources that they need to purchase good quality services for the people that they serve. The organisation and provision of continence services, and the manner in which they are delivered, is a matter for primary care trusts and NHS trusts. They are under an obligation to provide these services where the need exists, in light of resources and local priorities.

Epsom Hospital

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what conditions as to future usage were applied to the handover of the Epsom hospital cluster sites to the NHS; and whether covenants remain which require areas of the sites to be used for specific purposes. [60239]

Jacqui Smith: No conditions were attached to the future usage of land in the Epsom cluster not do any covenants apply.

Hospital Discharges

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May), of 15 May 2002,, *Official Report*, column 735W, on hospital discharges, (1) if he will set out the target number of the maximum number of beds blocked following the 20 per cent. reduction of bed blockers as proposed in, Delivering the NHS Plan, paragraph 8.10; [60814]

(2) how many people had their discharge delayed in March, broken down by *(a)* reason, *(b)* health authority and *(c)* length of delay. [60815]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answers 12 June 2002]:* All information, collected centrally, on delayed discharge in March 2002, quarter 4 of 2001–02, has been placed in the Library. The NHS Plan target is to reduce the number of delayed discharges from hospitals by 20 per cent. between March 2002 and March 2003.

Malignant Neoplasms

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the five most common malignant neoplasms for NHS patients; and how many deaths were incurred as a result of each for *(a)* men and *(b)* women in 2001. [61855]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Bob Spink, dated 17 June 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question concerning the five most common malignant neoplasms for NHS patients; and the number of deaths incurred as a result of each for (a) men and (b) women in 2001. (61855)

The information that is available on new cases of cancer relates to all those registered in England in each year. It is likely that the vast majority of these will have had some contact with the NHS during their treatment, but it is not possible to state which were NHS patients. The most recently available information is for cases diagnosed in 1998 and for deaths occurring in 2000. Figures for all new cases of the five most common cancers and all deaths from these cancers are given in the table.

Number of new cases[1] of the five most common cancers, England,[2] 1998; and a number of deaths[3] from these cancers, England,[2] 2000[4]

Men			Women		
5 most common cancers	*Number of new cases in 1998*	*Number of deaths in 2000*	*5 most common cancers*	*Number of new cases in 1998*	*Number of deaths in 2000*
Bronchus and lung	19,487	16,875	Breast	32,908	10,609
Prostate	19,335	7,785	Colon and rectum	13,459	6,278
Colon and rectum	14,927	6,945	Bronchus and lung	11,789	10,338
Bladder	7,529	2,727	Ovary	5,529	3,653
Stomach	5,209	3,356	Corpus uteri and uterus, part unspecified	4,407	1,243

[1] defined using the following codes from the International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision (ICD-10):
Stomach—C16
Colon and rectum—C18-C21
Bronchus and lung—C34
Breast—C50
Corpus uteri and uterus, part unspecified—C54-C55
Ovary—C56
Prostate—C61
Bladder—C67

[2] data are for residents of England.

[3] defined using the following codes from the International Classification of Diseases, Ninth Revision (ICD-9):
Stomach—151
Colon and rectum—153–154
Bronchus and lung—162.2–162.9
Breast—174
Corpus uteri and uterus, part unspecified—179, 182
Ovary—183.0
Prostate—185
Bladder—188

[4] data are for cases diagnosed and deaths occurring in each calendar year.

Laboratory and Generic Research

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the reduction of cost weights for laboratory and generic research. [61470]

Margaret Hodge: I have been asked to reply.

The Higher Education Funding Council for England has reviewed the annual data from higher education institutions on the relative costs of research in different subjects and, in the light of that, has reduced the weight attached to the most expensive subjects in calculating research funding in 2002–03.

False Memory Syndrome

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research has been conducted by his Department into false memory syndrome since 1997; who undertook the research; and when the papers were published. [61871]

Ms Blears: The Department has not directly commissioned any recent research into false memory syndrome. The Department provides national health service (NHS) research and development (R&D) funding to meet the NHS costs of hosting R&D supported by funders such as the research councils and charities. Details of ongoing and recently completed research projects funded by or of interest to the NHS are available on the National Research Register at www.doh.gov.uk/research/nrr.htm.

General Practitioners

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many whole-time equivalent general practitioners, excluding GP retrainees and GP registrars, per 100,000 population there were in each health authority in each of the last six years; [60826]

(2) what the average percentage annual increase of whole-time equivalent general practitioners was, excluding GP retrainees and GP registrars, in each health authority in each year since 1996. [60827]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the table.

NHS Plan GPs[1] per 100,000 population, by 2001 health authorities as at 1 October 1996–99 and 30 September 2000–01

Estimated whole time equivalents[2]

Region/HA name	*HA code*	*1996[3]*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Northern and Yorkshire							
Bradford HA	QDD	54.6	55.4	56.2	57.2	56.2	58.9
Calderdale and Kirklees HA	QDT	50.0	49.6	49.2	50.1	49.6	50.7
County Durham Health Commission	QDE	50.1	50.7	50.6	51.2	51.7	54.2
East Riding HA	QDF	51.1	50.6	50.4	50.6	50.3	50.9
Gateshead and South Tyneside HA	QDG	51.7	51.3	51.6	53.0	53.1	54.1
Leeds Healthcare	QDH	54.3	54.1	54.3	55.1	54.8	55.4
Newcastle and North Tyneside HA	QDJ	55.6	55.8	55.0	55.3	55.7	56.5
North Cumbria HA	QDK	61.2	60.6	60.0	60.7	60.0	60.7
North Yorkshire HA	QDR	58.5	58.3	58.7	58.1	57.8	58.2

NHS Plan GPs[1] per 100,000 population, by 2001 health authorities as at 1 October 1996–99 and 30 September 2000–01

Estimated whole time equivalents[2]

Region/HA name	*HA code*	*1996[3]*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Northumberland HA	**QDM**	**58.8**	**58.0**	**58.0**	**59.0**	**58.1**	**59.9**
Sunderland HA	**QDN**	**45.7**	**45.2**	**45.3**	**47.1**	**46.6**	**50.5**
Tees HA	**QDP**	**48.9**	**51.1**	**50.5**	**50.3**	**50.5**	**52.3**
Wakefield Healthcare	**QDQ**	**55.0**	**54.9**	**54.4**	**54.7**	**55.7**	**57.8**
Trent							
Barnsley HA	**QCG**	**48.7**	**48.2**	**47.5**	**49.1**	**49.0**	**49.0**
Doncaster HA	**QCK**	**51.2**	**50.1**	**50.4**	**50.4**	**50.6**	**51.8**
Leicestershire HA	**QCL**	**52.1**	**52.4**	**52.3**	**51.2**	**50.5**	**50.7**
Lincolnshire HA	**QCM**	**53.1**	**52.7**	**52.7**	**53.3**	**53.3**	**52.8**
North Derbyshire HA	**QCH**	**49.6**	**50.1**	**51.1**	**51.7**	**50.0**	**49.8**
North Nottinghamshire HA	**QCN**	**44.2**	**48.2**	**49.6**	**49.4**	**49.8**	**49.8**
Nottingham HA	**QCP**	**50.2**	**48.6**	**48.4**	**50.3**	**51.4**	**50.8**
Rotherham HA	**QCQ**	**45.0**	**45.4**	**45.8**	**45.2**	**47.0**	**47.2**
Sheffield HA	**QCR**	**58.1**	**58.0**	**57.4**	**57.9**	**57.3**	**56.5**
South Humber HA	**QDL**	**50.9**	**54.6**	**52.8**	**54.1**	**53.4**	**52.4**
Southern Derbyshire HA	**QCJ**	**53.4**	**52.1**	**52.0**	**50.0**	**51.1**	**52.3**
Eastern							
Bedfordshire HA	**QA6**	**51.2**	**51.6**	**51.4**	**51.0**	**51.0**	**50.6**
Cambridgeshire HA	**QER**	**52.9**	**53.0**	**52.3**	**51.3**	**53.5**	**52.6**
Hertfordshire	**QEX**	**53.3**	**53.9**	**54.7**	**54.1**	**53.1**	**53.1**
Norfolk HA	**QET**	**54.9**	**55.7**	**55.8**	**55.9**	**54.4**	**55.1**
North Essex HA	**QAX**	**50.5**	**51.1**	**50.2**	**50.2**	**49.6**	**48.3**
South Essex HA	**QAY**	**46.2**	**46.2**	**47.7**	**47.1**	**46.6**	**45.6**
Suffolk HA	**QCF**	**54.8**	**54.6**	**55.3**	**55.0**	**54.2**	**52.9**
London							
Barking and Havering HA	**QAP**	**47.4**	**48.6**	**48.0**	**47.6**	**50.6**	**47.5**
Barnet, Enfield and Haringey HA	**QEW**	**56.7**	**56.1**	**57.1**	**55.4**	**55.8**	**55.3**
Bexley, Bromley and Greenwich HA	**QEY**	**49.1**	**50.5**	**49.4**	**50.7**	**49.8**	**48.2**
Brent and Harrow HA	**QAR**	**61.4**	**62.6**	**61.4**	**59.1**	**58.0**	**59.5**
Camden and Islington HA	**QAT**	**61.3**	**66.4**	**63.3**	**63.1**	**62.6**	**58.8**
Croydon HA	**QAD**	**48.4**	**54.4**	**51.0**	**50.4**	**49.2**	**46.6**
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow HA	**QAV**	**56.7**	**63.5**	**60.5**	**57.6**	**55.9**	**54.2**
East London and the City HA	**QAW**	**60.6**	**63.3**	**62.9**	**62.1**	**62.3**	**60.7**
Hillingdon HA	**QA2**	**48.5**	**48.1**	**48.9**	**47.6**	**47.3**	**48.1**
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster HA	**QA3**	**54.8**	**61.8**	**57.1**	**54.4**	**51.1**	**49.9**
Kingston and Richmond HA	**QAG**	**54.5**	**53.2**	**52.6**	**53.9**	**52.4**	**50.6**
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham HA	**QAH**	**54.9**	**55.7**	**56.1**	**57.4**	**55.9**	**58.3**
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth HA	**QAJ**	**51.0**	**52.6**	**51.5**	**50.8**	**50.3**	**51.1**
Redbridge and Waltham Forest HA	**QA5**	**48.0**	**50.4**	**50.7**	**49.9**	**49.6**	**49.3**
South Eastern							
Berkshire HA	**QA7**	**50.6**	**50.0**	**51.5**	**52.5**	**52.5**	**52.4**
Buckinghamshire HA	**QA8**	**53.4**	**52.8**	**53.2**	**53.9**	**54.2**	**54.0**
East Kent HA	**QAE**	**51.3**	**51.1**	**51.0**	**50.7**	**49.7**	**49.7**
East Surrey HA	**QAK**	**51.4**	**50.7**	**51.2**	**50.0**	**50.0**	**48.9**
East Sussex Brighton and Hove HA	**QAM**	**53.2**	**52.8**	**52.9**	**52.2**	**52.0**	**51.9**
Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire HA	**QEV**	**52.5**	**53.8**	**54.5**	**54.3**	**54.6**	**53.9**
North and Mid Hampshire HA	**QD1**	**51.8**	**51.5**	**51.3**	**50.4**	**49.7**	**49.1**
Northamptonshire HA	**QCC**	**50.2**	**50.1**	**49.9**	**47.6**	**46.4**	**46.1**
Oxfordshire HA	**QCE**	**55.5**	**55.6**	**55.8**	**55.9**	**54.9**	**54.9**
Southampton and South West Hampshire HA	**QD3**	**56.1**	**56.2**	**55.4**	**55.9**	**56.0**	**56.1**
West Kent HA	**QAF**	**53.6**	**53.8**	**53.3**	**52.9**	**52.0**	**51.1**
West Surrey HA	**QAL**	**52.5**	**52.2**	**52.1**	**50.5**	**50.6**	**51.2**
West Sussex HA	**QAN**	**54.1**	**53.6**	**53.4**	**53.3**	**53.5**	**52.8**
South Western							
Avon HA	**QD8**	**54.0**	**54.1**	**54.6**	**54.4**	**53.9**	**54.2**
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly HA	**QDV**	**60.9**	**60.1**	**59.9**	**59.1**	**58.5**	**59.2**
Dorset HA	**QDW**	**58.7**	**58.9**	**59.1**	**59.2**	**59.1**	**58.6**
Gloucestershire HA	**QDY**	**57.5**	**57.8**	**58.4**	**57.3**	**56.7**	**56.3**
North and East Devon HA	**QDX**	**59.9**	**61.7**	**60.9**	**59.9**	**59.3**	**59.1**
Somerset HA	**QD5**	**56.8**	**56.7**	**57.1**	**57.8**	**58.3**	**57.2**
South and West Devon HA	**QD6**	**58.5**	**58.4**	**58.7**	**58.0**	**58.0**	**58.8**
Wiltshire HA	**QD7**	**51.4**	**50.9**	**51.7**	**52.5**	**52.9**	**52.3**
West Midlands							
Birmingham HA	**QD9**	**55.9**	**55.0**	**55.8**	**56.3**	**56.1**	**55.6**
Coventry HA	**QEA**	**53.4**	**53.0**	**53.5**	**54.8**	**55.3**	**55.0**

NHS Plan GPs[1] per 100,000 population, by 2001 health authorities as at 1 October 1996–99 and 30 September 2000–01

Estimated whole time equivalents[2]

Region/HA name	*HA code*	*1996[3]*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Dudley HA	QEC	48.3	49.6	50.1	47.9	47.9	50.1
Herefordshire HA	QED	58.5	61.1	62.1	60.0	60.0	59.6
North Staffordshire HA	QEH	50.3	48.7	49.5	49.4	48.7	47.7
Sandwell HA	QEE	51.5	52.6	52.1	54.5	54.4	54.4
Shropshire HA	QEF	54.5	53.6	53.1	54.8	53.3	53.1
Solihull HA	QEG	51.8	52.6	51.8	51.3	52.6	51.7
South Staffordshire HA	QEJ	45.7	46.1	47.3	48.7	48.9	48.1
Walsall HA	QEK	50.4	50.1	49.5	50.1	49.6	48.7
Warwickshire HA	QEL	51.8	51.9	51.2	50.5	50.7	51.0
Wolverhampton HA	QEM	49.8	51.2	50.4	50.3	52.7	51.6
Worcestershire HA	QEN	54.3	54.0	54.5	55.0	53.3	54.1
North West							
Bury and Rochdale HA	QCT	50.9	51.5	52.3	52.8	53.1	51.7
East Lancashire HA	QCX	55.2	52.4	53.2	53.3	53.0	52.6
Liverpool HA	QC2	52.5	53.9	53.3	53.5	53.4	53.7
Manchester Health	QC3	61.8	61.8	59.9	61.9	59.6	59.9
Morecambe Bay HA	QC4	51.6	57.3	58.7	57.5	57.4	56.6
North Cheshire HA	QCV	49.4	47.1	47.8	49.5	49.7	50.4
North West Lancashire HA	QCY	50.9	50.3	51.3	50.7	50.7	51.2
Salford and Trafford HA	QC6	51.8	51.7	52.7	52.6	53.4	51.2
Sefton HA	QC7	48.9	50.5	50.3	50.8	50.8	51.4
South Cheshire HA	QCW	53.9	53.9	53.5	55.1	55.1	54.3
South Lancashire HA	QC1	52.8	50.8	51.2	50.9	49.9	50.8
St. Helens and Knowsley HA	QC5	51.7	52.4	52.4	52.9	52.1	54.8
Stockport Health	QC8	51.0	50.2	50.7	52.6	52.3	53.2
West Pennine HA	QC9	46.4	47.4	47.6	47.6	46.6	47.3
Wigan and Bolton HA	QDA	49.1	49.3	49.3	48.0	48.8	47.4
Wirral HA	QDC	55.9	56.8	57.2	57.3	58.6	57.9
England Total		53.1	53.5	53.5	53.4	53.1	53.0

[1] NHS Plan GPs include GMS Unrestricted Principals, PMS Contracted GPs, PMS Salaried GPs, Restricted Principals, Assistants, Salaried Doctors (Para. 52 SFA) and PMS Other.

[2] WTE data have been estimated using the results from the 1992–93GMP Workload Survey. Full-time = 1.00 wte; three quarter time = 0.69 wte, job share = 0.65 wte, half time = 0.60 wte.

[3] There were 286 LIZ Assistants in the 1996 census, we do not have sufficient details to calculate wte data below a national level. The national total for 1996 has been estimated based onavailable headcount data and a such will not equal the sum of components. Because of this, London data for 1996 and subsequent calculations based on 1996 London data needs to be treated with caution.

Source:

Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics and ONS Population estimates/projections.

NHS Plan GPs[1] by 2001 health authorities as at 1 October 1996–99 and 30 September 2000–01

Estimated whole time equivalents[2]

	1996[3]		*1997*		*1998*		*1999*		*2000*		*2001*	
Region/HA name	*GPs*	*% change*	*GPs*	*% change*	*GPs*	*% change*	*GPs*	*% change*	*GPs*	*% change*	*GPs*	*%[4] change*
Northern and Yorkshire												
Bradford HA	264	1.4	268	1.4	272	1.9	277	−1.2	273	5.0	287	1.7
Calderdale and Kirklees HA	291	−0.7	289	−0.5	287	2.0	293	−0.3	292	2.4	299	0.6
County Durham Health Commission	305	1.2	309	−0.3	308	1.0	311	0.9	314	4.7	328	1.5
East Riding HA	294	−1.2	291	−0.3	290	0.1	290	−0.6	288	1.5	293	−0.1
Gateshead and South Tyneside HA	184	−1.0	183	−0.1	182	2.1	186	−0.3	186	1.5	188	0.4
Leeds Healthcare	395	−0.3	394	0.4	395	1.3	400	−0.5	398	1.3	403	0.4
Newcastle and North Tyneside HA	265	−0.3	264	−2.0	259	−0.3	258	0.4	259	1.2	262	−0.2
North Cumbria HA	195	−0.6	193	−0.9	192	0.6	193	−1.3	190	1.2	193	−0.2
North Yorkshire HA	430	0.1	430	1.2	436	−0.3	434	0.3	436	1.3	441	0.5
Northumberland HA	181	−0.8	179	0.2	180	1.9	183	−1.5	180	3.2	186	0.6
Sunderland HA	135	−1.7	132	0.2	133	3.3	137	−1.3	135	7.9	146	1.6
Tees HA	273	4.3	284	−1.1	281	−0.6	279	0.7	281	3.2	290	1.3
Wakefield Healthcare	175	−0.3	174	−0.3	174	0.7	175	2.1	178	3.7	185	1.2
Trent												
Barnsley HA	111	−0.8	110	−1.3	108	3.4	112	−0.2	112	0.1	112	0.2
Doncaster HA	150	−2.2	146	0.0	146	−0.1	146	0.5	147	2.1	150	0.1
Leicestershire HA	483	0.9	487	−0.3	486	−1.4	479	−1.0	474	1.0	479	−0.2
Lincolnshire HA	327	−0.3	326	0.6	328	2.1	335	0.9	338	−0.1	338	0.6
North Derbyshire HA	184	0.7	185	2.1	189	1.4	192	−3.1	186	−0.4	185	0.1
North Notinghamshire HA	173	8.7	188	2.6	193	0.3	194	0.8	195	−0.1	195	2.4
Nottingham HA	322	−3.0	312	−0.2	311	3.6	322	2.0	329	−1.0	325	0.2
Rotherham HA	115	0.9	116	0.6	117	−1.6	115	3.7	119	0.4	119	0.8
Sheffield HA	308	−0.2	307	−0.8	305	0.7	307	−1.2	304	−1.4	299	−0.6
South Humber HA	158	6.7	169	−3.7	163	2.4	167	−1.5	164	−2.3	161	0.3
Southern Derbyshire HA	299	−1.7	293	0.5	295	−3.4	285	2.6	292	2.9	301	0.2

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NHS Plan GPs[1] by 2001 health authorities as at 1 October 1996–99 and 30 September 2000–01

Estimated whole time equivalents[2]

	1996[3]		*1997*		*1998*		*1999*		*2000*		*2001*	
Region/HA name	*GPs*	*% change*	*GPs*	*% change*	*GPs*	*% change*	*GPs*	*% change*	*GPs*	*% change*	*GPs*	*%[4] change*
Eastern												
Bedfordshire HA	281	1.4	285	0.5	286	0.1	287	0.7	289	0.0	288	0.5
Cambridgeshire HA	384	1.6	390	–0.1	390	–4.5	372	5.0	391	–0.6	388	0.2
Hertfordshire	541	2.0	552	2.4	565	–0.2	564	–1.0	558	0.6	561	0.7
Norfolk HA	414	2.2	423	1.0	427	4.3	445	–1.8	437	1.8	445	1.5
North Essex HA	447	1.8	455	–1.1	450	0.9	454	–0.3	453	–2.0	444	–0.2
South Essex HA	324	0.6	326	3.7	338	–0.7	335	–0.6	333	–1.6	328	0.3
Suffolk HA	363	0.3	364	2.0	371	–0.1	371	–0.6	369	–1.8	362	0.0
London												
Barking and Havering HA	182	2.5	187	–1.3	184	0.0	184	6.3	196	–6.3	183	0.1
Barnet, Enfield and Haringey HA	452	0.3	454	2.9	467	–1.4	461	1.8	469	0.5	471	0.8
Bexley, Bromley and Greenwich HA	357	3.0	368	–2.0	361	3.4	373	–1.0	369	–2.9	358	0.1
Brent and Harrow HA	281	2.5	288	–1.1	285	–3.5	275	–1.0	272	3.7	282	0.1
Camden and Islington HA	224	8.9	244	–4.4	233	0.9	235	1.6	239	–4.9	227	0.3
Croydon HA	161	13.0	182	–5.5	172	–1.3	170	–1.7	167	–4.4	160	–0.2
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow HA	374	12.9	422	–3.9	406	–2.9	394	–2.0	386	–1.7	380	0.3
East London and the City HA	367	4.5	383	0.6	385	0.8	388	2.0	396	–1.0	392	1.4
Hillingdon HA	120	0.0	120	2.4	123	–1.8	121	0.1	121	3.1	125	0.7
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster HA	199	16.9	233	–4.0	223	0.0	223	–0.5	222	–0.2	222	2.2
Kingston and Richmond HA	175	–0.5	175	0.8	176	5.0	185	–1.6	182	–1.7	179	0.4
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham HA	404	1.6	411	1.9	418	3.5	433	–1.8	425	4.9	446	2.0
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth HA	319	3.3	329	–1.9	323	–0.3	322	0.0	322	2.3	329	0.7
Redbridge and Waltham Forest HA	216	5.0	227	1.0	230	–1.7	226	–0.5	224	–0.2	224	0.7
South Eastern												
Berkshire HA	400	–0.3	399	3.2	412	2.1	420	0.2	421	0.9	425	1.2
Buckinghamshire HA	359	–0.3	358	1.5	363	2.3	371	1.1	375	0.8	378	1.1
East Kent HA	304	0.6	306	0.2	306	0.8	309	–1.0	306	0.4	307	0.2
East Surrey HA	213	–0.3	212	1.5	215	–0.5	214	0.4	215	–1.6	211	–0.1
East Sussex Brighton and Hove HA	391	0.0	391	1.0	395	–0.3	394	0.3	395	0.6	397	0.3
Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire HA	351	2.8	361	1.6	366	–0.3	365	0.9	368	–0.7	366	0.8
North and Mid Hampshire HA	284	0.1	285	0.4	286	–0.8	283	–1.4	279	–0.3	279	–0.4
Northamptonshire HA	303	0.7	305	0.5	307	–3.8	295	–1.7	291	–0.1	290	–0.9
Oxfordshire HA	335	1.4	339	1.4	344	1.7	350	–0.9	347	1.0	350	0.9
Southampton and South West Hampshire HA	301	0.6	303	–1.0	300	1.7	305	0.7	307	0.7	310	0.5
West Kent HA	517	0.6	520	–0.3	519	–0.3	517	–1.0	512	–1.5	504	–0.5
West Surrey HA	333	0.3	334	0.1	334	–1.6	329	0.3	330	1.8	336	0.2
West Sussex HA	399	0.3	400	0.5	402	1.0	406	0.7	408	–0.4	407	0.4
South Western												
Avon HA	532	0.9	537	1.7	545	0.6	549	–0.3	547	1.0	556	0.8
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly HA	294	–0.3	293	0.2	294	–0.5	292	0.0	292	1.8	298	0.2
Dorset HA	400	1.2	405	0.8	408	0.4	410	0.7	413	0.0	413	0.6
Gloucestershire HA	320	1.0	323	0.7	325	–0.9	322	–0.5	321	–0.3	320	0.0
North and East Devon HA	282	3.9	293	–0.3	292	–0.9	289	0.4	290	0.3	291	0.6
Somerset HA	274	0.7	276	1.3	280	1.9	285	1.4	289	–1.3	285	0.8
South and West Devon HA	345	–0.2	344	0.5	346	–0.7	343	1.0	347	1.7	353	0.5
Wiltshire HA	305	0.0	305	2.6	313	2.4	320	1.3	325	–0.4	324	1.2
West Midlands												
Birmingham HA	571	–2.1	558	1.3	566	0.9	571	–0.7	567	–0.8	562	–0.3
Coventry HA	164	–1.4	161	1.0	163	2.2	166	0.4	167	–0.5	166	0.3
Dudley HA	151	2.3	154	1.1	156	–4.1	150	–0.1	149	4.7	156	0.7
Herefordshire HA	96	5.4	101	2.7	104	–3.1	101	0.6	102	0.0	102	1.1
North Staffordshire HA	237	–3.3	229	1.4	232	–0.3	232	–1.7	228	–2.3	222	–1.2
Sandwell HA	150	1.8	153	–1.1	151	4.2	158	–0.5	157	–0.3	157	0.8
Shropshire HA	230	–1.0	227	0.4	228	3.9	237	–2.0	232	0.2	233	0.3
Solihull HA	106	2.3	108	–1.2	107	–1.0	106	2.1	108	–1.7	106	0.1
South Staffordshire HA	267	1.8	272	3.1	280	2.7	288	0.4	289	–1.3	285	1.3
Walsall HA	132	–0.9	131	–1.5	129	1.5	131	–1.3	129	–2.1	127	–0.9
Warwickshire HA	259	0.8	261	–0.7	260	–1.3	256	0.8	258	1.1	261	0.1
Wolverhampton HA	122	1.8	124	–1.8	122	–0.5	121	4.7	127	–2.4	124	0.3
Worcestershire HA	289	0.1	289	1.5	293	1.3	297	–2.8	286	1.9	294	0.4
North West												
Bury and Rochdale HA	198	1.2	200	2.1	205	1.3	207	1.0	209	–2.6	204	0.6
East Lancashire HA	282	–5.1	268	1.6	272	–0.4	271	–0.7	269	–0.7	267	–1.1
Liverpool HA	246	1.7	250	–1.5	246	–0.5	245	–0.3	244	–0.1	244	–0.1
Manchester Health	266	–0.6	264	–2.6	258	3.5	267	–1.8	262	0.5	263	–0.2
Morecambe Bay HA	160	11.3	178	2.4	182	–1.4	180	–0.1	179	–1.1	177	2.1
North Cheshire HA	154	–4.8	147	1.5	149	3.5	154	0.3	155	1.7	158	0.4
North West Lancashire HA	238	–1.3	235	2.0	239	–1.2	236	0.5	238	1.4	241	0.3
Salford and Trafford HA	232	–0.5	231	2.0	235	–0.6	234	1.4	237	–4.1	227	–0.4
Sefton HA	142	3.0	146	–0.8	145	0.8	146	–0.2	146	0.7	147	0.7
South Cheshire HA	360	0.4	361	–0.5	360	2.8	370	0.2	370	–1.0	367	0.4
South Lancashire HA	163	–3.5	158	1.5	160	–0.7	159	–1.3	157	1.9	160	–0.5

NHS Plan GPs[1] by 2001 health authorities as at 1 October 1996–99 and 30 September 2000–01

Estimated whole time equivalents[2]

	1996[3]		*1997*		*1998*		*1999*		*2000*		*2001*	
Region/HA name	*GPs*	*% change*	*GPs*	*% change*	*GPs*	*% change*	*GPs*	*% change*	*GPs*	*% change*	*GPs*	*%[4] change*
St. Helens and Knowsley HA	172	1.2	174	0.1	175	0.7	176	−1.5	173	4.6	181	1.0
Stockport Health	149	−1.4	146	1.4	149	3.4	154	−0.9	152	1.9	155	0.9
West Pennine HA	219	2.3	224	0.1	224	−0.1	224	−2.2	219	1.5	222	0.3
Wigan and Bolton HA	282	0.5	284	0.4	285	−2.5	278	1.7	283	−2.8	275	−0.5
Wirral HA	184	1.3	186	0.4	187	0.0	187	2.5	192	−1.5	189	0.5
England Total	26,271	0.3	26,359	0.4	26,455	0.4	26,558	0.0	26,557	0.3	26,628	0.3

[1] NHS Plan GPs include GMS Unrestricted Principals, PMS Contracted GPs, PMS Salaried GPs, Restricted Principals, Assistants, Salaried Doctors (Para. 52 SFA) and PMS Other.

[2] WTE data have been estimated using the results from the 1992–93GMP Workload Survey. Full-time = 1.00 wte; three quarter time =0.69 wte, job share = 0.65 wte, half time = 0.60 wte.

[3] There were 286 LIZ Assistants in the 1996 census, we do not have sufficient details to calculate wte data below a national level. The national total for 1996 has been estimated based onavailable headcount data and a such will not equal the sum of components. Because of this, London data for 1996 and subsequent calculations based on 1996 London data needs to be treated with caution.

[4] Average annual percentage change 1996–2001.

Source:

Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 18 June 2002

TRANSPORT

Network Rail

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how much private finance will be brought in under the proposal for company limited by guarantee made by Network Rail; and in what areas this money is budgeted to be spent; [60652]

(2) if he will make a statement on the proposed funding arrangement for the successor to Railtrack, as given by the proposal for a company limited by guarantee made by Network Rail; and if he will make a statement. [60651]

Mr. Darling: Negotiations are continuing on a commercially confidential basis with Network Rail.

Railtrack

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much money has been *(a)* lent, *(b)* granted and *(c)* guaranteed to Railtrack by the Government and SRA since Railtrack was placed in administration. [58014]

Mr. Spellar: I have been asked to reply.

(a) I refer the right hon. Member to the reply given to the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) on 15 April 2002, *Official Report,* column 742W.

(b) Railtrack plc received a grant of £162 million on 16 November 2001 and £493 million on 1 April 2002 as part of Appendix D of the Rail Regulator's October 2000 Periodic Review and the 1 April 2001 agreement between the Government and Railtrack.

(c) As announced on 25 March 2002, the Administrators of Railtrack plc have secured up to £4.4 billion of commercial banking facilities, backed by a Government guarantee. This has enabled them to repay the short-term commercial loan that Government provided on 7 October 2001.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much was spent on maintenance by Railtrack in each of the last five years; and if he will publish the expected expenditure on maintenance for the *(a)* current and *(b)* next year. [60654]

Mr. Darling: The information requested is shown in the following table:

Financial year	*Maintenance expenditure in £ million cash*
1996–97	732
1997–98	702
1998–99	694
1999–2000	663
2000–01	715
2001–02	[1]943
2002–03	[2]1,112

[1] projected

[2] budget

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if the results of the enhanced basic questionnaire for prospective Railtrack contractors will be made available to the public. [62443]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 10 June 2002, *Official Report,* column 788W [60599].

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what maintenance delivery and other improvements are being followed up by Railtrack in line with the Cullen report. [62446]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 10 June 2002, *Official Report,* column 786W [60602].

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if his Department is represented on the Railtrack Safety Executive; [62455]

(2) if he will place a copy of the programme of safety tours that the Chief Executive Officer of Railtrack undertakes; [62454]

(3) what meetings his Department has had with Railtrack officials since the Southall rail accident. [62441]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 10 June 2002, *Official Report,* column 784W.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will list the steps to be completed by Railtrack to comply with the recommendations of the Cullen report into the Ladbroke Grove rail inquiry, indicating the timescales for these activities and the costs involved; [62442]

(2) if he will publish the results of the development of a corporate training and development strategy by Railtrack, as outlined in the Cullen report. [62456]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 10 June 2002, *Official Report,* column 786W.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the deferred timescales for Railtrack for the revised selection process for prospective contractors. [62444]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 10 June 2002, *Official Report,* column 788W.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the 10 strategic maintenance principles developed by Railtrack that involve Railtrack directly managing inspection, appraisal and key work decisions. [62445]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 10 June 2002, *Official Report,* columns 786–87W.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport who has responsibility to ensure that *(a)* Railtrack and *(b)* its successor company carry out all necessary maintenance work on the rail network. [60647]

Mr. Darling: It is for a network operator to comply with the terms and conditions of its network licence. Enforcement of licence conditions is a matter for the Rail Regulator. Additionally the Health and Safety Executive is responsible for enforcement of safety matters on the railway.

Railways

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the answer of 10 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 778W, on railways, how much of the money provided by the SRA *(a)* will be spent in Scotland and *(b)* has been spent so far. [62064]

Mr. Jamieson: This is a national initiative. Funding is not being allocated geographically. No money has yet been spent.

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the condition of the railway track on the line between Liverpool Street and Colchester. [58992]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

Track condition is an operational matter for Railtrack. Railtrack and their contractor, Balfour Beatty have inspected this line and have assured my Department that this line is safe. The Health and Safety Executive have also said that the line is safe.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the proposals for establishment of a railway industry safety body; and if he will place the consultation papers in the Library. [62440]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 10 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 784W.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if the development group meetings of key stakeholders of the rail industry safety body will be available to the public. [62452]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 10 June 2002, *Official Report*, columns 784–85W.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the initiatives and management systems that the rail industry use to ensure employee involvement in safety issues. [62453]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 10 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 785W.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the terms of reference, term of office and the job description for the successful candidate applying for the position of director in Her Majesty's Railway Inspectorate. [62449]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 10 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 789W.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will make a statement on the reasons for non-completion of recommendations 4, 6, 9 and 72 of the Cullen report into the Ladbroke Grove rail inquiry; and what the timetable is for their completion; [62438]

(2) what the terms of reference are for the local management teams that monitor the implementation of contracts for the rail industry. [62448]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 10 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 786W [60604].

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the shortcomings in the scope of contract documentation reported in the Cullen report on the Ladbroke Grove Rail Inquiry. [62447]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 10 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 786W [60603].

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the primary legislation required to set up the Railway Advisory Investigation Branch will be published. [62451]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 10 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 784W [60607].

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on details regarding the timescale, terms of reference and costing of the consultation exercise on the establishment of an independent rail accident investigation body. [62439]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 10 June 2002 *Official Report*, column 785W [60595].

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the terms of reference are for the two additional members of the Railway Industry Advisory Committee; and from which areas nominations will be accepted. [62450]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 10 June 2002, *Official Report*, columns 789–90W.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what budgetary provision has been made for compensating train operating companies for increases in track access charges determined by the Rail Regulator in the current and future control periods. [62978]

Mr. Spellar: Payments made to train operating companies by the Strategic Rail Authority under franchise agreements are automatically adjusted by the amount of any change in fixed track access charges determined by the Rail Regulator. For the current control period the amount of 10-year plan funding committed to the rail industry was set, and subsequently adjusted, to reflect the (October 2000) final conclusions of the Rail Regulator's periodic review of access charges. For future control periods, track access charges will be determined by future periodic reviews.

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with the SRA about improving the skills level on the railways; and will he make a statement. [62033]

Mr. Jamieson: The SRA, in conjunction with DfES, is taking forward work identified in the Framework for Skills in the Rail industry, published in March last year. The first progress report was published in December. The SRA is also leading on proposals for a National Rail Academy, to take a strategic overview of skills in the rail industry. It will be working closely with other key stakeholders and aims to consult widely on the proposals in the autumn.

Computers

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures are *(a)* in place and *(b)* under discussion in his Department in order to ensure compliance with the WEE Directive. [60749]

Mr. Spellar: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for Trade and Industry on 12 June 2002.

Aviation Industry

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he makes of the environmental cost resulting from aviation industry use of UK airports. [60432]

Mr. Darling: The then DETR reported on available estimates of environmental costs in "Valuing the External Costs of Aviation", which was published in December 2000. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimates he has made of the increase in carbon dioxide emissions from aviation over the next 20 years. [60430]

Mr. Darling: The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change provides forecasts of carbon dioxide emissions from aircraft over the next 20 years and beyond for a range of scenarios. They can be found in figure 1 on page 6 of their report "Aviation and the Global Atmosphere" (1999). These estimates are generally accepted to be the best currently available.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the change in fuel efficiency of aircraft, using UK airports, over the last 30 years. [60428]

Mr. Darling: Specific information on fuel efficiency of aircraft using UK airports is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Aviation industry representatives estimate that global fuel consumption per passenger kilometre has been reduced by about 60 per cent. since 1970, largely through improvements in engine and airframe technology. Reasons for these improvements include more stringent standards as well as commercial initiatives.

NATS

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the assumptions used to set the five-year price cap regime for NATS in 2001. [60657]

Mr. Darling: National Air Traffic Services (NATS) is subject to price regulation by the RPI-X method, which is the standard model for monopoly regulation in the United Kingdom. The charge cap, or "X" factor, for the first five years of the public private partnership (PPP) was set by the Government, in the light of advice received from the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA).

The CAA's advice on the charge cap was based on a well-considered and comprehensive analysis of NATS' operational and investment plans and the potential for efficiency savings. The advice fully reflected the Government's, and the CAA's, commitment to giving the highest priority to safety.

The CAA recommended that the "X" factor for NATS' UK monopoly services be set at 5 per cent. per year for each of the first five years. The Government considered this advice carefully, alongside representations from NATS and the projections of bidders for the NATS PPP, and decided to set charge capping at 2.2 per cent. for 2001, 3.0 per cent. for 2002, 4.0 per cent. for 2003, and 5.0 per cent. for each of 2004 and 2005.

Furthermore, since delays are a major concern to airlines, the Government decided that the charge cap should include a delay term, so that the "X" factor would automatically tighten, thereby reducing NATS' revenues, if delays increased.

In reaching these decisions, the Government was concerned to achieve a smooth transition to the PPP and to enable NATS' management to focus on getting the change and investment programmes right during the early years of the PPP.

Air Traffic

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the increase in air traffic, over the last 30 years, using UK airports. [60429]

Mr. Darling: The number of passengers using UK airports has increased from 35 mppa in 1971 to 180 mppa in 2001. This corresponds to an average annual increase of 5.9 per cent. in passengers using UK airports over this 30 year period.

Buses

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) when formal type approval arrangements will be introduced for minibuses; [61811]

(2) what arrangements are planned for mandatory checks of seat belt installations on non-PSV minibuses to ensure they meet legally required standards. [61810]

Mr. Spellar: My Department is considering the implementation of a national type approval procedure for all buses, including minibuses, by the end of 2003, as part of a current review of bus and coach construction and use requirements. Checks of seat belt installation would be part of that procedure.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he will take to ensure that an *(a)* anti-lock braking system and *(b)* tachograph will be a mandatory safety feature for new buses. [61808]

Mr. Spellar: All new buses are already required to be fitted with an anti-lock braking system.

The fitting and use of tachographs is subject to a European Union (EU) Regulation from which there is an exemption for buses on routes of less than 50 kilometres.

A European Commission proposal to alter the scope of this Regulation and the EU drivers' hours rules themselves is currently being considered by member states.

Abandoned Cars

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures his Department intends to introduce to *(a)* strengthen vehicle licensing controls and *(b)* improve the traceability of the owners of abandoned cars. [62665]

Mr. Spellar: The Government is actively pursuing measures to improve the accuracy of the vehicle record, which would enable the authorities to trace more easily the keepers of abandoned cars, as well as those involved in crime.

The Finance Bill currently before Parliament includes enabling powers for changes to vehicle taxation, making possible a system of continuous registration which will ensure that the registered keeper of a vehicle cannot avoid responsibility for licensing it. There will be consultation with the motor trade and motorists' groups before any changes are implemented. The legislation will not affect the current system of Statutory Off-Road Notification (SORN) under which keepers who tell DVLA that they are taking their vehicles off the road are not obliged to tax them.

The Government has also recently announced that it has set up a Modernising Vehicle Registration Implementation Board which will take forward work on the recommendations of a review of the vehicle registration system that the Department undertook in partnership with the insurance industry.

East Midlands Airport

Mr. Anthony D. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he intends to designate East Midlands airport under section 80 for the purposes of section 78 of the Civil Aviation Act 1982, in order to impose restrictions on night flying there. [63190]

Mr. Jamieson: The Secretary of State was asked by North West Leicestershire district council (and by others) to designate this airport in order to impose night restrictions using the powers by which operational noise is currently regulated at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted airports.

I have written to the council to inform them that the Secretary of State has decided, after careful consideration, not to designate the airport. Following local discussions, the airport management has produced its own proposals, to which it is committed, for the control of noise including night noise. The Secretary of State is satisfied that these controls are sufficient in all the circumstances of the case, including the broad long-standing policy that noise controls should be settled locally where possible, such that designation is not appropriate for the present.

I encourage East Midlands airport, as well as other airports, to continue discussions in consultation with local stakeholders, and to keep their noise control regulations under review with the aim of minimizing noise nuisance from the airport's legitimate operations.

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the mandate of the Committee on Experts on the Transit of Natural Gas through Grids is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [61710]

Ms Hewitt: I have been asked to reply.

The mandate of the Committee is to conciliate in disputes between network operators over conditions for the use of gas transit pipelines, as set out in Article 3 of Council Directive 91/296/EEC of 31 May 1991 on the transit of natural gas through grids.

The Committee has not met in the past 12 months. The UK representation is provided by Lattice Group plc. There is no UK public funding of this Committee. There are no items currently under consideration by the Committee.

The Commission's current proposals for liberalising the European energy market would repeal Directive 91/296/EEC and so remove the legal base for this Committee.

Royal Geographical Society Speech

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library a copy of the speech made by the Secretary of State for Environment, Transport and the Regions to the Royal Geographical Society on 5 June 1997; and if he will make a statement. [61254]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: I have been asked to reply.

I have today placed copies of the speech in the Libraries of the House.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Departmental Website

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the cost of the redesign and re-launch of her Department's website. [52309]

Ms Hewitt: The redesign of the site was part of the ongoing process of making it easier for users to find the information they require. The contract for the redesign was let by tender, and six companies were invited to tender, in accordance with normal departmental rules. The winning company were judged to offer the best value for money for the job. As I informed the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) on 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 393W, the cost was £60,294 including VAT.

We are currently undertaking customer research to ascertain the success of the redesign. We will be talking to the three main audience groups, businesses, consumers and employees, to ensure that the site continues to meet their needs.

Anti-competitive Practices

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will ask the Director General of Fair Trading to investigate possible anti-competitive practices by mobile telephone network providers who prevent non-contracted pay-as-you-go consumers from switching networks on their handsets until they have spent a minimum amount on calls. [56584]

Miss Melanie Johnson: This is a matter for the Director General for Telecommunications. I understand that he intends to investigate this practice in the near future.

Departmental Regional Organisation

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what regional organisation her Department has; and if she will list the counties and unitary authorities in each region in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2002. [58946]

Ms Hewitt: The Department of Trade and Industry works at regional level through the Government Offices for the Regions. There are nine Government offices in England: south-east, south-west, London, east of England, east midlands, west midlands, Yorkshire and the Humber, north-west and north-east. The Government offices are funded by nine sponsor Departments, including my Department. The Regional Co-ordination Unit based in the office of my right hon. Friend, the Deputy Prime Minister has overall responsibility for the Government office network.

The county and unitary authorities in each of the nine English regions are set out in a table which my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and the Regions has placed in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which of the agencies and NDPBs sponsored by her Department have a regional organisation; and if she will list the counties and unitary authorities in each region in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2002. [58947]

Ms Hewitt: Following is the information in respect of the Department's NDPBs.

Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service

Region/Area covered

Scotland

All counties and authorities in Scotland.

Northern

All counties and unitary authorities covered by the Government offices for the north-east and Yorkshire and the Humber.

North-west

All counties and unitary authorities covered by the Government office for the north-west.

Midlands

All counties and unitary authorities covered by the Government offices for the east and west midlands.

Wales and the west

All counties and authorities in Wales plus counties and unitary authorities covered by the Government office for the south-west.

London, eastern and southern areas

All counties and unitary authorities covered by the Government offices for the east of England, London and the south-east.

The regional structure of ACAS at 1 April 1997 was the same as this with the following exceptions.

The county of Cumbria was covered by ACAS's northern region rather than north-west region.

Wales and the south-west were two separate regions.

The south-west region also covered Hampshire (except north-east Hampshire), Oxfordshire, Berkshire and the Isle of Wight.

Gas and Electricity Consumer Council (Energywatch)

Region/Area covered

North-east (Newcastle)

Counties: Northumberland, Tyne and Wear, Durham, north, west and south Yorkshire, East riding, Nottinghamshire, Lincolnshire.

Central (Birmingham)

Counties: Herefordshire, Worcestershire, West Midlands, Warwickshire, Leicestershire, Rutland, Cambridgeshire, Norfolk, Suffolk, Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Northamptonshire, Oxfordshire, Gloucestershire.

South-east (London)

Counties: London, Essex, Kent, Surrey.

Southern (Bournemouth)

Counties: East Sussex, West Sussex, Berkshire, Hampshire, Wiltshire, Bristol, Dorset, Somerset, Devon, Cornwall.

North-west (Manchester)

Counties: Cumbria, Lancashire, Greater Manchester, Merseyside, Cheshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Derbyshire

and the unitary authorities therein.

The GECC was established in 2000.

Consumer Council for Postal Services (Postwatch)

Postwatch was established in January 2001. There are six regional committees covering England. The exact boundaries of the regions are determined by discrete postcode areas, resulting in some counties being covered by more than one region.

The Postwatch Northern England region covers the counties of Cumbria, Northumberland, Durham, Lancashire, North Yorkshire, Cheshire and parts of Lincolnshire and Derbyshire and the unitary authorities of Darlington, Stockton-on-Tees, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland, Blackpool, Blackburn, Halton, Warrington, York, East Riding of Yorkshire, North Lincolnshire, city of Kingston upon Hull, North-east Lincolnshire.

The Postwatch Midlands region covers the counties of Staffordshire, Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Shropshire, Worcestershire, Warwickshire, Leicestershire, Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire, and Northamptonshire and the unitary authorities of Herefordshire, Stoke, the Wrekin, South Gloucestershire, city of Derby, city of Nottingham and the city of Leicester.

The Postwatch East of England region covers the counties of Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Cambridgeshire, Bedfordshire and parts of Lincolnshire and Hertfordshire and the unitary authorities of city of Peterborough, Luton and Milton Keynes.

The Postwatch South and West region covers the counties of Cornwall, Devon, Wiltshire, Dorset, Somerset and parts of Berkshire and West Sussex and the unitary authorities of city of Bristol, Swindon, Reading, Wokingham, Bracknell Forest, West Berkshire, North

Somerset, Bath and North-east Somerset, Bournemouth, Poole, Isle of Wight, Southampton, Portsmouth, Torbay and city of Plymouth.

The Postwatch South-east England region covers the counties of Kent, East Sussex, Surrey, and parts of West Sussex, Hampshire, Buckinghamshire, Berkshire, Essex and Hertfordshire and the unitary authorities of Windsor and Maidenhead, Slough, Brighton and Hove, Medway, Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock.

The Postwatch Greater London region covers the county of Middlesex and parts of Kent, Essex and Surrey and the 32 London boroughs and the Corporation of London.

In addition there are Postwatch offices for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The DTI sponsors the eight Regional Development Agencies in England. They cover the following areas:

East Midlands

The counties of Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire and Nottinghamshire.

The non-metropolitan districts of Derby, Leicester, Nottingham and Rutland.

Eastern

The counties of Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk and Suffolk.

The non-metropolitan districts of Luton, Peterborough, Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock.

London

Greater London.

North-east

The counties of Durham and Northumberland.

The metropolitan districts of Gateshead, Newcastle upon Tyne, North Tyneside, South Tyneside and Sunderland.

The non-metropolitan districts of Darlington, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland and Stockton-on-Tees.

North-west

The counties of Cheshire, Cumbria and Lancashire.

The metropolitan districts of Bolton, Bury, Knowsley, Liverpool, Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale, St. Helens, Salford, Sefton, Stockport, Tameside, Trafford, Wigan and Wirral.

The non-metropolitan districts of Blackburn with Darwen, Blackpool, Halton and Warrington.

South-east

The counties of Buckinghamshire, East Sussex, Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Kent, Oxfordshire, Surrey and West Sussex.

The non-metropolitan districts of Bracknell Forest, Brighton and Hove, the Medway towns, Milton Keynes, Portsmouth, Reading, Slough, Southampton, West Berkshire, Windsor and Maidenhead and Wokingham.

South-west

The counties of Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Gloucestershire, Somerset and Wiltshire.

The non-metropolitan districts of Bath and north-east Somerset, Bournemouth, Bristol, North Somerset, Plymouth, Poole, South Gloucestershire, Swindon and Torbay.

The Isles of Scilly.

West Midlands

The counties of Shropshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire and Worcestershire.

The metropolitan districts of Birmingham, Coventry, Dudley, Sandwell, Solihull, Walsall and Wolverhampton.

The non-metropolitan districts of Herefordshire, Stoke-on-Trent and Telford and Wrekin.

Yorkshire and the Humber

The county of North Yorkshire.

The metropolitan districts of Barnsley, Bradford, Calderdale, Doncaster, Kirklees, Leeds, Rotherham, Sheffield and Wakefield.

The non-metropolitan districts of the East Riding of Yorkshire, Kingston upon Hull, North-east Lincolnshire, North Lincolnshire and York.

The National Consumer Council has no regional organisation, however it has two subsidiary organisations, the Welsh Consumer Council and the Scottish Consumer Council covering Wales and Scotland respectively.

I have asked the chief executives of the Department's agencies that have a regional organisation to respond to the hon. Member direct, copies of which have been placed in the Library.

Refurbishment

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the refurbishment projects that *(a)* are in progress and *(b)* will start within the next six months; and what action is being taken to ensure that these will procure certified timber. [59774]

Ms Hewitt: *(a)* The information is as follows:

Elizabeth House, York Road, London—refurbishment works to the first and second floors

Sunley Towers, Piccadilly, Manchester—refurbishment works to the nineteenth floor

Athol House, Aberdeen—lift refurbishment

Ongoing programme of replacement of old office furniture with more space-efficient furniture.

(b) The information is as follows:

1 Victoria Street and 10 Victoria Street, London—internal redecorations

Kingsgate House, Victoria Street, London—external redecoration

Kingsgate House, Victoria Street, London—air conditioning enhancements

Kingsgate House, Victoria Street, London—reception refurbishment.

Only projects costing £100,000 or more have been included.

The following steps are taken in order to ensure that certified timber is procured.

All HQ furniture is procured through the Office for Government Commerce's (OGC) central Government buying framework arrangements. It is a condition of all furniture suppliers to the Department to have FSC certificates.

Contractors engaged in building works are required by our pre-qualification procedures to act in accordance with ISO 14001, which includes a commitment to use legal and sustainable sources of timber.

Business Links

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many start-up firms have received help from Business Links in each of the past three years. [61311]

Nigel Griffiths: Until 2002–03 SBS has not required Business Links to provide information on assistance to businesses by age of the business.

However, the SBS has required Business Links to provide management information on the number of clients assisted as part of the High Growth Potential start-up programme and more generally the number of pre-starts (people thinking about/trying to start a business) helped.

High Growth Potential (HGP) start-ups and pre-start businesses assisted—England

	1999–2000	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
HGP start-ups	465	2,769	5,219
non HGP pre-starts	[1]—	[1]—	83,515

[1] Not available

Source:

Business Link management information returns

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Advisory Committee for Co-ordination in the Internal Market Field is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [61702]

Ms Hewitt: The mandate for this committee is set out in Articles 1 and 2 of Council Decision of 23 December 1992 as follows:

> There shall be attached to the Commission an Advisory Committee for Co-ordination in the Internal Market Field, hereinafter referred to as 'the committee'. The committee shall comprise two representatives of each member state and be chaired by a representative of the Commission.
>
> The committee may be consulted by the Commission on any practical problem which may arise after 1 January 1993 concerning the functioning of the internal market other than those which are covered by action taken in accordance with arrangements to notify to the Commission, laid down in any other applicable Community measure or established within an existing framework for practical co-operation between the Commission and the member states.

The committee is divided into a number of formations, but has met in total 10 times within the last 12 months, and the UK is represented by a DTI official except in the case of the 'Better Regulation' formation where a Cabinet Office (Regulatory Impact Unit) official also attends. It is not possible to calculate the cost to public funds of the work of the committee without incurring disproportionate cost. The travel expenses for meetings of the committee are reimbursed by the Commission.

The main issues/topics considered at the last meetings of the various formations were:

Heads of Delegations

Internal market and enlargement; 'SOLVIT' problem solving system; review of the Commission's internal market strategy;

IMAC (general)

Effective problem solving in the internal market ('SOLVIT' database); European Business Test panel; marking the 10th anniversary of the internal market; company taxation and the internal market; Citizens Signpost Service; the May 2002 Internal Market Scoreboard; candidate countries and administrative co-operation;

Heads of Co-ordination Centres

Effective problem solving in the internal market ('SOLVIT' database);

SLIM (Better Regulation)

Modernising the European Business Test panel; The Commission's Better Regulation package; national simplification initiatives post-Mandelkern report; better regulation in other Community institutions; outcome of the 5 phase of SLIM.

In practice many of the items considered by the committee are also considered by Council working groups and the internal market Consumers and Tourism Council of Ministers. Proposals for Council legislation and other EU published documents are subject to UK parliamentary scrutiny.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the European Advisory Committee on Research is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [61705]

Ms Hewitt:

1. The European Research Advisory Board (EURAB) is a high level, independent, advisory committee created by the European Commission to provide advice on the design and implementation of EU policy in research and technological development.

2. In the last year, EURAB met on four occasions: 26 September 2001 (its inaugural meeting), 13 December 2001, 20 March 2002 and 28 May 2002.

3. There are three UK-based members of EURAB. Members of EURAB act in a personal capacity, member states do not have formal membership.

4. It is not possible to calculate the cost to public funds of the work of the committee without incurring disproportionate cost. The travel and subsistence expenses for meetings of EURAB, or any working party set up within the committee will be met by the European Commission in accordance with the current administrative rules and regulations.

5. EURAB's work is currently focused on: The Role of Universities in the European Research Area, Enlargement and the European Research Area, Evaluation, European Research Area: Scope and Vision, Improving Innovation, and Increasing the attractiveness of science, technology and engineering careers.

6. EURAB's role is to deliver advice and opinions on specific issues either at the request of the Commission or on its own initiative. In carrying this out, EURAB operates independently from the Commission, from member states and from existing science or industry organisations. It may nevertheless co-operate with organisations and institutions interested in European research, to create working groups on specific themes and to consult with other experts who could enrich its reflection. While the deliberations of the Board are confidential, its activities will be reported annually to the Commissioner responsible for Research. All advice or opinions adopted by the Board are also forwarded

to the Commissioner and made known to the other EU Institutions and to member states. EURAB's Annual Report and any advice or opinions it makes are published on the internet http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/eurab/index—en.html

Public Holidays

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to introduce for all employees *(a)* statutory entitlement to bank and public holidays and *(b)* a right to either time off, double pay or time off in lieu; and if she will make a statement. [62393]

Alan Johnson: The Government have no plans to change the existing bank holiday arrangements.

Tropical Hardwoods

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what systems her Department has in place to track Brazilian mahogany in the UK for the purpose of issuing re-export licences where necessary. [60670]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply.

We have no systems in place to track Brazilian mahogany in the UK. An exporter wishing to re-export unprocessed Brazilian mahogany outside the EU requires a re-export permit from my Department, and would need to present a stamped import notification form as proof of legal importation. Any cargo presented for re-export without the necessary documentation would be liable for seizure.

However, most Brazilian mahogany imported into the UK will be made into furniture and if re-exported will not require a re-export permit under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) because such permits are required only for logs, sawn woods and veneer sheets.

Small Businesses

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many members of her Department have been seconded to small businesses in the past five years; and what proportion of total placements these secondments account for. [61309]

Ms Hewitt: In recording information on the secondment of DTI staff to the private sector we have not, historically, included an indication of the size of the companies involved. It is not therefore possible to give the information requested. However, I have placed in the Library of both Houses information on the number of secondments commenced in each of the past five years and the companies involved. The total number of secondments to the private sector since 1997 has been 112.

We have recently introduced a new system for recording information on secondments and in future, where it is available, we will be recording within three ranges the size of the companies to which we send staff.

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps the Government have taken to reduce the level of regulations affecting small businesses in the last three years; and what further plans she has in this respect. [61160]

Nigel Griffiths: The Government has put in place a number of measures to reduce the burden of regulations on small businesses, including:

Announced in January 2000 that employers with over four or fewer employees will be exempt from the requirements to provide access to stakeholder pensions and deduct pension contributions.

Announced in April 2000 an increase in the statutory audit threshold for companies from £350,000 to £1 million. This measure will relieve up to 150,000 small firms from the burden of a statutory audit, saving small companies up to £180 million a year.

We have exempted small shops from the new EU unit pricing requirements.

We have exempted employers with 20 or fewer employees from the trade union recognition procedures in the Employment Relations Act.

The Small Business Service has produced clear guidance on a number of complex regulations.

The Business Link Website is now attracting 80,000 users per month—and businesses can register to receive alerts about regulations automatically.

A 12 weeks period between regulations has been agreed and implemented allowing owner managers time to adapt to the new regulations.

Ensured that the view of small business influenced Patrick Carter's review of payroll administration, a copy of which is in the Libraries of the House.

In February we published the regulatory Reform Action Plan—setting out over 250 proposals for better regulation and reform.

Further to these measures:

An estimated 900,000 SMEs benefit from measures announced in Budget 2002, including 485,000 businesses whose corporation tax bill has been cut or abolished, and 700,000 small businesses who will be able to benefit from our flat rate VAT scheme.

Regulatory Impact Assessments (RIAs) have to be produced for all regulations setting out clearly the costs and benefits with full recognition of small business concerns. The Department's policy is to 'think small first': the Small Business Service has to be consulted on all RIAs to ensure that the impact on small firms is not disproportionate.

Following the recent review of the DTL, the regulatory challenge function within the Department has been strengthened. A new team has been created specifically to consider how the Department should challenge existing and future legislation as well as to how to ensure all policy makers fully consider alternatives to regulation at the outset of the policy making process.

DEFENCE

Courts Martial

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of HM armed forces have been brought before courts martial in each of the past eight years charged with violent offences against *(a)* male and *(b)* female (i) members of HM armed forces and (ii) civilians. [61388]

Mr. Ingram: The information is not held in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 18 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 61W, on courts martial, if he will break down the cases involving violent crime by *(a)* severity of offence, *(b)* sex of victim and *(c)* whether the victim was a member of HM armed forces. [61387]

Mr. Ingram: Available information on cases in the three services presented to courts martial during the year 2000 involving violent crime are as follows. The services do not employ a formal ranking of severity for violent offences, and so the offences are presented by type.

Royal Navy

Assault occasioning actual bodily harm—11 charges. All victims were members of the armed forces and consisted of 10 males and one female.

Assault—23 charges. 21 victims belonged to the armed forces and two were civilians and consisted of 18 males and five females.

Fighting—2 charges. Both were naval personnel.

Army

Assault occasioning actual bodily harm—101 charges

Common assault/battery—33 charges

Grievous bodily harm/wounding—32 charges

Grievous bodily harm/wounding with intent—9 charges

Affray—7 charges

Protection from harassment—4 charges

Fighting/violence against a superior—3 charges

Threatening/abusive behaviour—1 charge

Other violent offences—2 charges.

The Army statistics presented show individual cases that may include the individual being charged with more than one charge. In such cases, the more severe charge is listed—e.g, cases involving GBH and AOABH have been listed under GBH.

The sex of the victim, or whether they were members of the armed forces or civilians is not held centrally, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Royal Air Force

Assault occasioning actual bodily harm—12 charges

Battery—12 charges

Common assault—2 charges

Grievous bodily harm—1 charge

Unlawful wounding—1 charge.

The sex of the victim, or whether they were members of the armed forces or civilians is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Service Personnel

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the net loss of people per month was for the *(a)* Army, *(b)* RAF and *(c)* Navy in each of the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [62245]

Mr. Ingram: The information requested is set out in the table.

Month of flow		*Naval service*	*Army*	*RAF*
April 2001	Officers	24	92	14
	Other ranks	121	445	96
May 2001	Officers	92	70	20
	Other ranks	475	119	116
June 2001	Officers	46	20	27
	Other ranks	17	450	35
July 2001	Officers	28	20	80
	Other ranks	116	91	44
August 2001	Officers	42	67	15
	Other ranks	298	85	33
September 2001	Officers	133	189	0
	Other ranks	13	1,406	46
October 2001	Officers	42	32	3
	Other ranks	143	0	5
November 2001	Officers	47	52	1
	Other ranks	4	202	31
December 2001	Officers	24	49	46
	Other ranks	82	251	75
January 2002	Officers	109	250	49
	Other ranks	86	810	27
February 2002	Officers	36	21	79
	Other ranks	34	194	154
March 2002	Officers	25	16	7
	Other ranks	49	3	58

Naval service includes both Royal Navy and Royal Marines.

Figures are for UK regular forces (including both trained and untrained personnel) and therefore exclude Gurkhas, full-time reserve personnel, the Home Service battalions of the Royal Irish Regiment, mobilised reservists and activated reservists.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the manning targets for the three services have been redefined since the publication of the Strategic Defence Review; and if he will make a statement. [62243]

Mr. Ingram: Manpower targets for each of the three services reflect the outcome of the strategic defence review and are set out in the current public service agreements. The target for each service is as follows:

The Naval Service to reach full manning within a tolerance band +1–2 per cent. in 2004;

The Army to reach 97 per cent. of its manning requirement in 2004;

The Royal Air Force to reach full manning against the requirement within a tolerance band of +1–2 per cent. by 2004.

The manpower requirement for each service reflects the necessity to deliver the capabilities and meet the commitments that were identified in the strategic defence review. The requirements, and the performance in meeting them, are reported by the Defence Analytical Services Agency both annually in UK defence statistics and quarterly under national statistics arrangements. Copies of these publications can be found in the Library of the House.

The Services' manpower requirements are dynamic and subject to annual review in light of evolving doctrine, new technology and equipment, and possible changes to the operating environment. For example, a review of the Army's future manpower requirement has recently been concluded, resulting in a revised manning target of 106,978.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many servicemen and servicewomen applied for premature voluntary retirement in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1999, *(c)* 2000 and *(d)* 2001; and if he will make a statement. [62246]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to Tri-Service Publication 5: UK Regular Forces Premature Voluntary Release. This publication is available in the Library of the House and is updated on a quarterly basis.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the manpower shortages against trained establishment were in *(a)* 1998, *(b)* 1999, *(c)* 2000 and *(d)* 2001; and if he will make a statement. [62241]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to Table 1 of the Quarterly Press Release on Services Manpower (TSP 4), a copy of which is held in the Library of the House.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the manning targets are for the *(a)* Army, *(b)* Navy and *(c)* RAF; and if he will make a statement. [62242]

Mr. Ingram: Manning targets can be found in the monthly publication; 'UK Armed Forces Strengths and Requirements' (TSP 3), a copy of which will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the outflow was of Regular Serving Personnel for *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99 and *(c)* 2000–01; and if he will make a statement. [62244]

Mr. Ingram: Outflow from trained strength of the UK Regular Forces is as follows:

	Financial Year		
	1997–98	*1998–99*	*2000–01*
Total	19,030	19.750	18,430
Naval Service	4,140	4,140	3,620
Army	10,620	11,250	10,640
RAF	4,270	4,360	4,180

Note:

Due to rounding methods used totals may not always equal the exact sum of the parts.

Defence Logistics Organisation

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his latest estimate is of the expenditure overspend for the Defence Logistics Organisation in the current year; what the principal cause of the overspend is; and how the overspend is to be funded, broken down by in-year spending reductions under other budget headings of his Department. [62221]

Mr. Ingram: The Defence Logistics Organisation is under remit to operate within its Control Totals for the current financial year 2002–03 and there is no reason to believe that it will overspend.

Tornado

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the cost has been of the Tornado F3 MLU programme. [62236]

Mr. Ingram: The Tornado F3 fleet has not undergone a Mid-Life Update programme.

A capability sustainment programme to integrate the Advanced Short Range Air-to-Air Missile (ASRAAM) and Advanced Medium Range Air-to-Air Missile (AMRAAM) onto the aircraft is nearing completion at a cost of £125 million.

In addition, the Tornado F3 fleet is currently undergoing, or planned to undergo, a number of upgrade activities that will maintain the aircraft's operational capability for the remainder of its in-service life. The work comprises integration of secure communication equipment, a Successor Identification Friend or Foe system, an instrumentation enhancement to aid training and a programme to maximise the effectiveness of the AMRAAM, and will cost an additional £125 million.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects Tornado fighters fitted with AMRAAM to be operational; and what radar system will be fitted to such Tornado fighters. [62230]

Dr. Moonie: There are currently 94 Tornado F3 aircraft operational with Advanced Medium Range Air-to-Air Missiles.

The current radar system fitted to the Tornado F3 is the Foxhunter Air Intercept radar known as the A124. There are no plans to change it.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the AMRAAM missiles fitted to Tornado F3 aircraft are able to be used to their full capabilities. [62238]

Dr. Moonie: A capability sustainment programme to integrate the Advanced Medium Range Air-to-Air Missile (AMRAAM) on the Tornado F3 aircraft is nearing completion. A further programme of work to optimise the effectiveness of AMRAAM is currently under way to enable the Tornado F3 fully to exploit the missile's capability. This work is due to be completed in the spring of next year.

Gurkhas

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has made to the Government of Nepal concerning the treatment of former British Army Gurkhas in Nepal by the Gurkha Army Ex-Servicemen's Organisation; and if he will make a statement. [62219]

Mr. Ingram: The Gurkha Army Ex-Servicemen's Organisation (GAESO) is one of a number of ex-Gurkha organisations based in Nepal. Unfortunately, there have been reports in the past of GAESO activists using threats of violence to extort money from former Gurkha soldiers. This is unacceptable intimidation of sometimes weak and vulnerable pensioners who have provided this country with dedicated service over many generations. In light of these reports, the then Minister for the Armed Forces, my right hon. Friend the Member for Warley (Mr. Spellar) wrote to the Prime Minister of Nepal in April 2000. Our concerns were also reinforced during subsequent visits to Nepal by my right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and my right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State for Defence. The British Embassy in Kathmandu also maintain regular contact with the Nepalese Government and police authorities. There have been no reports of illicit fund raising since October 2001.

Harrier GR9

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what extra training Sea Harrier pilots will have to undergo to convert to Harrier GR9; and what the cost will be of that training per pilot. [62336]

Mr. Ingram: We expect Sea Harrier FA2 pilots to undertake a course lasting approximately 12 weeks, comprising approximately 35 hours of flying, in order to convert to the Harrier GR7 aircraft. The content of the conversion course has yet to be finalised but the majority of training will be learning how to operate the aircraft weapons systems and sensors.

It is anticipated that the conversion course will be cost neutral because Sea Harrier FA2 pilots would have flown approximately the same number of hours to retain currency in that aircraft during a similar period. No additional resources have therefore been needed for this training.

Tank Regiments

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he plans to reduce the number of tank regiments in the British Army; [62226]

(2) if he plans to reduce the number of Challenger 2 tanks in the British Army; and if he will make a statement. [62222]

Mr. Ingram: There are no plans to reduce the number of tank regiments or the number of Challenger 2 tanks in the British Army.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the *(a)* establishment and *(b)* fully trained manned strength was of each tank regiment in the British Army in March of each of the past five years; and if he plans to reduce the establishment of the regiments. [62227]

Mr. Ingram: The establishment and trained manned strength of regiments equipped with Challenger 2 tanks[1] as at 1 April 2002 and in each of the previous four years is detailed as follows. There are no plans to reduce the establishment of these regiments.

[1] 8 Squadron 1 Royal Tank Regiment/Joint Nuclear Biological and Chemical Regiment retains Challenger 2 tanks in their role as the demonstrations squadron at Warminster.

Regiment	*Establishment*	*Strength*
1 April 2002		
Scots Dragoon Guards	497	457
Royal Dragoon Guards	497	495
Queen's Royal Hussars	497	508
King's Royal Hussars	497	488
Queen's Royal Lancers	497	475
2 Royal Tank Regiment	506	489
1 April 2001		
Scots Dragoon Guards	497	415
Royal Dragoon Guards	497	470
Queen's Royal Hussars	497	441
King's Royal Hussars	497	486
Queen's Royal Lancers	497	451
2 Royal Tank Regiment	506	538
1 April 2000		
Scots Dragoon Guards	511	424
Royal Dragoon Guards	511	431
Queen's Royal Hussars	511	399
King's Royal Hussars	511	463
Queen's Royal Lancers	511	445
2 Royal Tank Regiment	511	439
1 April 1999		
Scots Dragoon Guards	411	382
Royal Dragoon Guards	470	412
Queen's Royal Hussars	408	396
King's Royal Hussars	470	453
Queen's Royal Lancers	470	514
2 Royal Tank Regiment	410	387
1 April 1998		
Scots Dragoon Guards	394	373
Royal Dragoon Guards	470	400
Queen's Royal Hussars	470	470
King's Royal Hussars	470	451
Queen's Royal Lancers	470	440
2 Royal Tank Regiment	394	380

Parachute Regiment

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the establishment target figure was for each battalion of the Parachute Regiment at the end of the year 2001; what the actual figures were in each case; and if he plans to cut the establishment target figures for the Parachute Regiment. [62228]

Mr. Ingram: The establishment and trained manned strength of the three regular battalions of the Parachute Regiment as at 1 January 2002 is detailed in the table.

	Establishment	*Strength*
1 PARA	620	599
2 PARA[1]	686	695
3 PARA	687	712
Total	1,993	2,006

[1] The figures provided for both the establishment and strength of 2 PARA do not include the Gurkha Reinforcement Company that was attached to the battalion up until 1 April 2002.

Due to the reorganisation of 16 Air Assault Brigade announced in December 2001 and the inclusion of 1 PARA within the Brigade structure, it is planned to adjust the establishment of the three regular parachute battalions, towards a common figure of about 650.

Infantry Recruitment

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of infantry recruits was generated by *(a)* the Recruitment Group and *(b)* by the regiment's own efforts in the last 12 months. [62231]

Mr. Ingram: Army recruiting is an integrated operation involving both the Army Training and Recruiting Agency's Recruiting Group and the Field Army. All recruits are enlisted at an armed forces career office, and no central record of the source of their interest is maintained, although Recruiting Group is developing a contacts management database that will provide a broad indication of this in due course.

Royal Navy Vessels (Asylum Seekers)

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many Royal Navy vessels, and of which types, have been identified as being suitable for the control and interception of asylum seekers; [62232]

(2) what requests he has received from other Departments for Royal Navy vessels to be used in the interception and control of asylum seekers; and how many vessels have been requested; [62233]

(3) what plans he has for Royal Navy vessels to patrol *(a)* domestic and *(b)* international waters on duties related to the control and interception of asylum seekers. [62234]

Mr. Ingram: The management of all issues relating to immigration and asylum are the responsibility of the Home Office. Should they require military assistance, procedures are in place for them to make a request to the Ministry of Defence. No request has been received relating to the interception of asylum seekers in either national or international waters.

Hercules

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects work to be completed on the assessment of the airflow around the fuselage of the C130J Hercules aircraft. [62220]

Mr. Ingram: We are currently looking at what effect the airflow characteristics of the C130J Hercules aircraft has on its role in the aerial delivery of paratroopers and material. Separate trials are required for the C130J Mk5 and Mk4 aircraft and it is expected that all elements of the work will be successfully completed by mid-2003.

Contaminated Land

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what regulations cover radioactively contaminated land *(a)* owned and *(b)* managed by his Department. [61965]

Mr. Ingram: At present there are no regulations covering specifically radioactively contaminated land. However, a consultation paper on the control and remediation of radioactively contaminated land was jointly published by the then Department for Environment, Transport and the Regions and the Welsh and Scottish Offices in February 1998. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is considering the way forward on regulations concerning radioactively contaminated land in the light of the responses to that consultation.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent studies have been conducted by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* non-departmental public bodies responsible to his Department and *(c)* consultants on behalf of his Department into the clean up of (i) radioactively contaminated land and (ii) land contaminated by non-radioactive toxic pollution. [61963]

Mr. Ingram: In 1995 the Ministry of Defence embarked on a prioritised programme to assess the land quality across the defence estate. More than 600 land quality assessments have been carried out across the defence estate since the start of the programme. The land quality assessment work carried out to date has indicated that the majority of the defence estate is free of contamination, and where contamination has been identified, it has been predominantly localised and confined to soil horizons. The common contaminants are metals, fuels, oils and lubricants, solvents, and to a lesser extent, asbestos and radionuclides from luminised instruments. Where contamination has been encountered, appropriate management actions have been taken.

Nuclear Materials (Transportation)

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was *(a)* the origin of the consignment, *(b)* the physical form, *(c)* the isotopic composition and *(d)* the quantity of the nuclear materials delivered from the United States to RAF Brize Norton on 19 April; what carrier was used for the delivery; and whether the consignment is covered by the Reppir regulations on radiological emergencies and public information. [61960]

Mr. Ingram: I am withholding details in accordance with Exemption 1—defence, security and international relations—of the code of practice on access to Government.

Dirty Radioactive Bombs

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent research has been undertaken *(a)* by and *(b)* on behalf of his Department into prophylactic measures to deal with dirty radioactive bombs. [61968]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence does not carry out research targeted at dealing with dirty radioactive bombs. However, my Department is carrying out relevant research, including work on the nuclear and radiological aspects of military NBC defence, a review of potential radiological weapons, and support to development of equipment for use by service personnel in military operations, such as radiation alarms, dosimeters and survey meters. Among other things, this contributes to the Home Office led, inter-departmental mechanisms that ensure the Government can prevent, and respond to the widest possible range of terrorist actions in the United Kingdom.

India

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he last held discussions with the Indian Defence Minister. [62186]

Mr. Hoon: I last had formal discussions with my counterpart, the Indian Defence Minister on 22 January 2002. Although we met briefly at the International Institute for Strategic Studies conference on Asian security held in Singapore between 31 May and 2 June 2000, it was not possible to hold substantive discussions.

Jobs (Scotland)

Mr. Tom Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the number of jobs in Scotland *(a)* directly and *(b)* indirectly dependent on defence expenditure. [61969]

Mr. Ingram: The most recent figures published by the Defence Analytical Services Agency (DASA) indicate that there are 9,044 civilian personnel and 14,460 service personnel directly employed by the Ministry of Defence in Scotland. The most recent figures for civilian and service personnel are from April 2002 and July 2001 respectively.

It is estimated that around 6,000 people are supported by the placement of MOD contracts in Scotland. This is the most recent figure available and relates to the year 1998–99.

At present, we do not have any figures to suggest how many people are supported by MOD work that has been sub-contracted to Scottish firms.

It is difficult to estimate the indirect jobs that MOD generates and we are currently reviewing our multiplier methodology. As a rule of thumb, using a multiplier of 0.5, a further 14,752 people may be indirectly supported by the MOD presence in Scotland both through firms which supply goods and services to MOD/contractor establishments in Scotland (indirect jobs), and through consumer spending by MOD/contractor employees in the country (induced effects).

Troop Deployments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many British troops are stationed abroad; and in which countries. [62184]

Mr. Ingram: I refer my hon. Friend to Tri-Service Publication 6: Global Deployment of Service Personnel. This publication is available in the House of Commons Library and is updated on a six-monthly basis.

Army (Recruitment)

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many applications to join the Army from Northern Ireland were rejected on national security grounds in each year since 1998. [62642]

Mr. Ingram: Applications to join the Army in Northern Ireland that were rejected for all reasons for the period requested as follows:

Financial year	*Applications rejected*
1997–98	227
1998–99	162
1999–2000	189
2000–01	165
2001–02	99
2002–03[1]	16

[1] To date.

In common with other Government Departments, it is the Ministry of Defence's policy to maintain the freedom to accept, or reject, any person for employment without disclosing the reason why.

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many applications to join the Army were made in each year since 1998. [62641]

Mr. Ingram: The information requested is as follows:

Financial Year	*Number of applications*
1998–99	37,915
1999–2000	37,844
2000–01	33,679
2001–02	38,855
2002–03[1]	7,951

[1] To 31 May.

Defence Procurement

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Coventry, South (Mr. Cunningham) of 10 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 748W, if he will state which of the countries listed have offset agreements with the UK; what the value of UK defence exports to each listed country in each year since 1997 was; and in how many cases MOUs were signed after June 1997. [63040]

Dr. Moonie: The only Government to Government offset arrangement is that associated with the Al Yamamah programme in Saudi Arabia. Otherwise offset arrangements are normally a matter between the customer and the vendor company. Information on commercial offset agreements are not held centrally by the Ministry of Defence and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Lists of licences granted for the countries mentioned in the answer of 10 June can be found in copies of the Strategic Export Controls annual reports for 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000. Copies of these reports can be found in the Library of the House. The 2001 edition is currently being prepared.

Since 1997 the UK Government have signed 47 memorandums of understandings. Countries featured are: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Egypt, Finland, Germany, Italy, Jordan, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey, USA.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Research Projects

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what research projects sponsored and undertaken by her Department have been *(a)* cancelled and *(b)* postponed in the last three months; [60385]

(2) what recent changes have been made to her Department's research budget. [60384]

Margaret Beckett: The creation of DEFRA has brought together research, monitoring, surveillance and advisory programmes totalling in excess of £250 million annually. We are currently reviewing our science programmes and strategy following the recent appointment of a new Chief Scientific Adviser and in the light of the aims and objectives of the new Department.

Ozone-depleting Substances

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations her Department has made to the European Commission seeking the promotion of non-ozone depleting alternative refrigerants. [60880]

Mr. Meacher: The Department has not made any direct representations to the Commission on this issue. However, my officials meet regularly with counterparts from other EC member states and the European Commission to discuss issues arising from EC Regulation 2037–2000 on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer. They are taking an active part as members of the European Commission's "European Climate Change Programme (ECCP) Working Group Industry, Work Item Fluorinated Gases", which considers policies and measures on fluorinated gases such as hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) to enable the European Community to meet its commitments under the Kyoto Protocol.

On 23 October 2001, the Commission adopted the Communication on the implementation of the first phase of the ECCP. This includes a proposal to bring forward legislation designed to reduce emissions of fluorinated greenhouse gases, including HFCs, along the lines recommended in the report of the Working Group. The Environment Council, at its meeting of 12 December 2001, supported the Commission's proposal for legislative action.

The European Commission expects to publish a first draft of the legislation this Autumn. By implementing regulatory action on ozone depleting substances, as well as on HFCs which replace them in applications such as refrigeration, I anticipate a greater use of refrigerants which have no ozone-depleting potential and do not significantly contribute to climate change.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action her Department is taking to persuade the European Commission to accelerate the phase-out dates for ozone depleting substances. [60879]

Mr. Meacher: My officials meet regularly with counterparts from other EC member states and the European Commission to discuss issues arising from EC Regulation 2037–2000 which implements the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer. Together with the European Commission, the UK and other member states consider possible EC proposals for improving and strengthening the Protocol.

EC Regulation 2037–2000 already imposes on the UK and other member states significantly stricter controls on the production, sale and use of ozone-depleting substances than are required of other Parties to the Protocol. For example, the Regulation bans the use of CFCs in the servicing of existing equipment, where the Protocol only concerns itself with their production and supply to the market and imposes no use controls. Also, HCFCs are to be phased out under the Protocol by 2030, but under the Regulation they must be phased out by 2010 for newly-produced material and 2015 for recycled material.

Rural Economy

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many income-deprived rural wards there were in England and Wales in the last 10 years; and what percentage of wards this was. [60862]

Alun Michael: Information on the percentage of people in receipt of means-tested benefits in rural wards in England is contained in the table.

Percentage of people in receipt of means-tested benefit	*Number of rural wards*
Less than 5	102
5 to less than 10	1,271
10 to less than 15	1,317
15 to less than 20	753
20 to less than 25	338
25 to less than 30	168
30 to less than 40	123
40 or more	25

Notes:

1. Analysis of figures for Wales is a matter for the Welsh Assembly Government.
2. Information for other years is not readily available.
3. The benefits and the year to which the data relate are: adults in income support households for 1998; children in income support households for 1998; adults in income based jobseeker's allowance households for 1998; children in income based jobseeker's allowance households for 1998; adults in family credit households for 1999; children in family credit households for 1999; adults in disability working allowance households for 1999; children in disability working allowance households for 1999; non-earning, non-IS pensioner and disabled council tax benefit recipients for 1998.
4. People in receipt of more than one means-tested benefit are counted only once.
5. There is no agreed percentage above which areas are defined as income-deprived. The table therefore gives the number of rural wards in each percentage band.
6. There is variation between areas in the extent to which people who are eligible claim means-tested benefits.

Sources:

Figures for numbers in receipt of benefits come from the Department for Work and Pensions and form the basis of the Index of Income Deprivation (a subset of the Index of Multiple Deprivation).

Classification of rural wards made by the Countryside Agency.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many households in rural areas lived below the poverty line in each of the last 12 years, broken down by constituency. [60865]

Alun Michael: Information on the number of households below average income is not available for rural areas within each constituency. A table containing information on the percentage of people in receipt of means-tested benefit in rural wards in each constituency will be placed in the House of Commons Library.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to allocate additional funds for young people through *(a)* specific grants and *(b)* the revenue support grant to rural local authorities. [61174]

Alun Michael: We work closely across Government to ensure that policies for children and young people take into account particular rural issues rather than allocating separate funds through such grant mechanisms. Both Sure Start and Connexions are good examples of Government programmes where the identification of specific rural needs have led to the policies being developed in ways that help meet those needs.

Funding

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many projects were funded and what amount of funding was given by her Department and its predecessor to research on disease mechanisms, broken down by category, in each of the last 10 years. [61171]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* The level of DEFRA/MAFF funded research into veterinary science has increased from £20.7 million to £37.5 million per annum over the past ten years, 1992–93 to 2001–02 inclusive. The number of projects funded is relatively constant with 281 funded in 1992–92 and 294 in 2001–02.

A summary of the number of projects and annual costs broken down by disease category is as follows.

DEFRA/MAFF funded veterinary research

	SE[1] (£)	FBZ[2] (£)	TB[3] (£)	Welfare[4] (£)	TSEs[5] (£)	Endemics[6] (£)	Vetmed[7] (£)	Total spend (£)	Total no. of projects
1992–93	2,534,312	1,314,202	922,200	5,047,372	5,700,000	4,238,000	1,011,000	20,767,086	281
1993–94	3,655,164	1,613,991	1,071,544	4,829,620	6,200,000	4,805,000	1,151,000	23,326,319	284
1994–95	4,426,804	1,712,476	1,286,560	4,228,202	5,800,000	3,960,771	1,689,424	23,104,237	267
1995–96	4,189,123	1,908,169	1,484,286	4,255,462	5,600,000	3,892,278	1,712,758	23,042,076	274
1996–97	3,997,814	1,920,323	1,692,981	4,200,706	6,800,000	3,995,019	1,837,397	24,444,240	277
1997–98	3,650,299	1,993,241	1,719,387	4,078,745	10,100,000	3,785,207	1,804,333	27,140,212	299
1998–99	3,549,670	1,743,123	2,541,005	3,654,758	12,651,000	3,760,415	1,809,258	29,709,229	279
1999–2000	3,803,981	3,023,709	4,114,066	3,361,174	15,068,000	3,315,959	1,439,685	34,126,574	308
2000–01	3,746,853	3,528,362	5,265,709	3,714,391	13,284,000	3,127,310	1,576,388	34,243,013	301
2001–02	3,864,687	3,348,476	6,112,005	3,208,878	16,243,407	2,967,958	1,831,383	37,576,794	294

[1] Statuto[illegible] and exotic diseases

[2] Food bo[illegible] zoonoses

[3] Bovine tuberculosis

[4] Animal welfare

[5] Transmissible spongiform encephalopathy

[6] Alternatives to pharmaceutical control of disease

[7] Veterinary medicines

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what level of funding was provided by her Department and its predecessor to veterinary science research, broken down by category, in *(a)* cash and *(b)* at constant prices in each of the last 10 years. [61193]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* The level of funding into veterinary science research provided by DEFRA/MAFF over the last 10 years is provided in the table. This has increased from £20.7 million to £37.5 million per annum over the past 10 years, 1992–93 to 2001–02 inclusive.

DEFRA/MAFF funded veterinary research

	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95	1995–96	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01	2001–02
SE[1]	2,534,312	3,655,164	4,426,804	4,189,123	3,997,184	3,650,299	3,549,670	3,803,981	3,746,853	3,864,687
FBZ[2]	1,314,202	1,613,991	1,712,476	1,908,169	1,920,323	1,993,241	1,743,123	3,023,709	3,528,362	3,348,476
TB[3]	922,200	1,071,544	1,286,560	1,484,286	1,692,981	1,719,387	2,541,005	4,114,066	5,265,709	6,112,005
Welfare[4]	5,047,372	4,829,620	4,228,202	4,255,462	4,200,706	4,087,745	3,654,758	3,361,174	3,714,391	3,208,878
TSEs[5]	5,700,000	6,200,000	5,800,000	5,600,000	6,800,000	10,100,000	12,651,000	15,068,000	13,284,000	16,243,407
Endemics[6]	4,238,000	4,805,000	3,960,771	3,892,278	3,995,019	3,785,207	3,760,415	3,315,959	3,127,310	2,967,958
Vetmed[7]	1,011,000	1,151,000	1,689,424	1,712,758	1,837,397	1,804,333	1,809,258	1,439,685	1,576,388	1,831,383
Total spend	20,767,086	23,326,319	23,104,237	23,042,076	24,444,240	27,140,212	29,709,229	34,126,574	34,243,013	37,576,794
Total number of projects	281	284	267	274	277	299	279	308	301	294

[1] Statutory and exotic diseases

[2] Food borne zoonoses

[3] Bovine tuberculosis

[4] Animal welfare

[5] Transmissible spongiform encephalopathy

[6] Alternatives to pharmaceutical control of disease

[7] Veterinary medicines

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what initiatives, broken down by category and amount, have received Agriculture Development Scheme funding over the last two years. [61176]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 18 June 2002]:* There have been three rounds of the Agriculture Development Scheme. For reasons of commercial confidentiality the amounts of individual awards are not published. The successful projects and the sectors to which they relate are listed below. A total of £7 million has been awarded: £2 million on 2 February 2000, £3 million on 14 August 2000 and a further £2 million on 18 February 2002.

First round: £2 million of awards announced 2 February 2000

Sector	*Lead organisation*	*Project*
Pigs	Assured British Meat	National assurance database information and administration system (pigs module)
Pigs	Assured British Meat	ABM Assured British Pigs Scheme data merger
Pigs	BOCM Pauls Ltd.	Maximising pig carcase value
Pigs/organic	Eastbrook Farm Organic Meats Ltd.	Growing the organic pigmeat market from a UK production base
Pigs	Food Trak plc	Traceability in the pig meat supply chain
Pigs	JSR Farms Ltd.	Integrated pig meat supply initiative
Pigs	Ladies In Pigs	A catering colleges initiative to secure the future for British pigmeat in catering
Pigs	Meat and Livestock Commission	Project 2: improving supply chain communications

First round: £2 million of awards announced 2 February 2000

Sector	*Lead organisation*	*Project*
Pigs	National Pig Association	A risk management initiative for the UK pig industry
Pigs	United Pig Marketing	A shared IT and information system for UPM and its supply chain partners
Pigs	University of Aberdeen	A training package for the British pig industry using multi-media technology
Beef	Glendale Beef Producers	Glendale Beef Producers initiative
Beef/dairy	Warwickshire Quality Calves	Improving the value of beef calves from the dairy herd
Dairy	National Milk Records plc	Proposal for a south-west dairy information network
Dairy/organic	Organic Milk Suppliers Co-operative	Design and initial implementation of a novel technology transfer and quality management system on organic dairy farms
Dairy/speciality	Business Link Bradford and District	Feasibility study into potential for a yoghurt production facility for the Asian community
Eggs	British Free Range Egg Producers Association	British Free Range Egg Marketing Company Ltd.
Sheep	British Sheep Dairying Association	Implementation of structural development of the sheep dairy sector
Sheep/speciality	Business Link Bradford and District	New routes to new markets—investigation into ways of making better use of sheepmeat products to the benefit of producers
Wild Boar	The British Wild Boar Association	To improve collaborative marketing activity between primary and secondary producers of British farmed wild boar
Livestock general	Assured British Meat	Multiple retail caterers—food safety assurance module
Livestock general	Assured British Meat	Assurance chain—focus farms
Livestock general/ regional/speciality	Assured British Meat	Assurance and food heritage
Livestock general	Farmway Ltd.	Marketing co-operatively produced branded pork, beef and lamb through 'Farmway' co-operative stores: a feasibility study
Livestock general	Harper Adams University College	Building regional enterprise and agricultural competitiveness through IT (Breakthrough-IT)
Livestock general	Meadow Valley Livestock Ltd.	Improving farmers' efficiency and returns by directing them to market led, added value marketing schemes
Livestock general	South East Primestock Producers (SEPP) Ltd.	A plan for regional growth and farmer
Livestock general/ organic/speciality	Humane Slaughter Association	Mobile slaughter unit 2000
Nursery stock	Horticultural Trades Association	A project to influence structural change in the landscape supply chain to build value in the soft landscape market
Nursery stock	Horticultural Trades Association	A project to extend the HTA nursery certification scheme to include the inspection and supply of local provenance
Nursery stock	Horticultural Trades Association	A project to develop a greater understanding of the supply chain within the nurserystock sector
Onions	British Onion Producers Organisation	Sector analysis of the onion market
Potatoes	Hereward Growers	Collaborative marketing initiative
Soft fruit	Advanced Marketing Services Ltd.	Soft fruit development for category management
Soft fruit	The Berryworld Producers' Organisation Ltd.	Development of an integrated traceability system for the soft fruit industry
Tomatoes	Tomato Growers Association	Investigation into the development of an integrated quality management system for the British tomato industry
Top fruit	Fruition Group Ltd.	Rationalisation: the basis of a full category player
Horticulture general	Checkmate International	Benchmarking services for the EUREP GAP framework
Horticulture general	Institute of Grocery Distribution	Benchmarking the industry
Combinable crops	Samuel Rose Ltd.	Promoting vertical integration through farmer collaboration in agricultural supply chains
Combinable crops	United Grain Producers	The Marlborough Group (working together to improve farm incomes)
Farmers' markets	National Association of Farmers Markets	Together to market
Direct selling	Farm Retail Association	Red and green box scheme feasibility study
Viticulture	The Magpie Consultancy	Formation of a collaborative marketing company owned by producers and devoted to the marketing development of the wines and vineyards of England
Trout	Longford Estate	Co-ordinated approach to trout marketing
General	Plunkett Foundation	Increasing competitiveness in the farmer controlled business sector through the use of best practice benchmarking
General	Lantra	Increasing the competitiveness of the land based sector

Second round: £3 million of awards announced 14 August 2000

Sector	*Lead organisation*	*Project*
Beef	Beef Improvement Grouping Ltd.	Stabiliser suckler beef dam line—accelerated multiplication and selection
Beef	Mole Valley Farmers Ltd.	The Pilgrim Beef Project
Dairy	National Dairy Farm Assurance Scheme Ltd.	Re-assuring the milk supply chain
Eggs	British Free Range Egg Marketing Ltd.	Establishment of an internet based free range and organic egg inter-trading system in co-operation with Freedom Food Egg Guarantee Scheme (EGS)
Eggs	United Kingdom Egg Producers Association Ltd.	Enriched cages—impact on future market strategy for independent poultry producers in the UK
Pigs	British Pig Association	Collaborative market research, benchmarking and marketing to increase sales of 'pedigree pork'

Second round: £3 million of awards announced 14 August 2000

Sector	*Lead organisation*	*Project*
Pigs	Cotswold Pig and Development Company Ltd.	To manage the pig supply chain by introducing new business practices that increase the level of collaborative marketing
Pigs	Dalehead Foods Ltd.	Design and development of an e-supply chain
Pigs	Environment Agency	Wessex Outdoor Pig Partnership
Pigs	Meat and Livestock Commission	Collaborative Catering Pork Proposal
Pigs	University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne	A training package for the British pig industry using multi-media technology
Poultrymeat—organic	Sheepdrove Organic Farm	The Sheepdrove Organic Poultry Producer Group
Sheep	Meat and Livestock Commission	Northern Uplands Sheep Strategy—To improve the financial viability of hill sheep producers, by increasing the number of lambs meeting market requirements
Sheep	Messrs. Dixon	The Scrapie Resistant Swaledale Sheep Project
Veal	Anglo Dutch Meats (Charing) Ltd.	UK welfare friendly veal production for export under DBES
Veal	Rose Veal UK Ltd.	(Phase 2) Natural fed, freedom reared, welfare friendly, British veal
Venison	British Deer Farmers Association	Farmed Venison Production: Improving efficiency and standards in the supply chain by streamlining best practice transfer
Livestock—general	Meadow Valley Livestock Ltd.	Provision of specialist advice to pig producers; added value markets for beef and lamb.
Livestock—general	Rare Breeds Survival Trust	Traditional Breeds Meat Marketing Scheme (TBMMS)
Cereals	Glencore Grain UK Ltd.	Use of an internet tool to improve profitability of cereal production
Cereals	National Institute of Agricultural Botany	Benchmarking the market focus of the UK cereal producing sector
Cereals	United Grain Producers Ltd.	Improving the market awareness and competitive position of "Farmer Controlled Businesses" in the development and marketing of combinable crops
Top fruit	English Apples and Pears	Creation and validation of a maturity index for English dessert apples and pears
Ornamentals	EUROGRO	Workshops and training seminars under the agricultural development scheme second bidding round
Industrial crops	British Biogen	National Scheme For Energy Crop Marketing and Development
Fish	British Trout Association	Economic impact assessment of the UK trout industry
Other	First Honey Co-operative	Collaborative marketing of British honey; an initiative by First Honey Co-operative
General	Assured Food Standards	Developing the definitive authority for farm and food assurance
Farmers' markets	National Association of Farmers Markets	Marketing for Markets
General	National Farmers Union London	Improving competitiveness, building a better understanding of the food supply chain among farmers, growers and directors of FCBs.
Collaborative marketing	Plunkett Foundation	Collaborative Marketing—working together for profit

Third round: £2 million of awards announced 18 February 2002

Sector	*Lead organisation*	*Project*
Beef	Beef Improvement Grouping Ltd. and Paragon	Beef Genetic Services—a joint venture to enable central embryo transfer provision and maximum stabiliser multiplication rates.
Beef	Swindells Livestock Ltd. and Dickens Partnership	The production of quality beef from intensive vegetable production by-products, dairy calves, a by-product of the dairy industry and the investigating of marketing alternatives for this product using non-traditional market systems.
Beef/dairy	Meadow Quality Ltd.	Facilitating integrated collaborative marketing; integrated suckler-cow beef supply chains; and enabling dairy farmers and rearers to be involved partners in improved English beef production.
Beef/dairy	UK Sire Services Ltd.	Promotion of the English beef and dairy gene pool
Dairy	Royal Association of British Dairy Farmers and Plunkett Foundation	Strengthening the competitiveness of English milk groups—improved corporate governance through farmer-director development.
Pigs	PIC UK Ltd. on behalf of QSC Farmer Group	QSC—quality supply chain
Pigs	Porcofram Marketing	Future marketing and production strategies
Sheep	British Charollais Sheep Society	To establish a central body, which acts as the main link between ram breeders, prime lamb producers, abattoirs, meat processors, retailers and consumers and lead to the consumption of improved quality lamb from farms, which are selected by consumers.
Sheep	Meat and Livestock Commission	Northern Upland Sheep Strategy—Phase 2
Livestock/general	Freedom Food	Freedom Food Direct: A new model for animal agriculture.
Livestock/general	Oxlot Ltd.	21st century Livestock Marketing: Live real time on line market auction.
General/regional food	South West Regional Food and Drink Group	South West Food Plus—a pilot model for a regional food trade organisation.
General	Farmers First plc	The establishment of Aria foods and the introduction of meat chips into the UK Market.
General	Model Farm Society	Model farm society
General	Royal Agricultural Society of England	Farmer controlled businesses: raising the game

Genetically Modified Crops

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what *(a)* timetable and *(b)* expenditure is planned for the public debate on genetically modified crops. [61175]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs announced on 31 May that the Government considered that there should be a full and informed debate on GM issues, including GM crops. The Government want to start the debate as soon as possible. They are considering the timetable and expenditure for the debate.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what plans she has to change the procedure for approval of GM foods and seeds; [58544]

(2) what plans she has to alter the rights of members of the public who object to the approval of GM foods and seeds to protest against such moves. [58546]

Mr. Meacher: All EU member states are in the process of implementing directive 2001/18/EC on the deliberate release into the environment of genetically modified organisms, which replaces and updates the old directive 90/220/EEC.

The new directive introduces a more robust framework for taking decisions on whether or not to allow the release of GMOs, including GM seeds, in the UK and the EU. It clarifies and increases the level of scientific scrutiny required in assessing safety implications of proposed releases of GMOs. Risk assessments have been extended to cover 'indirect' and 'long-term' risks to the environment. It also introduces 'post-market monitoring', under which any GMO which is granted consent to be used commercially must be monitored for unanticipated effects on the environment.

The new directive also introduces a new requirement for mandatory public consultation before decisions are taken on applications for consents to release GMOs. We propose that public consultations in England on research trial applications must last for a minimum of 48 days. Consultations on commercial applications (for which the European Commission is responsible) will consist of two separate periods of 30 days.

The Department consulted the public on broad issues raised by the new directive in autumn 2001. We recently began a second public consultation on draft implementing regulations for England, and aim for the regulations to enter into force in October 2002. Copies of the consultation paper are being placed in the parliamentary Libraries.

The Scottish Executive, the National Assembly for Wales and the Department of Environment for Northern Ireland will make separate implementing regulations on issues for which they have devolved powers.

GM foods are approved in Europe in accordance with the provisions of the EC Novel Foods and Novel Foods Ingredients Regulation (258/97). A European Commission proposal for a single GM food and feed regulation is currently under negotiation. The proposal aims to improve the involvement of the public in the authorisation process.

Changes to the Seeds (National Lists of Varieties) Regulations 2001 will be needed in the near future to amend references to EC seeds marketing directives which are currently being codified by the Council of the European Union. In addition, on 21 November 2000 the Government replied to a parliamentary question about changes to the arrangement for requesting a hearing on proposed national list decisions. In this reply, the Government said that they would wish to consider whether the current arrangements are satisfactory for all parties, in the light of the proposed addition of a genetically modified plant variety, Chardon LL, to the national list. The Chardon LL hearing will finish around mid-June this year and the time is right to review how those arrangements have worked. If changes are proposed, all interested parties will be fully consulted.

Driving Lessons (Teenagers)

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what environmental assessment and assessment of the traffic implications she has made of proposals to encourage the *(a)* loan of mopeds and *(b)* cash help for driving lessons to teenagers in rural areas. [61325]

Alun Michael: The rural White Paper charged the Countryside Agency with evaluating existing Wheels to Work schemes and subsequent production of a good practice guide for their development and implementation. The evaluation does not include a specific environmental assessment or an assessment of the traffic implications of encouraging loans of mopeds or cash help for driving lessons for teenagers in rural areas.

Such assessments were not deemed to be necessary because the scale of Wheels to Work is fairly small: 21 schemes were identified and while new schemes will be set up, they are only ever likely to affect a small proportion of the population. The Countryside Agency will continue to monitor the number of new schemes developing to remain informed about possible environmental impacts.

Countryside Access

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of access to the countryside and right of way broken down by region; and if she will make a statement. [61133]

Alun Michael: We are on course to meet our target to open up all open country and registered common land in England under Part I of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 by the end of 2005. Draft maps of open country and registered common land have been issued and consulted upon for the south-east and lower north-west regions, but no specific assessment by region has been carried out. An assessment of the condition of rights of way in England was published recently by the Countryside Agency, but the Government have not produced any information on rights of way nationally or regionally. Work is progressing to produce regulations for Part II of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 with an aim to have the majority of provisions in force by the end of 2003.

Timber

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will support the proposal from Nicaragua and Guatemala to upgrade mahogany from CITES appendix III to appendix II at the 12th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES in November. [62322]

Mr. Meacher: As with all plant proposals put to the 12th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, we shall be advised on this by the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, our scientific authority on these matters.

I can confirm, however, that in principle we support the proposal by Nicaragua to include the neotropical populations of Swietenia macrophylla (big leaf mahogany) in appendix II of the convention.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to seize Brazilian mahogany imported since 19 October 2001. [50462]

Mr. Meacher: We have no plans to seize Brazilian mahogany imported since 19 October 2001. All of the mahogany that has been imported into the United Kingdom since then has been accompanied by export permits provided by the Brazilian Management Authority.

Countryside Stewardship Scheme

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of countryside stewardship agreements her Department's Rural Development Service has visited in each year since the scheme began. [60673]

Mr. Morley: A programme of care and maintenance visits is carried out by technical staff from DEFRA's Rural Development Service. This programme currently aims to cover around 20 per cent. of agreements each year. These visits are not part of the separate compliance monitoring programme, undertaken by staff from the Rural Payments Agency which inspects 5 per cent. of agreements annually. Prior to the creation of the Rural Development Service in April 2001, care and maintenance visits were carried out by technical staff from the Farming and Rural Conservation Agency.

Trickle Irrigation

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will examine the case for the protection of trickle irrigation in consultations on the draft water Bill; and if she will make it her policy that trickle irrigators are *(a)* granted time-limited licences equivalent to their current abstraction and *(b)* equally treated with other abstractors when licences are reviewed under the Environment Agency's Catchment Abstraction Management Strategy. [60680]

Mr. Meacher: I have examined the case for the protection of trickle irrigation before issuing the Government's response to the consultation on the water Bill. There will be a two-year transitional period during which trickle abstractors can apply for abstraction licences. During this time the Environment Agency will be required to ensure that there is no derogation of their abstractions.

The Department is drawing up transitional provisions aiming to ensure that established use of trickle irrigation is not disadvantaged compared to other licensed abstractions for agricultural or horticultural purposes. In doing so, I shall consider whether present trickle irrigators should be automatically granted time limited licences equivalent to their current abstraction when the exemption is removed, to enable trickle licences to be reviewed on a par with other abstractions as part of the Catchment Abstraction Management Strategy (CAMS) process.

Broadband

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the benefits of access to broadband services for rural diversification; and if she will make a statement. [61793]

Alun Michael: The Government are convinced that ICT has a central role in broadening the economic base in rural areas. Stimulating broadband across the whole of the UK, especially outside of large towns and cities, is one of Government's top priorities. Measures to drive further roll-out will include:

encouraging infrastructure sharing by telecommunications companies to reduce the cost of roll-out;

facilitating satellite broadband deployment, with a fast-track, on-line licensing regime and a review of planning regulations for satellite terminals;

using more effective procurement of the public sector's broadband requirements to drive broadband into rural areas and also to improve value for money. The Government are tasking the Office for Government Commerce to investigate what further steps Government Departments can take to procure broadband more effectively and to act as a source of guidance.

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what target she has set for the roll-out of broadband services across the rural community; and if she will make a statement. [61794]

Alun Michael: In February 2002 the Government published "UK Online: the Broadband Future" which set the target for the UK to have the most extensive and competitive broadband market in the G7 by 2005. The Government have put in place a £30 million fund to allow regional development agencies and devolved Administrations to develop schemes for extending broadband into areas that appear commercially unattractive. Along with the Minister for Trade, I have discussed implementation with the regional development agencies in England and they are focusing on how best to target the needs of their region.

CAP

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much the average UK family of four contributed to the CAP in the last year for which estimates are available. [60558]

Mr. Morley: Individuals in the UK contribute to the CAP as consumers through higher food prices and as taxpayers through CAP direct support payments.

We estimate that, in 2000, a notional UK family of four paid £4-£5 per week in higher food prices as a result of the CAP. UK taxpayers do not contribute specifically to the CAP; rather, they contribute to the EU budget as a whole. Total EU payments in 2000 were approximately £51 billion (83 billion euros), of which around £25 billion (40.5 billion euros) was spent under the CAP. The UK currently provides around 13.5 per cent. of total budgetary contributions.

Nitrates

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will place in the Library a detailed account of the eutrophication methodology that she proposes to use to implement the EC nitrates directive. [61555]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* The methodology used to identify eutrophic nitrate vulnerable zones is summarised in annex A of the consultation paper "How should England implement the 1991 Nitrates Directive?", published in December 2001, and set out in more detail in annex B of the consultation paper "Methodology for identifying sensitive areas (Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive) and Methodology for designating vulnerable zones (Nitrates Directive) in England and Wales", published by the then Department of the Environment, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and Welsh Office, in March 1993. Both publications should be available in the Library.

CERRIE

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 16 May, *Official Report*, column 829W, on CERRIE, what the job titles are of the CERRIE Secretariat; and when the CERRIE website will become active. [62004]

Mr. Meacher: The CERRIE Secretariat do not have formal job titles beyond being members of the secretariat. The CERRIE website became active on 31 May 2002.

Protected Areas

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what evaluation the Government have made of the success of the Natura 2000 network of protected areas in the European Union; and what role the Government are playing in plans to extend these areas to new member states upon enlargement. [61992]

Mr. Meacher: The EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EC) requires each member state to identify and select special areas of conservation that, together with special protection areas under the Birds Directive, will form a coherent European ecological network to be known as Natura 2000. However, the adoption of site lists across the whole EU has been delayed, with lists comprising the six biogeographic regions not expected to be finalised until next year. Following the adoption of the lists of sites it will be for the European Commission and member states collectively to ensure that the network is evaluated against its stated aim of maintaining or restoring the features concerned at a favourable conservation in their natural range.

Member states are required to produce 6-yearly reports on the implementation of the Directive. Most member states have now done so for the period June 1994–December 2000. As soon as all countries have done so the Commission will seek to evaluate member states' successes. The UK's report "First Report by the United Kingdom under Article 17 on implementation of the Directive from June 1994 to December 2000" is in the House Library.

To join the European Union countries have to have a requirement to implement the environmental acquis, which includes implementation and enforcement of environment legislation on the Birds and Habitats Directives. No transitional periods have been agreed for these Directives and the UK has supported new member states proposing Natura 2000 sites upon entry. Scientific advice and support has been provided by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee to some enlargement countries to assist them to understand and apply the site selection requirements of the Habitats Directive.

Rural Population

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proportion of the population lives in rural areas broken down by *(a)* parliamentary constituency and *(b)* district and unitary councils. [60834]

Alun Michael: Information on the percentage of the population living in rural wards in each *(a)* parliamentary constituency and (b) district and unitary councils in England is contained in the attached tables. A copy will be placed in the House of Commons Library.

Performance Targets

Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the performance targets that her Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies are required to meet, apart from those set out in the public service agreements for 1999 to 2002 and 2001 to 2004; and if she will specify for each target *(a)* who sets it and *(b)* who monitors achievement against it. [60469]

Mr. Morley: Since the creation of DFERA in June 2001, the new department has focused, through the SR2002 process, on developing a set of performance targets which properly reflects its new role and responsibilities.

The performance targets for DEFRA, other than those set out in its interim PSA, are drawn from both the former MAFF Service Delivery Agreement and parts of the former DETR Service Delivery Agreement. These targets were agreed between each department and the Treasury.

Progress against these targets is monitored by the Finance, Planning and Resources Directorate of DEFRA. Details of the SDAs can be found at:

"www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/busplan/sda/sdahome.htm"

The DEFRA Departmental Report (Cmd 5422) provides details of how to access information about its Executive Agencies and Non Departmental Public Bodies including information on business plans and performance targets.

Ragwort

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to make the irresponsible spread of ragwort a prosecutable offence; and if she will make a statement. [60763]

Mr. Morley: Using powers contained in the Weeds Act 1959, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs can take statutory action to control the spread of five injurious weeds, including common ragwort.

Under the Act, the Secretary of State can serve an enforcement notice on an occupier of land on which any of the five injurious weeds are growing requiring the occupier to take action to prevent the weeds from spreading. The Act also permits officials to enter land to inspect whether an enforcement notice has been complied with. If an occupier has unreasonably failed to comply with the notice, he or she shall be guilty of an offence and, on conviction, is liable to a fine. The Act also contains additional powers, which enable the Secretary of State to take action to arrange for the weeds to be cleared and recover the cost of doing so from the occupier, if necessary through the courts. If the occupier of the land cannot be traced and he or she is not the owner of the land, the costs may be recovered from the owner, or failing that, a charge in respect of the costs may be placed on the land by order of the courts.

In practice, it is rarely necessary to invoke the formal powers of the Weeds Act. DEFRA investigates each complaint about injurious weeds on its merits, but gives priority to complaints where there is a threat to farmland, farming activities and on farm diversified equine activities. Once DEFRA officials have made the occupier of land aware of the presence of injurious weeds, the matter can usually be resolved satisfactorily through co-operation and advice, without taking statutory action.

Agricultural Tenancies

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to bring forward legislation to amend the Agricultural Tenancies Act 1995. [61541]

Mr. Morley: We are currently considering the recommendations made in the report prepared for DEFRA by Plymouth university evaluating the operation of the Agricultural Tenancies Act 1995. We are also considering the recommendations on tenancy issues made by the Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food. As part of this process we are currently consulting stakeholders.

We will make our initial thoughts on both reports known when we respond to the Policy Commission report in the autumn. If we conclude that legislative changes might be appropriate, we will consult further on the detail of those changes before bringing legislation forward.

Young People

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on what subjects and on which dates her Department has consulted organisations representing young people; and if she will list such organisations. [52503]

Mr. Morley: This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The Department is committed to the new core principles for the involvement of children and young people published by the Minister for Young People in November 2001. On 12 June, the Department published an action plan setting out how it will implement these principles and give children and young people a real say in the DEFRA policies and services that affect them.

Endangered Species

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if she will make a statement on the timetable for the proposed review of the Control of Trade in Endangered Species (Enforcement) Regulations 1997; [59739]

(2) when she plans to *(a)* begin and *(b)* complete the review of the Control of Trade in Endangered Species (Enforcement) Regulations 1997; and if she will make a statement; [59735]

(3) if she will start the review of the Control of Trade in Endangered Species (Enforcement) Regulations 1997 before the summer. [59738]

Mr. Meacher: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) on 23 May 2002, *Official Report,* column 501W.

The first stage of the review—discussions within Government—is under way, and should be completed by the end of June. Pre-consultations, to gather views from interested parties on the Government's initial proposals and the scope of the review, will then take place over the summer.

How quickly the full formal public consultation exercise can begin will depend on what arises from the pre-consultation process, and whether it necessitates further discussion within Government and with other parties. It should begin before the end of the year and will last for three months.

Proposals for any changes to the existing regulations as a result of the review will then be drawn up.

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which organisations she plans to consult *(a)* prior to and *(b)* during the review of the Control of Trade in Endangered Species (Regulations) 1997; and at what stage in the process she plans to consult them. [59736]

Mr. Meacher: Pre-consultations will take place over the summer with: interested Government Departments (including HM Customs and Excise and the territorial administrations); the Association of Chief Police Officers (and its Scotland and Northern Ireland counterparts); the Government's scientific advisers on conservation matters; the Sustained Users' Network; Wildlife Link (including WWF-UK); and the Partnership for Action Against Wildlife Crime.

We will make every effort to ensure that everyone who is affected by or who has an interest in the review is included in the formal public consultation process later this year.

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received concerning the review of the Control of Trade in Endangered Species (Enforcement) Regulations 1997. [59737]

Mr. Meacher: I have so far received over 150 letters from right hon. and hon. Members, and a handful of letters direct from members of the public. WWF-UK officers have also been in regular contact with me and with my officials.

Departmental Staff (Scotland)

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many and what percentage of *(a)* civil service, *(b)* executive agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public body jobs under the remit of her Department are located in Scotland; and how many of each have been relocated to Scotland since May 1997. [56311]

Mr. Morley: The number of jobs under the remit of DEFRA that are located in Scotland is as follows:

	Number of jobs	*Percentage*
(a) Core DEFRA	93	1.29
(b) Executive agencies	52	0.92
(c) NDPBs	147.5	1.03

Six NDPB jobs have been relocated to Scotland since May 1997.

Whales

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the members of her Department's consultative forum on whaling. [57500]

Mr. Morley: The current members of the Consultative Forum on Whaling are as follows:

Campaign Whale
Earthkind
Environmental Investigation Agency
Greenpeace
International Fund for Animal Welfare
[illegible] Mammal Society
Marine Conservation Society
RSPCA
Seawatch Foundation
Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society
Wildlife and Countryside Link
The Wildlife Trusts
WWF International
WWF-UK
Young People's Trust for the Environment.

Departmental Communications

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 30 April, *Official Report*, column 662W, on departmental communications, what the cost was of *(a)* preparing; *(b)* printing and *(c)* processing the consultation papers, information documents and forms. [55603]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 10 May 2002]:* The aggregated costs of preparation, printing, and processing are as follows. Obtaining figures of expenditure separated according to the categories set out in this question could be achieved only at disproportionate cost.

(a) 38 consultation papers were issued at a cost of £126,223.00.

(b) 418 items categorised as circulars/information literature documents were produced at a cost of £852,649.00.

(c) 225 forms targeted at farmers and ancillary organisations at a cost of £202,965.00.

The mailing costs associated with delivering these documents was £831,049.00.

Agricultural Shows

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will exempt agricultural shows from the 20-day standstill period for animal movements. [54346]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 7 May 2002]:* The rules applicable to the movement of livestock to and from agricultural shows will be kept under review to ensure that they are proportionate to the disease risks involved. For the time being veterinary advice is that it remains appropriate for stock moving to a show either to respect any standstill on the premises of departure, and to impose a 20-day standstill on their return, or for the show animal(s) to be isolated for 20 days on their home premises before departure and after their return.

The 20-day standstill is at the centre of the interim livestock movement restrictions currently in force to guard against a future outbreak. Scientific and veterinary advice is that it aids detection of disease and slows disease spread. A number of exemptions from the standstill have been introduced, on veterinary advice, in order to help livestock farmers without causing an unacceptable increase in disease risk. These interim arrangements are currently under review, but whatever changes may be made to the interim rules this summer, the Government intend to take full account of any relevant findings from the FMD inquiries before it reaches a final view on the role that a 20-day standstill might play in the long-term controls over livestock movements.

Recycling

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what incentives she gives to local authorities to encourage the development and introduction of recycling facilities. [59746]

Mr. Meacher: Statutory performance standards for recycling and composting have been set to drive up performance by local authorities as part of the Government's waste strategy. The Government are committed to the achievement of these targets and will intervene if necessary to ensure they are delivered.

Local public service agreements provide opportunities for authorities to commit themselves to exceeding the statutory recycling targets and to be rewarded with additional resources for doing so.

Spending Review 2000 increased both the general revenue support to local authorities on waste management services and specific, ring-fenced, funding. A new £140 million fund has been created for local authority waste minimisation and recycling projects. The fund covers two years, and bids for the first year of funding were invited by 30 April 2002. They are currently being assessed by DEFRA policy officials and an expert panel consisting of various waste, local authority and community sector experts.

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what Government procedures are in place to monitor the *(a)* levels and *(b)* types of recycling being undertaken by local authorities in relation to normal daily disposal of refuse from households. [59745]

Mr. Meacher: Under the Best Value Performance Indicators, local authorities in England make annual returns on the percentage of the total tonnage of household waste arisings which have been sent for recycling (BV82a) or composting (BV82b). In addition, my Department's annual Municipal Waste Management Survey collects information on different types of materials collected for recycling and composting. For example, the Municipal Waste Management Survey shows that recycling of household waste plastics increased to 13,000 tonnes in 1999–2000, compared to 8,000 tonnes for the previous year.

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Advisory Committee on the Control and Reduction of Pollution Caused by the Discharge of Hydrocarbons and other Dangerous Substances at Sea is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [61708]

Mr. Spellar: I have been asked to reply.

The Advisory Committee on the Control and Reduction of Pollution Caused by the Discharge of Hydrocarbons and other Dangerous Substances at Sea (known as ACPH) was established in 1980 under Decision Number 80/686/EEC of 25/6/1980 of the European Parliament and the Council. The committee was composed of representatives of member states and was chaired by the European Commission. The terms of reference of the committee were as follows:

1. To advise the Commission, at the request of the latter or on its own initiative, on all problems concerning the implementation of Community measures for the control and reduction of pollution caused by hydrocarbons discharged at sea; and,
2. To allow the collection of existing information and experience gained in the member states, on ways of controlling and reducing pollution caused by hydrocarbons discharged at sea, thus facilitating the co-ordination of measures taken or planned at national, international or Community level.

This was amended by Decision Number 85/208/EEC, which expanded the focus of the committee from "hydrocarbons discharged at sea" to "oil and other harmful substances discharged at sea".

This advisory committee provided valuable advice on Commission proposals and its members—who were high-level government experts—acted as the interface between the services of the Commission and the corresponding national administrations. In December 2000 the Commission decided to develop a new committee to address marine pollution issues under new European rules and regulations. Therefore, the Management Committee on Marine Pollution was established under Decision Number 2850/2000/EC of 20/12/2000 of the European Parliament and the Council. This set up a Community framework for co-operation in the field of accidental or deliberate marine pollution. A similar question on the role and cost of this group was answered in column 188W, question number 56809 of the 21 May edition of *Hansard*.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February (Com (2001) 783 Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government has encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proportion of ordinary written questions for her Department were answered within a week of tabling in each month since June 2001; and what proportion of questions for named day received a substantive answer on that day in each month since June 2001. [58979]

Mr. Morley: The information requested is in the table.

Percentage

	Named days—PQs answered on time	*Written questions—PQs answered within 5 days*
2001		
June	2	42
July	8	22
August	n/a	n/a
September	n/a	n/a
October	19	56
November	20	60
December	24	32
2002		
January	20	58
February	20	53
March	16	60
April	7	53
May	9	32

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which ministers and officials have *(a)* been invited to give evidence and *(b)* given evidence to the Lessons Learned inquiry; and if she will make a statement. [61580]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* This is a matter for the Lessons Learned inquiry. As indicated on its website, the inquiry has held a series of meetings with key Ministers, senior officials and organisations involved in the handling of the foot and mouth disease outbreak in 2001.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many animals, by type, were slaughtered during the foot and mouth outbreak on the 13 infected premises in Wigtownshire which returned negative blood tests. [56624]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 15 May 2002]:* The following animals were slaughtered on the 13 infected premises in Wigtownshire:

3,539 cattle

3,572 sheep

55 pigs.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many *(a)* cattle, *(b)* sheep, *(c)* pigs and *(d)* other animals were slaughtered during the foot and mouth outbreak on the basis of (i) contiguous premises, (ii) three kilometre premises, (iii) slaughter on suspicion and (iv) other reasons as a result of the two infected premises which returned positive blood tests in Wigtownshire; and how many animals of each type were slaughtered on the infected premises themselves. [56623]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 15 May 2002]:* The table sets out the animals it was necessary to slaughter for disease control purposes as a result of the two infected premises in Wigtownshire.

	Cattle	*Sheep*	*Pigs*
Contiguous premises	3,485	2,424	—
3k cull	952	8,801	2
Dangerous contacts	2,049	1,462	—

299 cattle, 803 sheep and 27 pigs were slaughtered on the infected premises themselves.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what additional steps she is taking to prevent the importation of foot and mouth virus during the World cup finals in South Korea; [57141]

(2) what assessment she has made of the risk posed to UK livestock by the outbreak of foot and mouth disease in South Korea. [57140]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* In recent weeks, we issued advice to travellers, via the Football Association website and the British Consulate in Seoul, not to visit farms and to either keep to the current personal import allowance of 1kg of meat cooked in a hermetically sealed container or, preferably, not to bring any meat at all to the UK. In addition we sent letters to 5,000 World cup ticket holders reiterating this information. We have also advised our port and airport enforcement authorities of the outbreak of foot and mouth in South Korea.

South Korea is not a country that is authorised to export meat/animals to the EU. Veterinary advice is that the risk of travellers bringing foot and mouth disease back from South Korea is not significant. Most games are taking place in Japan, which does not have foot and mouth disease. As part of the Government's Action Plan, we will continue to gather intelligence to support the risk assessment currently under way, this will inform decisions about the nature of the risks and actions to be taken to reduce the risk of exotic diseases entering the country.

Rural Payments Agency

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what additional staff resources she has allocated to the Rural Payments Agency this year to handle payments under the beef support schemes. [61568]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* Rural Payments Agency staff at offices across the country are giving priority to the processing of bovine subsidy claims for payment. Additional staff have been recruited and existing staff are working extra hours and at weekends in order to process claims for payments and to resolve queries as quickly as possible.

In addition, the RPA currently has a large team of short-term staff based at the offices of the British Cattle Movement Service checking queries against the cattle tracing system database.

The total cost of undertaking the additional checks required to make payments will be in the region of £3.8 million, this includes provision for staff working overtime.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when Ministers were first informed that the Rural Payments Agency would be unable to complete payments for the 2001 beef support schemes by 30 June. [61566]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* My noble Friend the Under-Secretary was advised on 15 May 2002 of the Rural Payments Agency's inability to complete all payments under the 2001 bovine subsidy schemes by 30 June 2002.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many beef producers she expects not to have received all due beef support payments by 30 June. [61571]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* At this stage it is predicted that approximately 38 per cent. of Beef Special Premium (BSPS), 88 per cent. of Suckler Cow Premium (SCPS), 63 per cent. of Extensification Premium (EPS) and 30 per cent. of Slaughter Premium (SPS) claimants may not have been paid in full until after the 30 June deadline. However, producers claiming BSPS, SCPS and the Slaughter Premium Schemes should have already received their advance payments equating to 80 per cent. of the premium due.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the total value of beef support payments due to producers for 2001 which will not have been paid by 30 June. [61570]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* The current estimate provided by the RPA is that approximately £47 million will remain outstanding at 30 June. This represents 16 per cent. of the total projected bovine scheme payments due to have been completed by that date. This figure includes the unpaid extensification element.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the Rural Payments Agency began to cross-check beef support scheme applications against the UK Cattle Tracing System. [61578]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* The Rural Payments Agency did not come into existence until 16 October 2001. However, before that date, cross-checks had already begun to be undertaken by the Department.

Beef Special Premium Scheme claims were checked against previous animal documentation before the BCMS Cattle Tracing System (CTS) was set up. After the database became operative, these basic identification checks were run against CTS data. On the other hand, checks on the identity of the older female animals which form the basis of Suckler Cow Premium claims were not undertaken against the database until last summer.

More extensive checks on the location of animals during periods of retention required by EU legislation have been introduced more recently and are causing particular difficulty.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the cost of overtime payments in the current year to staff at the Rural Payments Agency who are working on payment under the beef compensation schemes. [61567]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* No differentiation was made in arriving at the projected costs between the use of overtime or of additional temporary staff. Each RPA site is utilising additional staff and overtime on the most suitable basis, taking into account local conditions, particularly the availability of accommodation to house additional staff, and the capacity of permanent staff to work overtime.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many *(a)* permanent and *(b)* temporary staff are employed by the Rural Payments Agency to process payments due to beef producers in respect of the 2001 beef support schemes. [61569]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* Details of staff numbers currently involved in some form with the processing of bovine subsidy claims for payment are as follows:

Scheme	*Permanent staff*	*Temporary staff*
Beef special premium/slaughter	332	152
Premium schemes	177	35
Suckler cow premium scheme	29	2
Extensification payment scheme	0	65
Total	538	254

Sustainable Development Strategy

Dr. Palmer: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she intends to publish the forthcoming DEFRA Sustainable Development Strategy; and if she will make a statement. [63424]

Margaret Beckett: I have today published DEFRA's Sustainable Development Strategy—'Foundations for our Future'.

'Foundations for our Future' clarifies what sustainable development means in practice for DEFRA's policy development and decision making, as well as its own operations. In particular the strategy:

sets out the principles and processes which DEFRA needs to adopt to ensure all its policies address economic, social and environmental objectives at the same time;

identifies DEFRA policy areas which pose the greatest challenges or can make the greatest contribution to the achievement of sustainable development, with a set of indicators to measure progress in these areas; and

looks at the scope to contribute to sustainable development through DEFRA's own impacts (including energy, waste, travel, staff policies and procurement).

The strategy also commits my Department to review annually the progress that we make against the principles, commitments and priorities that are included within the strategy. This review process will be open and participative, involving DEFRA's staff and stakeholders.

I have placed copies of the strategy in the Library of the House. It is also available at: http://defraweb/environment/sustainable/index.htm.

HEALTH

Arthritis

11. **Mr. Best:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will introduce a national system for monitoring arthritis. [59131]

Jacqui Smith: There are currently no plans to introduce a national system for monitoring arthritis. However, the importance of good arthritis services, particularly for the health and well being of older people is recognised in the National Service Framework for Older People. Arthritis is set as the next priority for development within the ten-year framework.

Emergency Acute Facilities

12. **Andrew George:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment he has made of the provision of emergency acute facilities in remote rural areas. [59132]

Mr. Hutton: It is the responsibility of primary care trusts to commission accessible high quality services that can meet the needs of people living in rural areas.

Any substantial changes in the pattern of such services must be the subject of full public consultation, and in relation to any contested proposals, my right hon. Friend will make final decisions only after a full assessment of the case for change.

Smoking

13. **Mr. Michael Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of smoking cessation policies in Worcestershire. [59133]

Ms Blears: Smoking cessation services in the west midlands are assessed quarterly by the Regional Director of Public Health. The Smoking Advice Service in Worcestershire has rapidly developed across primary and secondary care, and in community settings since January 2001, and is now demonstrating good performance, with quit rates higher than regional and national averages.

Mental Health

14. **Mr. Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to review procedures under the Mental Health Act 1983 which delay the provision of suitable treatment. [59134]

Jacqui Smith: The modernisation of mental health services through the National Service Framework, the NHS Plan investment of £300 million by 2004, and reform of legislation proposed in the White Paper "Reforming the Mental Health Act 1983" will provide effective and safe services more easily and quickly.

26. **Sandra Gidley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance is given to mental health and social care trusts regarding the provision of specialist mental health services for black and ethnic minority users. [59147]

Jacqui Smith: The Department has issued guidance on specialist mental health services including:

The National Service Framework for Mental Health;

The Mental Health Policy Implementation Guide.

All departmental guidance stresses that services must be able to meet the needs of black and ethnic minority service users.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what he is doing to remove the stigma surrounding mental health in relation to the delivery of services. [61897]

Jacqui Smith: The 'Mind out for mental health' campaign is a sustained programme of activity with partners in the voluntary sector, the media and business working together to change attitudes and behaviour surrounding mental health. In 2002–03, we shall be widening the focus of the employers' strand of the campaign to address the stigma experienced by people with mental health problems in the national health service. The Department also supports the Royal College of Psychiatrists' 'Changing Minds' campaign to combat stigmatisation of people with mental health problems by, among others, healthcare professionals, specifically doctors.

Cancer

15. **Dr. Cable:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on waiting times for cancer treatment. [59135]

Ms Blears: The NHS Cancer Plan sets out our strategy to reduce cancer waiting times with the ultimate goal being that no one should wait longer that one month from urgent referral for suspected cancer to the start of treatment, except for a good clinical reason or through the patient's personal choice.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what allocation the health authorities have received from the money earmarked for palliative care under the Cancer Plan in 2001–02. [60676]

Ms Blears: The Government have pledged in the NHS Cancer Plan that funding for specialist palliative care services, including hospices, will increase by £50 million per annum by 2004. This investment is included in the overall national health service investment for implementing the Cancer Plan. We are currently reviewing the outturn position for 2001–02 and the progress in that year.

Health Inequalities

16. **Ms Dari Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his Department is doing to reduce health inequalities between different social groups, with special reference to the incidence of cancer. [59136]

Ms Blears: We have put in place major cross-Government programmes of work to address the risk factors for cancer and tackle health inequalities. The Cancer Plan made a commitment to reduce the prevalence of smoking among manual groups to 26 per cent. by 2010. We are taking this forward with a comprehensive programme to tackle smoking, including NHS smoking cessation services and a public information campaign. We are also running a Five-a-Day Programme to increase access to, and consumption of fruit and vegetables. The New Opportunities Fund is providing funding to set up 66 five-a-day community programmes led by primary care trusts based in deprived areas. We have also recently announced a new £2.5 million programme of community physical activity pilots that will be set up in Neighbourhood Renewal areas. This work underpins the two national health inequalities targets in the areas of life expectancy and infant mortality, announced by the Secretary of State last year.

NHS Patients (Overseas Treatment)

17. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS patients have been treated in France in the last 12 months. [59138]

Mr. Hutton: 109 patients were treated in France earlier this year under the pilot scheme to refer national health service patients overseas for routine elective surgery.

Schizophrenia

18. **Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects NICE to publish its guidance on the use of atypical anti-psychotics for people with schizophrenia; and if he will make a statement. [59139]

Mr. Lammy: The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) issued guidance on newer atypical anti-psychotics on 6 June 2002. In addition the Department of Health has commissioned NICE to develop a clinical guideline on the management of schizophrenia, to cover treatment by drugs, including atypical anti-psychotics, and psychological therapies. This work is currently in train.

Directions have been issued obliging health authorities and primary care trusts to provide appropriate funding for recommended treatments. From 1 January 2002, the NHS has three months from the date of publication of each Technology Appraisal Guidance to provide funding, so that clinical decisions made by doctors involving NICE recommended treatments or drugs can be funded.

Matthew Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when he expects NICE to publish its guidance on the use of atypical anti-psychotics for people with schizophrenia; and if he will make a statement; [59860]

(2) what plans he has to remove postcode prescribing in relation to atypical anti-psychotics for people with schizophrenia; and if he will make a statement. [59861]

Mr. Lammy: The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) issued guidance on newer atypical anti-psychotics on 6 June 2002.

Directions have been issued obliging health authorities and primary care trusts to provide appropriate funding for recommended treatments. From 1 January 2002, the national health service has three months from the date of publication of each technology appraisal guidance to provide funding, so that clinical decisions made by doctors involving NICE recommended treatments or drugs can be funded.

Bed Blocking (Oxfordshire)

19. **Mr. Cameron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many blocked beds there are in Oxfordshire; and if he will make a statement. [59140]

Ms Blears: The Government recognise that delayed discharges are a problem across the south-east. Health and local authorities are working together to take action to improve the situation. In October 2001 the Government announced an extra £300 million in the "Cash for Change" initiative to tackle bed blocking in 2001–02 and 2002–03. Last year Oxfordshire received £706,000, this year £1.489 million.

All information, collected centrally, on delayed discharge has been placed in the Library. Information for quarter 4 of 2001–02 shows that Oxfordshire had 52 delayed discharges. This is the most recent period for which figures are currently available.

Health Policy (Schoolchildren)

20. **Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last had discussions with the Secretary of State for Education and Skills about the health of schoolchildren. [59141]

Ms Blears: My hon. Friend the then Under-Secretary of State for Public Health met the Secretary of State for Education and Skills in February this year to talk about inequalities and during this meeting the health of school age children was discussed. The two Departments work very closely to ensure that the health needs of school age children are met and work on a number of initiatives together, including the National Service Framework for Children, the healthy schools programme, national school fruit scheme, Special Educational Needs Code of Practice and Sure Start.

Air-related Thromboembolic Disease

22. **Mr. John Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the World Health Organisation's research into air-related thromboembolic disease. [59143]

Ms Blears: The Department of Health, together with the Department for Transport, fully supports the aims of the World Health Organisation's research into air travel and venous thromboembolism, and has agreed to provide up to £1.2 million in funding for [illegible] work. The two year project will start in June 2002.

Day Surgery

23. **John Mann:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to expand the number of day surgery units in hospitals. [59144]

Mr. Hutton: The Government are investing in the biggest building programme in the history of the national health service, including the new day surgery unit at Bassetlaw district general hospital.

We are also building a new model of diagnostic and treatment centres, which will make a significant contribution to increasing capacity for day surgery. In addition, we are working towards maximising the capacity in existing day surgery units, and I have asked Professor Ara Darzi to develop a strategy to help units to improve their throughput.

Residential Home Beds

24. **Mr. Swire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many beds for elderly people in residential homes have been lost between May 1997 and the latest available date. [59145]

Jacqui Smith: Between 31 March 1997 and 31 March 2001, the number of residential care beds in homes for older people decreased by 1,550 from 261,620 to 260,070, a drop of under 1 per cent.

Chiropody Services

25. **Norman Lamb:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the provision of chiropody services in the national health service. [59146]

36. **Lembit Öpik:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the provision of chiropody services on the NHS. [59157]

Jacqui Smith: No specific assessment has been made. There are national variations in chiropody services. This may be because local national health service organisations clinically prioritise access to their services to ensure they meet the needs of their most at risk patients. The clinical criteria used to prioritise will be determined locally by primary care trusts.

Retained Human Organs

27. **Mr. Wray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health which hospitals have retained human organs without permission from the relatives of the deceased since 1997; and how many are continuing this practice. [59148]

Mr. Lammy: These data are not collected centrally. General information about organ retention in NHS trusts is available in the Chief Medical Officer's census report[1].

The Chief Medical Officer issued interim guidance in March 2000 requiring NHS trusts to obtain consent from spouses or other relatives to any organ retention from post-mortem examination. This is to ensure that the requirements of the Human Tissue Act 1961 are met effectively.

We have recently consulted on a comprehensive, new code of practice on families and post mortems and on a range of post mortem consent forms. We shall shortly be seeking views on whether changes to the current law are necessary.

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[1] "Retention of Organs at Post Mortem: Census of hospitals in England" report available at: www.doh.gov.uk/organcensus

Age Discrimination

28. **Mrs. Brooke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to tackle age discrimination in the health service. [59149]

Jacqui Smith: The National Service Framework for Older People, published in March 2001, sets the elimination of age discrimination in accessing national health service or social care as a priority. To help achieve this, it provides a programme of actions and milestones to be achieved over the next 10 years.

Racial Equality

29. **Mr. Moore:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in the promotion of racial equality in the NHS. [59150]

Mr. Hutton: Activity to promote race equality in the national health service is occurring on a number of fronts, including implementation of the NHS Plan, National Service Frameworks and within the NHS work force. On 31 May 2002 the Department published its "Race Equality Scheme" setting out a programme of action on promoting race equality.

Operation Waiting Times (South-West)

30. **Mr. Heath:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients in the south-west had been waiting over 15 months for an NHS hospital operation in April. [59151]

Ms Blears: Data for March 2002 reported that there were two patients in the former south-west region waiting over 15 months for treatment. However, a waiting list review at the Royal United Hospital Bath National Health Service Trust has concluded that waiting list information reported by the trust in the year 2001–02 was inaccurate. Further examination of these waiting lists, published on 7 June, shows that 223 patients in March and 235 patients in April had been waiting for more than 15 months for in-patient treatment.

By the end of June, all patients will be offered a date for operation.

Cancer Research

31. **Mr. MacDougall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what criteria the Government use when allocating resourcing to cancer research. [59152]

Ms Blears: Total Government expenditure on research in any given year is not normally allocated in advance to specific diseases. Decisions depend on many variables including the quality of proposals received. By 2003–04, the Government will be spending an additional £20 million a year on the new national health service infrastructure for cancer research. This will mean that more cancer patients will have access to new and experimental treatments. In April 2002, the Government set up the National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) in partnership with charities and industry. The NCRI is providing strategic oversight of cancer research across the whole of the United Kingdom.

Teaching Primary Care Trusts

32. **Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the work of teaching primary care trusts. [59153]

Mr. Hutton: An essential aim of teaching primary care trusts (PCTs) is to develop posts that are both clinical and rooted in teaching, research and/or development. The objective is to provide additional patient care through the recruitment of extra clinicians in areas of need, complemented with the development of learning, sharing of knowledge and collaboration in research.

Teaching PCTs will provide a resource for all PCTs to develop as learning organisations, in promoting a research and evidence-based approach and in supporting work force planning and development.

11 teaching PCTs have been established, and a further 17 to 20 will be established by April 2003.

Dorset and Somerset Health Authorities

33. **Mr. Walter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people are employed *(a)* by the Dorset and Somerset health authority and *(b)* in administrative posts in the primary care trusts in both counties. [59154]

Ms Blears: The information is not collected centrally.

Hospital Modernisation (Trent Region)

34. **Phil Sawford:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what capital funding is available for upgrading and modernising hospitals in the Trent region in the current financial year. [59155]

Mr. Lammy: The area covered by the former Trent region has been allocated £191 million capital in 2002–03. Details of earmarked allocations are given in the table.

Funds available in 2002–03

Trent region	*£ million*
Initial capital planning total	139
Earmarked allocations	
Local capital modernisation fund (LCMF)	9
Coronary heart disease (CHD)	27
Intermediate care	2

Funds available in 2002–03

Trent region	*£ million*
Maternity units	8
Nightingale ward replacements	5
Nurseries	1
Total allocated (to date) for 2002–03	191

Suicide

35. **Ms Drown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action the Government are taking to reduce the suicide rate. [59156]

Jacqui Smith: We published the "National Suicide Prevention Strategy for England" for public consultation on 26 April 2002. It is a comprehensive, evidence-based strategy to prevent suicide. The strategy describes key actions already taken, and proposes further actions to be taken, to help meet the target set out in the White Paper "Saving Lives: Our Healthier Nation". A copy of the consultation document has been placed in the Library.

Braille

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how long the time it takes to transfer a book to Braille will be reduced under the proposed Copyright (Visually Impaired Persons) Bill. [61148]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I have been asked to reply

The Copyright (Visually Impaired Persons) Bill will remove the need to obtain copyright clearance for each book that is to be converted to Braille for visually impaired people by an educational establishment or not-for-profit body, except where the book is already commercially available in Braille. Obtaining this copyright clearance quite frequently takes six months or longer.

Cardiac Care

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many heart bypass operations were carried out in NHS hospitals in each year since 1995. [60546]

Ms Blears: The number of heart bypass operations carried out in the national health service in England, each year since 1995, are as follows:

Coronary artery bypass grafting

	Number
1995–96	21,599
1996–97	22,700
1997–98	22,129
1998–99	23,996
1999–2000	23,698
2000–01	24,387

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department has taken to raise awareness among general practitioners and coroners of cardiac risk in the young. [59631]

Ms Blears: We have put in place major cross-Government programmes of work to prevent coronary heart disease by ensuring that children have access to a healthy diet, have opportunities to be physically active and are aware of the dangers of smoking. This includes investment from the new opportunities fund for a physical education and sports programme, a national school fruit scheme and a new initiative called Smokescreen to reduce smoking among teenagers. The Department is also developing a document on the health benefits of exercise which will aim to influence policy making and raise awareness about the importance of physical activity among primary care and local authorities.

In due course the children's national service framework (NSF) will produce national standards across the national health service and social services for children. However, its scope has yet to be finalised and it is too early in the development of the NSF to advise what guidance may be made available to general practitioners.

In addition, the paediatric and congenital cardiac services review group has been established to consider the recommendations from the Kennedy report that specifically relate to health care services and treatment for children with congenital heart disease. The group has also been asked to recommend quality standards for paediatric and congenital cardiac services. The review group will report in 2002.

Hospital Discharges

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) pursuant to the answer of 21 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 305W, on hospital discharges, when his Department expects to complete its consultations on the penalty system for social services departments; [60812]

(2) pursuant to the answer of 21 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 305W, on hospital discharges, what *(a)* representations he has received and *(b)* estimates he has made about the early discharge of patients from hospital. [60813]

Jacqui Smith: The proposals for a system of financial incentives to tackle delayed discharge are still being developed. We shall consult fully on the details of the scheme.

Stroke

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much the Government have invested in stroke treatment since 1997; and what plans he has to increase this. [60136]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 12 June 2002]:* The specific information requested is not collected centrally. However, as a result of the Budget, the national health service in England will receive an annual average real terms growth in resources of 7.4 per cent. for the five years from 2003–04 to 2007–08. Decisions about allocation of this increased funding will be announced later this year.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures are contained in the NHS Plan to help the Afro-Caribbean community to combat their higher rate of stroke. [60135]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 12 June 2002]:* The NHS Plan sets out a comprehensive programme of action to tackle the risk factors for chronic diseases, including stroke, and tackle health inequalities. This includes a five-a-day programme to increase access to, and consumption of fruit and vegetables, work with industry to improve the overall balance of diet, including salt, sugar and fat in food, and world leading smoking cessation services. Local strategies on promoting healthy eating and physical activity, reducing smoking, and reducing overweight and obesity are already being developed as part of the national service framework for coronary heart disease. The national service framework for older people makes clear that these activities should take into account both differences in lifestyle and the impact of cultural beliefs.

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much and what proportion of the departmental expenditure limit for 2002–03 will be accounted for by staff costs; what the figures were for 2001–02; and if he will make a statement. [61018]

Mr. Hutton: The final accounts for national health service trusts, health authorities, primary care trusts and primary care groups have yet to be collected for 2001–02, but the current estimate of the hospital and community health services pay bill in 2001–02 is £22.7 billion (46 per cent. of the overall NHS planned net expenditure).

The overall cost of the 2002–03 pay award is 4 per cent., but it is not yet possible to estimate the full cost of staff costs as a proportion of overall expenditure because the costs of pay drift, increase in staff numbers and other additional costs are not yet available.

Complaint Procedures

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what formal procedures are available for patients who wish to record a complaint about the quality of care and treatment they have received in hospital. [61451]

Mr. Lammy: Patients, or someone on their behalf with their consent, can complain about the service or treatment they have received from the NHS using the NHS complaints procedure. The health service ombudsman can investigate complaints where the NHS complaints procedure has not successfully resolved the complainants concerns.

Heart Surgery Centre (Wolverhampton)

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what date he expects the Royal Wolverhampton Hospitals NHS Trust heart surgery centre to open. [61426]

Mr. Lammy: The Royal Wolverhampton Hospitals NHS Trust heart surgery centre is planned to open in May 2004. The project plan is on target and building works have commenced.

Patient Confidentiality

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions Ministers in his Department have had with representatives of the *(a)* Medical Protection Society, *(b)* Patient Information Advisory Group, *(c)* Medical Defence Union and *(d)* GPC regarding patient confidentiality in the last two months. [61420]

Mr. Lammy: My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary met Professor Joan Higgins, chair of the Patient Information Advisory Group, on 7 May 2002 to discuss patient confidentiality issues.

Criminal Records Bureau Certification

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health under what circumstances general practitioners will be obliged to complete a Criminal Records Bureau certification form; and what details will need to be provided to complete such a form. [61423]

Mr. Hutton: Section 19 of the Health and Social Care Act 2001 amended section 115 of the Police Act 1997 to permit the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) to provide enhanced criminal record certificates in respect of general practitioners who are included or seeking inclusion to a health authority medical, supplementary or services list.

The purpose of this amendment was to ensure that the health authority in assessing the doctor's suitability to provide primary care services on their behalf had the fullest possible report from the CRB. Criminal record certificates might well help to keep an unsuitable practitioner off the health authority lists and out of primary care.

The circumstances in which these certificates will have to be provided by general practitioners will be specified in regulations. Before such regulations are made we will consult the general practitioners' committee of the British Medical Association on the content.

The application form that has to be completed by any member of the public applying to the CRB for a criminal record certificate is prescribed in SI 2002/233 the Police Act (Criminal Records) Regulations 2002—schedule 2. A copy is available in the Library.

Nurses (Travel Expenses)

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how reimbursement for travel expenses is calculated; and what the value is of such reimbursement for each grade of staff nurse. [61427]

Mr. Hutton: Travelling expenses for national health service staff on national terms are the subject of an agreement of the general Whitley council. Expenses are generally based on reimbursement of receipted costs incurred or, in the case of staff using their own care, by payment of mileage allowances. The current rates of mileage allowances are set out in advance letter (GC) 2/2000, a copy of which is in the Library. The value of such reimbursement does not vary by grade of nurse.

Primary Care Trusts

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of health care services in their area he expects primary care trusts will be responsible for commissioning in *(a)* 2002, *(b)* 2003, *(c)* 2004 and *(d)* 2005. [61441]

Mr. Hutton: There are currently 303 primary care trusts (PCTs) established, with 99 per cent. of these being level four PCTs. Level four PCTs commission services, run community hospitals and provide community health services.

Subject to legislation, PCTs will take on the responsibility for a greater range of functions including the commissioning of all acute and specialised services. By 2004, PCTs will be responsible for 75 per cent. of the total national health service resources.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how deficits arising in health authorities or in strategic health authorities in 2002–03 will be taken into account in allocating money to PCTs; [46415]

(2) whether health authority deficits will be allocated to PCTs; and if he will make a statement on how such allocations will be calculated and made. [46417]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 26 March 2002]:* Resources will continue to be allocated on the basis of the relative needs of primary care trust populations.

Under the Government's resource accounting arrangements, all health authorities are required to contain their annual expenditure within an agreed resource limit allocation. As a consequence there should be no health authority or strategic health authority deficits.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will strengthen the management of primary care trusts operating in areas of social deprivation. [59128]

Mr. Hutton: All primary care trusts have a challenging agenda to deliver the NHS Plan. We are taking steps to ensure that they have the means to strengthen their management capacity by lifting the cap on primary care trust management costs. The Modernisation Agency has also in place a number of initiatives designed to support and strengthen the organisational development of primary care trusts as well as strengthening the management capacity through initiatives such as the national primary and care trust development programme and the chief executives development programme.

From 1 April 2002 legislation provides for primary care trusts to have a director of public health on their boards. The focus of their activity will be on local neighbourhoods and communities, leading and driving programmes to improve health and reduce inequalities. They will also play a powerful role in forging partnerships with, and influencing, all local agencies to ensure the widest possible participation in the health and health care agenda.

Hearing Aids

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if a patient with an NHS-provided digital hearing aid is entitled to a replacement digital hearing and continued support with it if they move from living within an NHS trust that routinely provides digital hearing aids to an NHS trust that provides only analogue hearing aids. [61079]

Jacqui Smith: If the services commissioned by a trust locally do not meet the needs of a particular patient, then general practitioners (GPs) do have freedom to refer elsewhere using the out of area arrangements. If a patient requires replacement of a national health service digital hearing aid, and the local service has not received the training and equipment to fit such aids, the GP could refer the patient back to the department from which the aid was supplied or to an other which does have the necessary infrastructure to fit digital hearing aids.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when each of the NHS trusts that have been selected to become part of the modernising hearing aid services project will start routinely issuing digital hearing aids. [61080]

Jacqui Smith: The modernising hearing aid services project is being managed on the Department's behalf by the Royal National Institute for the Deaf. The project management team has contacted each of the 30 sites which will be joining the project this calendar year and are in discussion with and in the process of visiting each service. The current service is assessed (obtaining details of the sites involved, staffing, information technology needs etc.), the new service discussed and a timetable for modernisation agreed. The first of these sites should have new systems in place and staff trained and fitting digital hearing aids by the beginning of October and all 30 should be fitting them by the end of March 2003.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what initial investment is required of NHS trusts in order to apply for funding for the provision of digital hearing aids; and if he will make a statement. [61515]

Jacqui Smith: When deciding which national health service trusts would join the modernising hearing aid services project in 2002–03, we wrote to all trusts not involved in the first wave of the project, inviting them to express an interest in becoming a second wave site. We asked that any such expressions of interest should be signed by the appropriate primary care trusts who would be expected to contribute 25 per cent. of additional staffing costs and 25 per cent. of any additional cost incurred in supplying digital rather than analogue aids.

Applicants were informed that sites would be selected on the basis of preparedness, willingness to improve access for patients by providing some services from a community base, whether they were paediatric audiology departments transferring patients to existing adult sites, whether they had interest in and willingness to implement universal new-born hearing screening and bearing in mind the need to provide reasonable geographical spread of sites across the country.

Sites must have the appropriate infrastructure, information technology equipment and trained staff, before they can fit digital hearing aids.

Hospital Safety

Helen Southworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will set up a task group with high level participation from the Department of Health, the Fire Service and the Fire Policy Unit to consider the implications of the fire at Warrington hospital for the structure of hospital buildings, with special reference to the NHS building programme. [61407]

Jacqui Smith: Fire engineers from NHS Estates represent the Department on the national fire policy advisory group. This group comprises of members from the Chief and Assistant Chief Officers Association, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, the Home Office, the Institute of Building Control, the Association of County Councils and the Fire Protection Association. In addition, the Department is represented on key British standard panels relating to fire safety. I will be asking my officials to ensure the implications of the fire at

Warrington general hospital are considered carefully. In addition, NHS Estates will be undertaking fire reviews of all new hospital schemes to ensure all necessary standards are met.

Antipsychotic Medicines

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what recent representations he has received regarding the prescribing of antipsychotic medicines to patients in intermediate care; and if he will make a statement; [61506]

(2) what advice his Department issues regarding the prescribing of antipsychotic medicines for elderly patients; and if he will make a statement. [61505]

Jacqui Smith: No representations have been received regarding the prescribing of antipsychotic medicines to patients in intermediate care. In September 1998 we published a report on general practitioner prescribing support with the national prescribing centre. This document provides many examples of good practice including advice and support on prescribing in residential and nursing homes and involving community pharmacists.

Implementation of the national service framework for older people will ensure effective prescribing and administration of medication for older people. To support this, consideration is being given to the inclusion of a clinical guideline on the management of dementia within the National Institute for Clinical Excellence's programme of work. Such a guideline would cover the use of antipsychotic medication in older people.

Dental Services

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many sure start programmes include initiatives that promote children's dental health. [60867]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* This information is not available centrally. However, many local sure start programmes offer advice and information to parents to promote oral and dental health in young children, and the sure start unit is working closely with the Department on the involvement of sure start programmes in the "Brushing for Life" scheme.

Waiting Times

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in the Mid-Essex Hospital Trust area were awaiting in-patient treatment in the last two available months; and how many were waiting *(a)* over 12 months and *(b)* over 15 months for treatment. [60137]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 18 June 2002]:* There were 319 in-patients and day cases waiting over 12 months, and no patients waiting over 15 months, at the end of March 2002. At the end of April 2002 there were 269 in-patients and day cases waiting over 12 months, and no patients waiting over 15 months for admission to hospital.

Hospital Beds

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the average daily number of available *(a)* beds and *(b)* wards open overnight was in each NHS (i) trust and (ii) region in England in each of the last two years; [61885]

(2) what the occupancy rate was of beds in each NHS *(a)* region and *(b)* trust in England in each year since 1996; [61884]

(3) what the average daily number of available beds in wards open 24 hours was in *(a)* acute, *(b)* geriatric, *(c)* mental illness, *(d)* learning disabilities and *(e)* maternity specialties in each (i) NHS region and (ii) trust in each year since 1997. [61777]

Mr. Hutton: Information on the average daily number of available and occupied beds for each national health service trust and NHS region from 1996–97 to 2000–01 is available from the Department's website at www.doh.gov.uk/hospitalactivity.

Medical Students

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many medical students are expected to enter medical school in each of the next five years; and if he will make a statement. [62057]

Mr. Hutton: As a result of the Government's acceptance of the recommendation in the medical work force standing advisory committee's 1997 report and the commitment made in the NHS Plan, almost 2,150 new medical school places were announced in England between 1999 and 2001 (an increase of 57 per cent.). This is the largest increase in medical school places since the national health service was established.

In autumn 2001, medical school intake in England was almost 950 more than in 1997, and by autumn 2003 should be over 1,950 a year more than in autumn 1997 (a 52 per cent. increase).

The planned intake to English medical schools in the next five years is as follows:

Academic year	*Planned intake in England*
2002–03	4,993
2003–04	5,707
2004–05	5,789
2005–06	5,894
2006–07	5,894

Care Homes

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment the Government have made of the number of care homes which will be unable financially to meet the requirements of the Care Standards Act 2000, broken down by *(a)* constituency and *(b)* local authority and region; [61891]

(2) what assessment the Government have made of the number of care homes which fall short of the standards set in the Care Standards Act 2000, due to come into force in 2006–07, broken down by *(a)* constituency and *(b)* local authority and region; [61887]

(3) what provision the Government have made for people who will be displaced by their care home failing to meet the standards laid down in the Care Standards Act 2000, broken down by *(a)* constituency and *(b)* local authority and region; [61889]

(4) what assistance the Government have made available towards the additional resources required by social services departments to meet the shortfall in provision for people who will be displaced by their care homes failing to meet the standards laid down in the Care Standards Act 2000; [61888]

(5) what assessment the Government have made of the numbers of people who will be displaced by the Care Standards Act 2000, broken down by *(a)* constituency and *(b)* local authority and region. [61890]

Jacqui Smith: It will be for the National Care Standards Commission to decide in the particular circumstances of each individual home whether the home conforms to the standards necessary to meet the assessed needs of its residents. The standards were extensively consulted on and the Department has no evidence to suggest that large numbers of care homes will be unable to meet them. The Commission will form a more detailed picture of care homes' compliance with the national standards as it completes its first cycle of inspections of providers in England during 2002–03.

Care home closures may occur for many reasons. It is for local authorities, in their role as commissioners of care, to have contingency plans in place, drawn up in consultation with service providers, to deal with care home closures. Local authorities have a responsibility for making alternative arrangements for anyone that they place in a home which subsequently closes.

We have not allocated resources to social services departments specifically to meet any local short fall in care home provision. However, we are increasing total resources available for social services by an average of 6 per cent. a year in real terms over the next three years (2003–04 to 2005–06). These increases follow average annual real terms increases of more than 3 per cent. between 1996–97 and 2002–03 including a 3.6 per cent. real terms increase this year (2002–03). These substantial increases in resources, in particular over the next three years, will enable local authorities to deliver the improvements to social services to which the Government are committed. Additional resources were also included in these budgets to help providers with the costs of meeting key national minimum standards. This means that local authorities have the resources they need to purchase services at realistic prices.

Epilepsy

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how the Government will ensure that there is effective communication between primary and secondary epilepsy care providers; [61895]

(2) if the Government will conduct awareness-raising campaigns for epilepsy with *(a)* patients, *(b)* carers and *(c)* the general public; [61892]

(3) if the Government will ensure that those experiencing their first epileptic seizure have access to an epilepsy specialist within 28 days; [61896]

(4) if the Government will ensure that people with epilepsy receive check-ups every six months with their GP or epilepsy specialist to review their medication; [61893]

(5) what the Government's policy is on the recommendation by the Chief Medical Officer in his annual report that it should put together an action plan for treatment of epilepsy within three months; [61886]

(6) whether the Government seeks to ensure that *(a)* epilepsy related deaths are centrally recorded and *(b)* coroners are made aware of this; [61894]

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what steps are being taken to warn those with epilepsy of sudden unexpected death in epilepsy; [61898]

(2) what steps are being taken to prevent those at risk from developing epilepsy; [61899]

(3) what steps are being taken to improve care for those with epilepsy; [61901]

(4) what steps are being taken to reduce the number of people who die each year as a result of epilepsy. [61900]

Jacqui Smith: The Department has recently welcomed the publication of the Government funded national sentinel audit of epilepsy-related death. The audit looked at investigations into epilepsy deaths, care provided prior to death and contact with bereaved families. The Department has given a commitment to consider the recommendations of the audit and develop an action plan by September 2002 to try to improve epilepsy services and reduce the number of preventable deaths from epilepsy.

The Department is also undertaking a range of initiatives to improve services for the care and management of people with epilepsy. For example, we have:

Provided funding to the Joint Epilepsy Council (JEC) to develop a "National Statement of Good Practice for the Treatment and Care of People who have Epilepsy", which was published in May 2002. The statement makes a series of recommendations for good quality epilepsy services. It is intended to facilitate commissioning and will be of use to national health service purchasers, providers and service users.

Asked the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) to develop a clinical guideline (due in summer 2004) for the diagnosis, management and treatment of epilepsy to help address widespread variations in clinical practice and contribute to the improvement of services. This will be supported by a technology appraisal (due autumn 2003) of the clinical and cost effectiveness of new anti-epileptic drugs in children and adults, to help promote appropriate uptake and equitable access.

Announced that the national service framework (NSF) for long term conditions is expected to develop standards of care for specific neurological conditions, including epilepsy. The NSF is expected to be published in 2004. Implementation is expected to start from 2005.

Developed the expert patients programme, which aims to provide training in self-management skills for people with long term chronic conditions. The first pilot phase will include people with epilepsy.

Provided funding to the national society for epilepsy for its living well project. The project aims to promote independent living by providing locally based short-term courses for people with epilepsy to develop self-help and self-management techniques.

Cataract Care

Laura Moffatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the new cataract unit at the Surrey and Sussex Trust. [59124]

Mr. Lammy: The development of Limpsfield Ward, which specialises in Ophthalmology, has been to create a walk in one day unit for patients requiring cataract surgery. The development has included redesigned waiting, reception and admission areas, an additional assessment clinic room, additional space for consultants and their secretaries, a separate dedicated anaesthetic room and a dedicated operating theatre. This is all under one roof resulting in the patient only being in the unit for one and a half to two hours on the day of surgery. Waiting times are reducing rapidly, and the number of patients being treated has increased.

Mobile Phones (Hospitals)

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the technical reasons why mobile phones are prohibited from hospitals. [62704]

Ms Blears: The medical devices agency published a comprehensive device bulletin in March 1997 listing the effects of mobile communications on a wide range of medical devices (MDA DB 9702 March 1997). This research identified that some critical care and life support devices were adversely affected by the radiated fields from mobile phones, particularly if used within approximately 2.5 million of medical devices.

Examples of typical adverse effects are lock up of software driven devices, spurious changes to set parameters, screen interference and interference to displayed electro-cardiographs.

As there are various levels of risk to medical devices associated with the use of different mobile phone systems there is no outright prohibition on the use of mobile phones in hospitals. Trusts have been advised to develop local policies in order to manage the risk particularly in areas where critical care and life support devices may be used.

Organ Donation

Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the impact on the number of lives that would be saved each year if a system of presumed consent for organ donation were introduced. [59130]

Mr. Lammy: No such estimates have been made. Comparisons with other European countries, which operate a system of presumed consent show most have comparable levels of organ donation to the UK. The highest level of cadaveric donation is in Spain where consent to donation is always sought.

Pesticides

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library his scientific evidence on which the recommendation from the Advisory Committee in Pesticides to alter advice provided to schools and parents in reducing the exposure of children to pesticide residues was based. [48324]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The scientific evidence on which the advisory committee on pesticides (ACP) based its advice on washing and peeling fruit and vegetables is contained in the relevant ACP committee papers which have been placed in the Libraries.

Correspondence

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the letter dated 27 November 2001 from the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell relating to an inquiry by Mr. Moran of 130 Curtis Road, West Ewell, Surrey. [48210]

Mr. Lammy: The Department could not trace this correspondence. The Department's ministerial correspondence unit has sought a copy of the correspondence.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many letters were received by each Minister in his Department in each month since June 1997. [59467]

Mr. Lammy: The Cabinet Office, on an annual basis, publishes a report to Parliament on the volume of Members' correspondence received by Departments. The report for 2001 was published on 24 May 2002, *Official Report*, columns 674–76W. Copies of previous reports are available in the Library.

Departmental Recruitment

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many net additional staff his Department has recruited in each month since June 2001 at *(a)* executive officer level and *(b)* administrative level. [52434]

Mr. Lammy: The information requested is shown in the table. There is a total net reduction of staff during this period of:

Executive office level—36 reduction (-32.95 full-time equivalent)

Administrative office level—105 reduction (-100.36 full-time equivalent)

	Administrative		*Executive Officer level*	
	Headcount	*FTE*	*Headcount*	*FTE*
June 2001				
Casual	10	9.41	2	2.64
Permanent	12	11.89	3	3.32
Total	22	21.3	5	5.96
July 2001				
Casual	21	18.18	0	–0.4
Permanent	30	28.88	9	9
Total	51	47.06	9	8.6
August 2001				
Casual	–17	–15.83	–2	–1.81
Permanent	–4	–2.96	–5	–5.13
Total	–21	–18.79	–7	–6.94
September 2001				
Casual	–13	–11.08	3	3
Permanent	–11	–11.68	–5	–4.33
Total	–24	–22.76	–2	–1.33
October 2001				
Casual	1	0.49	–1	–0.81
Permanent	6	6.12	–6	–6.19
Total	7	6.61	–7	–7

	Administrative		*Executive Officer level*	
	Headcount	*FTE*	*Headcount*	*FTE*
November 2001				
Casual	3	3.01	–1	–1
Permanent	–8	–8.18	5	5
Total	–5	–5.17	4	4
December 2001				
Casual	–2	–0.9	0	0
Permanent	–94	–93.75	–18	–17.33
Total	–96	–94.65	–18	–17.33
January 2002				
Casual	3	3.29	1	0.83
Permanent	2	1.61	–1	–1
Total	5	4.9	0	–0.17
February 2002				
Casual	2	1.68	–1	–0.83
Permanent	–9	–8.1	–4	–3.54
Total	–7	–6.42	–5	–4.37
March 2002				
Casual	–4	–2.77	–3	–3
Permanent	–28	–25.14	–6	–6
Total	–32	–27.91	–9	–9
April 2002				
Casual	3	2.79	7	7.63
Permanent	–8	–7.32	–13	–13
Total	–5	–4.53	–6	–5.37
Grand Total	–105	–100.36	–36	–32.95

Source:

Department of Health PARIS personnel system

Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the joint committee on vaccination and immunisation *(a)* has a website and *(b)* makes its minutes available on a website. [53899]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 2 May 2002]:* The website for the joint committee on vaccination and immunisation was launched on 30 May. Information which will be available on the website includes a list of members, their declarations of interest, minutes, and terms of reference.

It is also intended to use the website to advertise board vacancies. The website address is www.doh.gov.uk/jcvi/index.htm

E.coli

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of E.coli infection there were in each of the last five years. [56959]

Ms Blears: The Public Health Laboratory Service (PHLS) for England and Wales and the Scottish Centre for Infection and Environmental Health in Scotland (SCIEH) receives reports from microbiology laboratories for E.coli blood stream isolates (bacteraemias) and E.coli 0157 faecal isolates. E.coli is the second most common cause of bacteraemia. The results for the past five years are as set out in the table.

E.coli blood stream isolates (bacteraemias) and E.coli 0157 faecal isolates; England, Wales and Scotland, 1997 to 2002

	E.coli bacteraemias		*E.coli 0157 faecal isolates*	
Year	*England and Wales*	*Scotland*[1]	*England and Wales*	*Scotland*[1]
1997	[2]10,336	1,572	[3]1,087	423
1998	[2]11,537	1,672	[2]890	217
1999	[2]11,329	1,586	[2]1,084	294
2000	[3]11,032	1,545	[2]896	197
2001[4]	[3]11,392	1,499	[2]768	237

Data sources:

[1] Scottish Centre for Infection and Environmental Health

[2] PHLS website

[3] PHLS CDR Weekly

[4] Provisional data

In addition, SCIEH received a further 237 reports of E.coli infection not specified as E.coli 0157 over the five-year period.

For Northern Ireland, the Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre received the following confirmed laboratory reports:

	E.coli total (all serotypes)	*E.coli 0157*
1997	515	30
1998	507	29
1999	481	54
2000	579	54
2001	584	52

Pensions

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much was spent by his Department on paying pensions to retired employees of his Department in 2001–02; if he will estimate the corresponding amounts to be spent in *(a)* five years' time, *(b)* 10 years' time, *(c)* 20 years' time and *(d)* 30 years' time; if he will estimate in each case the proportion of such liabilities which will arise from (i) unfunded pension schemes and (ii) pre-funded pension schemes; and in the case of pre-funded schemes, if he will estimate the value of the corresponding pre-funded funds in each of these years. [57371]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 23 May 2002, *Official Report,* column 561W.

NICE

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what products have been *(a)* approved and *(b)* rejected for use in the NHS by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence since its inception. [58789]

Mr. Lammy: The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) does not approve or reject products for use within the national health service. The role of NICE is to provide guidance for health care professionals and patients and their carers, that will help to inform their decisions about treatment and health care. NICE guidance does not override the responsibility of health care professionals to make appropriate decisions on the circumstances of individual patients. However, they are expected to take the guidance fully into account when exercising their clinical judgment.

It is possible to place the technology appraisals published to date into the following categories:

Recommendation	*Number of appraisals*
Recommended for routine use	11
Selective use	27
Research only	4
Total	42

Scottish Executive

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many representations the Scottish Executive has made to his Department since May 1999, broken down by *(a)* Scottish Executive Department, *(b)* subject and *(c)* date; [59511]

(2) how many times his Office has made representations to the Scottish Executive since May 1999, broken down by *(a)* Department approached, *(b)* subject and *(c)* date. [59512]

Mr. Lammy: I refer the hon. Member to the answer provided to her by the Prime Minister on 24 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 601W.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of ordinary written questions for his Department were answered within a week of tabling in each month since June 2001; and what proportion of questions for named day received a substantive answer on that day in each month since June 2001. [58983]

Mr. Lammy: Available data[1] are shown in the table:

	Percentage of:	
Month (current Session)	*Ordinary written questions answered within one week of tabling*	*Named day written questions answered on day named*
June	20	30
July	39	22
September/October	25	22
November	7	24
December	8	42
January	18	13
February	23	14
March	4	42
April	20	28
May[2]	31	32

[1] Based on 10 per cent. sample of the records

[2] To date

We are developing an improved database capable of providing more sophisticated analysis of information which should be introduced before the next parliamentary Session.

Land Sales

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the land that his Department is *(a)* offering for sale and *(b)* plans to offer in the next 12 months, giving its (i) location and (ii) size. [59054]

Mr. Lammy: No land held by the Department for its own use is being offered for sale nor are there any plans to do so in the next 12 months.

This answer does not include the national health service.

Press Releases

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many press releases have been issued by his Department in each month of 2002. [59503]

Mr. Lammy: The information is shown in the table:

Month	*Number of press releases issued*
January 2002	40
February 2002	45
March 2002	49
April 2002	32
May 2002[1]	32

[1] To date, 22 May

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many press releases were issued by his Department *(a)* in each month between May and December 1997 and *(b)* in each year from 1998 to 2001 inclusive. [59502]

Mr. Lammy: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) on 20 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 436W.

Devolution

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to transfer the administration of reserved powers and functions of the Department of Health, its executive agencies and non-departmental public bodies within its remit from the Department of Health to the Scotland Office. [59510]

Mr. Lammy: I refer the hon. Member to the answer provided to her by the Prime Minister on 24 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 601W.

Prescriptions

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the *(a)* cost per head of resident population and *(b)* average cost per prescription was of (i) tranquillisers and (ii) anti-depressants prescribed by GPs in each health authority in England in (A) the most recent available year and (B) the previous three years. [59724]

Mr. Lammy: Information for 2000 and 2001 is shown in the table. Information for 1999 and 1998 was provided in a reply to my hon. Friend to a previous question on 17 July 2000, *Official Report*, column 79W.

The net integrated cost per head of population and the average net ingredient cost per prescription item for tranquillisers and antidepressants dispensed in the community in England by health authority, 2000 and 2001

	Tranquillisers				*Antidepressants*			
	Net ingredient cost per head of population		*Average net ingredient cost per prescription item*		*Net ingredient cost per head of population*		*Average net ingredient cost per prescription item*	
Health authority in which items were dispensed	*2000*	*2001*	*2000*	*2001*	*2000*	*2001*	*2000*	*2001*
Avon	2.5	3.0	5.78	6.95	5.8	6.5	13.91	13.88
Barking and Havering	2.6	3.3	7.82	9.68	4.2	4.6	14.43	14.40
Barnet, Enfield and Haringey	3.0	3.8	9.40	12.28	4.5	5.0	16.16	16.30
Barnsley	2.8	3.4	4.52	5.84	7.5	8.2	13.37	13.39
Bedfordshire	2.1	2.8	5.86	7.70	5.1	5.6	14.20	14.33
Berkshire	2.4	2.8	7.48	8.84	5.6	6.1	14.96	14.76
Bexley, Bromley and Greenwich	2.3	2.7	6.77	8.19	5.1	5.4	15.57	15.35
Birmingham	2.8	3.7	6.36	8.22	5.4	6.0	14.18	14.53
Bradford	2.8	3.5	4.05	4.71	6.4	6.8	11.60	11.16
Brent and Harrow	3.2	4.1	11.35	14.44	3.9	4.4	16.77	17.14
Buckinghamshire	2.0	2.5	6.40	7.60	4.9	5.5	14.53	14.59
Bury and Rochdale	3.3	4.2	6.05	7.63	7.5	8.3	13.57	13.75
Calderdale and Kirklees	3.1	3.7	5.53	6.77	6.2	6.8	13.80	13.56
Cambridgeshire	2.1	2.6	5.36	6.75	5.8	6.4	13.58	13.45
Camden and Islington	3.9	4.6	8.65	10.42	6.4	6.7	17.91	17.53
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	2.4	2.8	4.46	5.12	7.0	7.7	12.64	12.54
County Durham and Darlington	2.9	3.5	5.54	6.65	7.6	8.2	12.99	12.77
Coventry	3.7	4.5	7.27	8.66	5.2	5.8	14.24	14.13
Croydon	3.6	4.4	11.34	14.01	4.6	4.9	15.96	15.92
Doncaster	2.4	2.7	4.85	5.67	7.0	7.7	12.31	12.11
Dorset	2.6	3.1	5.52	6.58	6.1	6.5	12.67	12.40
Dudley	2.2	2.8	6.55	8.17	5.5	6.2	14.92	15.25
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	2.9	3.6	9.05	11.36	4.3	4.6	17.51	17.29
East Kent	3.5	4.2	7.50	9.39	6.3	6.8	14.74	14.77
East Lancashire	3.8	4.5	5.09	5.83	6.6	7.5	12.37	12.45
East London and The City	3.4	4.4	11.62	14.44	4.2	4.7	15.21	15.08
East Riding and Hull	3.0	3.4	5.94	6.92	5.6	6.3	12.55	12.38
East Surrey	2.5	3.0	7.00	8.30	5.7	6.2	17.55	17.39
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	3.8	4.5	6.08	7.12	7.3	8.1	15.82	15.99
Gateshead and South Tyneside	3.0	3.6	5.93	7.15	8.1	8.8	13.91	13.59
Gloucestershire	2.2	2.8	5.26	6.34	6.7	7.3	14.98	14.91
Herefordshire	1.9	2.4	5.92	7.38	5.2	5.7	13.64	13.71
Hertfordshire	2.2	2.8	6.53	8.30	5.7	6.2	15.66	15.53
Hillingdon	2.0	2.6	6.38	8.10	4.0	4.5	14.36	14.32
Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	2.8	3.5	6.91	8.12	7.6	8.6	15.44	15.82
Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster	3.3	4.0	9.67	11.75	5.3	5.6	19.09	18.92
Kingston and Richmond	2.5	3.1	7.22	8.60	4.9	5.3	16.30	15.97
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	3.2	3.8	9.95	11.93	4.5	4.8	14.60	14.45
Leeds	2.9	3.6	6.12	7.64	7.5	8.2	13.67	13.66
Leicestershire	2.5	3.0	6.76	8.15	5.9	6.4	16.03	15.64
Lincolnshire	2.6	3.2	4.83	6.01	6.5	7.0	12.19	11.72
Liverpool	4.3	5.3	7.10	9.02	8.3	9.0	13.99	13.93
Manchester	4.8	5.6	6.95	8.11	7.7	8.5	12.78	12.57
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	3.3	4.0	9.89	11.99	4.7	5.0	16.46	16.31
Morecambe Bay	3.3	4.0	5.45	6.53	7.7	8.4	13.56	13.25
Newcastle and North Tyneside	3.5	4.6	6.55	8.52	7.7	8.7	12.57	12.79
Norfolk	2.7	3.4	4.72	5.74	7.9	8.9	13.44	13.39
North and East Devon	3.3	3.7	6.44	7.11	6.2	6.7	12.95	12.96
North and Mid Hampshire	2.8	3.4	7.90	9.45	6.3	7.0	15.05	15.29
North Cheshire	2.6	3.0	4.54	5.31	7.1	7.7	13.49	13.40
North Cumbria	3.2	3.9	6.47	7.76	8.0	9.1	14.81	15.18
North Derbyshire	2.2	2.7	5.21	6.39	6.4	6.9	12.35	11.86
North Essex	2.5	3.0	6.03	7.33	6.0	6.7	13.49	13.46
North Nottinghamshire	1.9	2.4	4.36	5.47	5.5	6.1	11.36	11.14
North Staffordshire	2.6	3.3	5.13	6.62	7.9	8.8	15.07	15.24
North Yorkshire	2.2	2.6	5.38	6.52	5.5	6.0	11.93	11.84
Northamptonshire	2.4	3.0	6.49	7.93	6.0	6.6	14.36	14.15
Northumberland	2.8	3.3	5.81	6.71	7.2	8.0	13.16	13.16
Nottingham	1.2	1.3	3.70	4.44	5.9	6.4	13.41	13.14
North West Lancashire	3.8	4.8	5.70	7.24	7.6	8.6	13.25	13.36
Oxfordshire	2.3	2.8	7.15	8.76	5.9	6.6	14.18	14.01
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	2.9	3.7	9.81	12.49	4.4	4.7	16.20	16.31
Rotherham	3.2	4.2	6.00	7.81	7.8	8.7	14.69	14.47
Southampton and South West Hampshire	3.1	3.8	7.61	8.96	7.7	8.7	14.44	14.61
Salford and Trafford	3.5	4.3	5.26	6.51	7.9	8.6	13.23	12.95
Sandwell	2.5	2.9	6.60	7.73	5.9	6.6	14.55	14.90
Sefton	4.5	5.5	6.93	8.52	7.6	8.4	13.81	13.90

The net integrated cost per head of population and the average net ingredient cost per prescription item for tranquillisers and antidepressants dispensed in the community in England by health authority, 2000 and 2001

	Tranquillisers				*Antidepressants*			
	Net ingredient cost per head of population		*Average net ingredient cost per prescription item*		*Net ingredient cost per head of population*		*Average net ingredient cost per prescription item*	
Health authority in which items were dispensed	*2000*	*2001*	*2000*	*2001*	*2000*	*2001*	*2000*	*2001*
Sheffield	2.2	2.6	4.82	5.84	7.0	7.4	13.33	12.73
Shropshire	2.6	3.1	6.86	8.09	6.3	7.1	15.90	16.04
Solihull	2.1	2.6	5.92	7.40	6.1	7.0	16.10	16.56
Somerset	2.3	2.8	4.94	5.79	5.8	6.4	13.19	12.91
South and West Devon	3.4	4.2	6.18	7.49	6.4	7.1	13.34	13.51
South Cheshire	2.9	3.6	6.14	7.61	7.2	8.1	14.98	15.18
South Essex	2.3	3.0	6.11	7.92	5.5	6.0	15.11	14.79
South Humber	2.6	3.3	4.47	5.64	5.3	6.0	12.27	12.18
South Lancashire	2.6	3.2	5.57	6.86	6.0	6.8	13.26	13.61
South Staffordshire	2.0	2.4	5.40	6.55	5.6	6.1	14.53	14.20
Southern Derbyshire	1.9	2.5	5.15	7.03	6.0	6.4	14.72	14.34
St. Helens and Knowsley	3.7	4.8	5.59	7.33	7.3	8.4	12.48	12.93
Stockport	3.3	3.9	4.83	5.99	8.2	8.8	12.88	12.78
Suffolk	2.2	2.9	5.29	6.77	7.9	8.7	14.81	14.70
Sunderland	2.7	3.3	6.08	7.76	7.6	8.6	14.94	15.37
Tees	3.3	4.1	5.57	6.85	7.6	8.6	14.51	14.64
Wakefield	3.1	3.8	6.05	7.36	6.5	7.2	11.85	11.87
Walsall	3.2	4.0	6.73	8.81	5.5	6.0	13.93	14.20
Warwickshire	2.5	3.1	6.33	7.58	5.4	6.0	14.53	14.08
West Kent	2.5	3.1	6.25	7.83	5.6	6.3	14.66	14.73
West Pennine	2.7	3.2	4.42	5.33	5.7	6.2	12.65	12.47
West Surrey	2.4	3.0	6.44	7.89	5.8	6.3	16.50	16.49
West Sussex	2.7	3.2	5.92	7.06	6.6	7.3	14.99	15.21
Wigan and Bolton	2.8	3.6	4.82	6.15	6.7	7.6	13.04	13.39
Wiltshire	2.3	2.9	5.91	7.31	6.3	6.9	13.81	13.66
Wirral	4.0	4.8	5.51	6.65	7.9	8.6	12.25	12.01
Wolverhampton	3.1	3.6	7.93	9.07	5.1	5.7	13.76	13.66
Worcestershire	1.8	2.5	5.29	7.04	5.8	6.5	13.81	13.97
England	2.8	3.4	6.20	7.60	6.2	6.8	14.89	14.04

Notes:

1. Tranquillisers are defined as those drugs within the British National Formulary (BNF) sections 4.1, hypnotics and anxiolytics, and 4.2 drugs used in psychoses and related disorders. Antidepressant drugs are those within the BNF section 4.3
2. The data are from the Prescription Cost Analysis system and cover all prescriptions dispensed by community pharmacists and dispensing doctors in England. The system covers prescriptions originating from general practices and also those written by nurses
3. The net ingredient cost refers to the cost of the drug before discounts and does not include any dispensing costs or fees. It does not include any adjustment for income obtained where a prescription charge is paid at the time the prescription is dispensed
4. ONS mid-year population projections have been used

Leukaemia

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the Department's estimate is of the average time scale for each of the three stages of chronic myeloid leukaemia; and if he will make a statement; [60006]

(2) how many people have died from chronic myeloid leukaemia in the last two years; and if he will make a statement; [60007]

(3) what criteria are used to assess which of the three stages of chronic myeloid leukaemia a patient is in; and if he will make a statement. [60005]

Ms Blears: Three phases of chronic myeloid leukaemia (CML) are usually definable; the chronic phase, an accelerated phase and the blast phase.

The chronic phase is typically of three to five years duration from diagnosis. The majority of patients are in chronic phase at presentation. Clinically, in the chronic phase there are less than 10 per cent. immature blood cells (called blast cells) and promyelocytes (one of the series of cells that gives rise to granulocytes—a type of white blood cell) in the bone marrow. There is an elevated white cell count and often an elevated platelet count.

The accelerated phase of CML marks the transition to the blast phase typically lasting two to 15 months, but generally leading to a rapidly fatal blast crisis within six months. As the accelerated phase is associated with numerous haematological cytogenic and clinical signs and symptoms, no single set of criteria for its onset is accepted.

The blast phase is usually fatal within three to six months of onset. Clinically, the presence of 30 per cent. or more blast cells in the marrow or the presence of blast cells within the peripheral blood defines the blast phase.

There were 514 deaths due to chronic myeloid leukaemia occurring in 2000 and 465 deaths occurring in 1999.

NHS Dentistry

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of *(a)* children and *(b)* adults in England are registered with an NHS dentist. [59599]

Mr. Lammy: Arrangements are now in place to ensure that patients can gain access to national health service services simply by calling NHS Direct. This means that even if a patient chooses not to register with a dentist it will still be possible for that patient to access all forms of dentistry that are provided by the NHS.

60 per cent. of children and 43 per cent. of adults were registered with a general dental service (GDS) dentist in England at 31 March 2002.

Timber

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the refurbishment projects that *(a)* are in progress and *(b)* will start within the next six months; and what action is being taken to ensure that these will procure certified timber. [59758]

Mr. Lammy: There are no refurbishment projects currently in progress in the buildings occupied by the Department for its own use, although a small project to fit out headquarter premises for the commission for patient and public involvement may commence within the next six months.

Environmental criteria are now contained as part of the specification in tendering contracts and include a requirement that timber products are from sustainable sources.

Diabetes

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what training medical students receive in the diagnosis and treatment of diabetes; and if he will make a statement. [60121]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* Individual university medical schools determine their own undergraduate medical curriculum in the light of recommendations from the General Medical Council's education committee, which has the statutory responsibility to determine the extent and knowledge and skill required for the granting of primary medical qualifications in the UK. This includes the range of problems that are presented to doctors and the range of solutions that have been developed for their recognition, investigation, prevention and treatment.

The undergraduate medical course is the first step in the continuum of medical education, laying down the foundation for future professional life. The undergraduate course is not intended to provide specialist medical education within which training in the diagnosis and treatment of diabetes would fall.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to allow GPs to complete form C1EXAM3 when diabetes sufferers apply for C1(+E) licences; and if he will make a statement. [61939]

Mr. Spellar: I have been asked to reply.

There are currently no plans to allow general practitioners to complete the C1EXAM3 form. My right hon. Friend's honorary medical advisory panel on driving and diabetes advises that a specialist assessment by a consultant diabetologist is required when an insulin treated diabetes sufferer applies for a C1 (+E) licence. The situation will be reviewed should a system of accredited specialism in diabetes be introduced for general practitioners.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the financial provision he will make to implement the national service framework for the treatment of diabetes. [61514]

Mr. Lammy: The Budget provides the highest sustained growth in national health service history, with annual average increases of 7.4 per cent. In real terms over the five years 2003–04 to 2007–08. Decisions about the allocation of the increased funding will be announced later this year.

Alcohol Treatment Services

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent discussions his Department has had on the co-ordination of policies to reduce alcoholism in the United Kingdom. [60708]

Ms Blears: The NHS Plan said that the Government would implement a national strategy to tackle alcohol misuse in England by 2004 and we are on course to achieve this. We will consult fully with the devolved Administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland as we develop this strategy. It is also the case that the devolved Administrations have consulted the Department in developing their own strategies for tackling alcohol misuse, including the strategy for Scotland that was published in January this year.

Foundation Hospitals

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health to which Government targets foundation hospitals will now have to adhere. [60517]

Mr. Lammy: Foundation trusts will be expected to deliver their contribution to Government targets and uphold national standards and guarantees to patients.

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what extra flexibility foundation hospitals will have in pay over other NHS trusts. [60516]

Mr. Hutton: Foundation trusts will be able to use the flexibilities of the new pay system we are currently negotiating to modernise the work force including developing additional rewards for those staff who are contributing most. The full details of the flexibilities will be available once the pay modernisation negotiations are complete and the legislation is finalised.

Respiratory Syncitial Virus

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children were re-admitted to hospital more than once during the year suffering from the respiratory syncitial virus in the last three years in the South East region, broken down by age; how many of these were re-admitted to the intensive care unit; and if he will make a statement. [60717]

Ms Blears: The information requested is not collected centrally.

All information held on hospital admissions of children diagnosed with respiratory syncitial virus in the south east was contained in the answer given to the hon. Member by the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), on 10 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 401W.

Orthodontic Treatment

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he *(a)* collates and *(b)* will publish details of waiting times for NHS orthodontic treatment. [61450]

Mr. Lammy: Information on waiting times for orthodontic treatment carried out in primary care, which accounts for the majority of orthodontic services, is not held centrally. However, information is available for patients who have been referred to hospital for treatment. Latest data show that at quarter ending 31 March 2002 there were 2,716 out-patients who had been waiting over 13 weeks for a first out-patient appointment with an orthodontic consultant and there were 130 in-patients waiting for orthodontic treatment.

The intention to reform orthodontic treatment was signalled in the NHS dental strategy "Modernising NHS Dentistry—Implementing the NHS Plan" published in September 2000. The Department continues to work with the profession to see how reform might be achieved.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were waiting for orthodontic treatment on 1 May in each year since 1996. [60722]

Mr. Lammy: Information on waiting times for orthodontic treatment carried out in primary care, which accounts for the majority of orthodontic services, is not held centrally. However, information is available for patients who have been referred to hospital for treatment. The tables show orthodontic treatment waiting times for in-patients and out-patients in hospitals.

The intention to reform orthodontic treatment was signalled in the NHS dental strategy "Modernising NHS Dentistry—Implementing the NHS Plan" published in September 2000. The Department continues to work with the profession to see how reform might be achieved.

Table 1: Waiting time for first out-patient appointment, Orthodontics consultant specialty, England

		Of those GP written referrals seen, the number who waited (weeks)				*Of those GP written referrals seen, the percentage who waited (weeks)*			*GP written referrals still waiting, who have been waiting (weeks)*	
Quarter ended	*Number of GP written referral requests seen*	*0 to less than 4*	*4 to less than 13*	*13 to less than 26*	*26 plus*	*less than 4 (per cent.)*	*less than 13 (per cent.)*	*less than 26 (per cent.)*	*13 to less than 26*	*26 plus*
March 1996	24,965	4,805	9,598	6,173	4,389	19	58	82	3,978	3,524
March 1997	20,690	3,681	8,936	4,974	3,099	18	61	85	4,442	3,380
March 1998	19,236	2,784	7,838	5,911	2,703	14	55	86	5,170	5,258
March 1999	19,438	2,418	7,464	5,595	3,961	12	51	80	6,524	5,074
March 2000	23,175	3,036	7,971	7,009	5,159	13	47	78	5,225	4,614
March 2001	21,237	2,955	9,339	5,184	3,759	14	58	82	3,996	2,982
March 2002	21,176	3,484	8,980	5,597	3,115	16	59	85	2,713	3

Source:

Department of Health form QM08

Table 2: Patients waiting for elective admission, Orthodontics consultant speciality, England (ordinary and day case admissions combined)

		Total patients waiting for admission by month waiting						
Quarter ended	*Waiting*	*Less than 3*	*3–5*	*6–8*	*9–11*	*12–14*	*15–17*	*18 plus*
March 1996	257	136	63	34	24	0	0	0
March 1997	253	119	91	28	15	0	0	0
March 1998	304	149	77	50	25	3	0	0
March 1999	184	74	61	29	16	3	1	0
March 2000	84	31	27	17	6	3	0	0
March 2001	170	77	50	26	14	3	0	0
March 2002	130	50	49	18	13	0	0	0

Source:

Department of Health form KH07

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance his Department gives on which orthodontic treatments should be made available on the NHS. [60720]

Mr. Lammy: Details of all orthodontic treatment that can be made available through general dental services are included in the statement of dental remuneration (SDR), which is issued to all dental practitioners and health authorities annually, in April. The Department does not give specific advice on what treatment a dentist or orthodontist should provide for patients, as this is a matter for the individuals' clinical judgment. However, the range of treatments available in the SDR was introduced in consultation with the profession and is considered adequate to ensure the best treatment outcome for all patients.

Over recent months officials have had helpful discussions with the profession on possible changes to the current system and the Department will continue to work with the profession on this.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people per 1,000 of the population were provided with orthodontic treatment in each year since 1996, broken down by health authority. [60721]

Mr. Lammy: The available information is shown in the table and quantifies the number of claims made for the provision of orthodontic appliances in the general dental service (GDS) per 1,000 population by health authority (HA) in England for each year from 1996–97 to 2001–02.

The figures for HAs will be affected by some patients receiving treatment in a different HA area from one in which they reside.

General dental service: number of claims for orthodontic appliances per 1,000 population[1]*, 1996–97 to 2001–02*

England

Health authority	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Avon	4.9	5.1	5.6	6.5	6.5	8.3
Barking and Havering	5.6	7.6	6.2	7.4	7.6	7.2
Barnet, Enfield and Haringey	8.0	9.2	8.2	8.2	9.5	9.6
Barnsley	2.2	1.9	2.1	2.0	2.1	1.4
Bedfordshire	5.0	5.7	5.7	3.6	1.9	1.7
Berkshire	7.3	8.1	7.4	5.6	5.8	6.7
Bexley, Bromley and Greenwich	6.0	6.1	6.8	7.2	7.7	7.5
Birmingham	4.4	4.6	4.6	4.7	5.0	4.8
Bradford	2.0	1.9	1.9	2.1	1.8	1.9
Brent and Harrow	9.3	4.3	3.1	3.1	3.3	3.8
Buckinghamshire	3.8	4.4	5.5	4.8	4.2	4.3
Bury and Rochdale	5.5	5.8	6.5	5.3	5.9	6.0
Calderdale and Kirklees	3.3	3.5	3.8	3.6	4.0	4.3
Cambridge and Huntingdon[2]	6.8	5.7	4.9	—	—	—
Cambridge[2]	—	—	—	4.4	4.1	5.4
Camden and Islington	1.1	1.5	1.9	1.9	2.4	2.6
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	2.6	2.9	3.0	3.5	3.5	3.3
County Durham	2.5	2.2	2.3	2.5	2.3	2.6
Coventry	2.5	2.7	2.8	3.0	3.1	3.3
Croydon	6.5	6.9	6.9	6.6	6.7	6.4
Doncaster	4.3	4.4	5.0	5.2	5.7	6.1
Dorset	4.3	3.9	3.9	3.9	4.0	3.6
Dudley	2.6	3.1	3.4	3.7	3.7	3.8
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	1.8	2.1	2.6	3.2	3.8	4.0
East Kent	4.2	3:0	3.4	3.7	3.6	4.0
East Lancashire	4.3	3.6	3.7	3.6	3.3	3.3
East London and The City	2.8	3.0	3.1	3.5	4.8	4.2
East Norfolk[2]	6.0	5.8	5.7	—	—	—
East Riding	2.4	2.5	2.7	3.1	3.1	3.0
East Surrey	4.2	4.6	5.2	4.8	5.5	6.1
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	3.8	4.7	4.6	4.5	4.0	4.0
Gateshead and South Tyneside	1.8	1.6	1.9	2.0	1.9	1.7
Gloucestershire	4.5	4.8	5.8	6.5	6.4	5.9
Herefordshire	2.9	2.8	2.8	3.3	4.5	4.7
Hertfordshire	6.5	6.7	6.6	6.4	7.9	8.9
Hillingdon	8.0	7.0	8.4	8.3	7.5	6.2
Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	3.9	3.4	3.5	3.1	2.5	1.8
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	0.7	2.9	4.6	4.7	5.6	6.8
Kingston and Richmond	4.7	6.3	4.6	5.8	7.9	7.2
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	1.0	2.1	[illegible]	4.2	3.8	3.1
Leeds	4.8	5.1	5.9	5.8	6.0	6.6
Leicestershire	3.3	3.8	3.7	3.7	3.7	4.8
Lincolnshire	2.0	2.4	2.7	2.3	2.5	2.6
Liverpool	7.0	7.0	7.2	6.6	6.5	5.5
Manchester	3.1	2.9	3.1	2.6	2.8	2.7
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	4.5	4.1	2.8	2.7	3.3	4.5
Morecambe Bay	3.2	3.5	3.6	3.7	3.4	3.4
Newcastle and North Tyneside	3.5	4.4	3.8	4.5	3.8	4.2
Norfolk[2]	—	—	—	4.7	4.7	4.7
North and East Devon	4.5	4.6	5.0	4.6	5.1	6.4
North and Mid Hampshire	2.2	2.2	2.6	2.5	3.1	3.6
North Cheshire	6.3	5.7	6.7	7.3	7.1	7.1
North Cumbria	3.0	2.5	2.6	2.3	2.6	2.3
North Derbyshire	4.5	4.8	4.6	4.3	4.5	4.3
North Essex	6.6	5.9	6.2	5.8	5.2	5.3
North Nottinghamshire	5.8	5.8	6.6	5.9	6.0	5.9
North Staffordshire	3.4	3.3	3.2	2.9	3.1	2.8
North West Anglia[2]	3.8	4.0	4.8	—	—	—
North West Lancashire	5.7	7.4	8.9	9.6	8.9	8.8
North Yorkshire	4.4	4.3	4.6	4.5	4.2	4.4
Northamptonshire	3.6	3.8	3.8	4.4	4.3	4.8
Northumberland	2.3	2.1	2.0	1.8	1.6	1.6
Nottingham	6.3	6.9	6.4	6.8	5.7	7.4
Oxfordshire	3.8	4.0	4.1	4.9	4.9	5.6
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	7.9	6.3	7.6	7.4	7.8	8.1
Rotherham	3.5	3.6	3.6	3.2	2.8	2.7
Salford and Trafford	5.3	5.4	7.0	8.4	8.0	8.4
Sandwell	0.7	1.1	2.2	2.3	2.8	4.2
Sefton	2.5	2.2	2.4	1.5	1.4	1.0
Sheffield	5.8	5.0	4.6	4.4	4.8	5.2
Shropshire	3.1	3.1	2.9	3.1	5.6	4.3

General dental service: number of claims for orthodontic appliances per 1,000 population[1]*, 1996–97 to 2001–02*

England

Health authority	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Solihull	4.0	4.5	4.5	4.0	5.7	7.1
Somerset	3.5	3.2	3.4	3.6	4.4	4.6
South and West Devon	4.8	4.6	4.9	4.2	4.3	4.7
South Cheshire	9.0	9.8	11.0	11.1	11.0	10.6
South Derbyshire	2.7	3.0	2.9	3.0	3.4	3.7
South Essex	4.7	3.9	2.9	2.4	3.4	3.4
South Humber	2.5	2.7	2.8	2.3	2.5	2.3
South Lancashire	3.3	3.9	3.5	5.1	6.2	6.1
South Staffordshire	3.0	2.8	2.8	2.7	2.6	2.7
Southampton and South West Hampshire	4.4	4.0	4.0	4.5	4.2	4.6
St. Helens and Knowsley	2.6	3.2	3.0	2.2	2.4	1.7
Stockport	6.5	6.5	6.3	5.2	5.7	5.4
Suffolk	4.9	5.0	5.4	4.9	5.4	5.7
Sunderland	2.8	3.0	3.3	3.2	2.9	3.4
Tees	3.1	3.0	3.6	3.8	3.9	4.4
Wakefield	3.0	2.3	1.9	2.0	3.0	4.9
Walsall	2.2	2.2	2.0	2.2	2.7	2.7
Warwickshire	2.1	2.1	2.4	2.9	3.2	3.4
West Kent	3.9	4.8	5.9	5.8	8.5	8.9
West Pennine	6.3	7.0	5.7	6.2	7.4	4.5
West Surrey	7.9	8.4	8.8	8.3	8.8	8.6
West Sussex	6.4	7.3	7.9	7.9	7.9	8.0
Wigan and Bolton	5.9	6.5	6.3	5.5	5.9	5.7
Wiltshire	4.3	4.8	4.3	4.8	5.4	4.5
Wirral	5.2	6.0	6.7	7.1	9.0	9.7
Wolverhampton	1.8	2.2	2.7	2.8	3.2	3.7
Worcestershire	6.6	5.8	6.3	5.8	5.7	7.4
England	4.4	4.6	4.7	4.7	4.9	5.1

[1] ONS 1996–2000 mid year population estimates based on the 1991 census are used to calculate the number of orthodontic claims per 1,000 population.

[2] In April 1999 Cambridge and Huntingdon, East Norfolk and North West Anglia were replaced by Cambridge and North Norfolk health authorities.

Operation Waiting Time (Leicester)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the waiting time is for operations in Leicester. [60573]

Mr. Lammy: The table shows the waiting time for elective admission for patients in the area covered by the former Leicestershire health authority as at 31 March 2002.

Patients waiting for elective admission

	Number
Total patients waiting	15,354
Patients waiting for admission by months waiting	
Less than 3	9,111
3–5	3,648
6–8	1,710
9–11	876
12–14	9
15–17	0
18-plus	0
Median length of wait (months)	2.53

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Rwanda

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much assistance the UK Government provided for the Rwandan Government on a bilateral basis in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02. [61866]

Clare Short: The UK Government provided the following bilateral assistance to the Government of Rwanda during 2000–01 and 2001–02:

2000–01—£32.8 million (of which £25.4 million was budgetary aid, and the remainder in project aid, technical co-operation and other grants);

2001–02—£26.9 million[1] (of which £18 million was budgetary aid).

[1] This figure is provisional. Final disbursement figures will be available in November 2002 when Statistics on International Development is published.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what representations she has made to the Government of Rwanda regarding the presence of Rwandan soldiers in the Democratic Republic of Congo. [61868]

Clare Short: We are in regular contact with the Government of Rwanda on all aspects of its policies in the Great Lakes region, including the presence of its soldiers in the DRC. The international community has recognised, in numerous Security Council resolutions and in the Lusaka Peace Agreements, that Rwanda has legitimate security concerns that have led to its military presence in the DRC. We are working actively as part of the international community to work for full implementation of the Lusaka Peace agreement, which will ensure that legitimate security concerns are addressed so that Rwanda can safely withdraw its forces from the DRC at the earliest possible date.

Third World

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she is having to regulate the activities of international organisations with respect to the Third World; and if she will make a statement. [61934]

Clare Short: There are a large number of international organisations whose activities influence developing countries, these include the World Trade Organisation (WTO), World bank and regional development banks and the UN Agencies. The WTO exists as an organisation whose members can agree the trade rules that they consider to be mutually beneficial, with decisions made through consensus; the formal regulatory environment for the World bank and the regional development banks is established through their Articles of Agreement; UN agencies are regulated through their mandates. The executive boards of the multilateral development banks and the UN agencies provide day to day policy direction, oversight and control. In the Government's 2000 White Paper "Making Globalisation Work for the Poor" we are committed to build a stronger, more open and accountable international system, including to increase the capacity of poor countries to negotiate in the WTO, and I am continuing to have discussions with other stakeholders on how best to take this work forward.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps she is taking to encourage third world countries to protect *(a)* poorer farmers and *(b)* the environment in their own countries. [61932]

Clare Short: My Department is working with developing countries on poverty reduction strategies that will enable the poorest to lift themselves out of poverty. Three-quarters of the world's poorest people live in rural areas and depend significantly on agriculture. In many countries, therefore, this means attention to rural development and agriculture. Countries where we are already engaged in agricultural and rural reform processes include: Bangladesh, Cambodia, Ghana, India, Malawi, Mozambique, Nepal, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda. My Department has recently issued a consultation paper, "Better Livelihoods for Poor People: the Role of Agriculture". This focuses on the livelihoods of small and medium producers and proposes action within developing countries, particularly with regard to the policy and institutional environment that will create opportunities for the poor; at international level with regard to trade, standard setting and international agricultural research; and domestically with regard to the distortions caused by EU agricultural subsidies and trade barriers.

We are also encouraging countries to mainstream environment within their poverty reduction strategies, recognising that more effective environmental management can contribute to sustained poverty reduction. Action is proceeding in four main areas: improving governance; enhancing the assets of the poor; improving the quality of growth; and reforming international and developed country policies. This broad agenda shows that the issue of environmental protection cannot be looked at in isolation, and that many decisions affecting the environment are not taken by those directly responsible for environmental issues.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she is having with EU Ministers about improving its third world aid budget and the delivery of aid to those countries; and if she will make a statement. [61936]

Clare Short: I am in regular contact with EU Development Ministers to discuss how to improve the effectiveness of EC development assistance. Most recently, we met during the EU Development Council on 30 May to discuss reform of EC development assistance as well as the EU position for the upcoming World Summit on Sustainable Development.

My Department is focusing its efforts on two broad objectives: improving the overall effectiveness of EC development assistance and increasing its poverty focus. We welcome the positive steps that have been taken to reform EC development assistance and are pressing the EC to pursue its reform efforts vigorously in order to implement the November 2000 EC Development Policy, which for the first time, makes poverty reduction the central objective of EC development programmes. We are working for agreement that a much greater share of EC aid should be allocated to low income countries where it will have the greatest impact on poverty reduction. In 2000, only 38 per cent. of EC aid was spent in low income countries compared to 70 per cent. in 1990.

Ethiopia

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when she last met Government officials from Ethiopia to discuss the provision of development aid to that country; and if she will make a statement about the provision of development aid to Ethiopia. [61931]

Clare Short: I last met Prime Minister Meles in Gabarone in October 2001. A senior DFID delegation subsequently held development talks with the Ethiopian Government in Addis Ababa in February 2002. Following these talks we have continued the process of taking forward our development partnership with the Ethiopian Government, which will be informed by the Ethiopian Government's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, which we understand will be issued shortly.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much *(a)* emergency and *(b)* development aid the UK Government have provided to Ethiopia in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available. [61930]

Clare Short: Over the last 10 years my Department has provided the following bilateral development assistance to Ethiopia:

Bilateral aid to Ethiopia

£000

	DFID programme	*of which: Humanitarian assistance*
1991–92	22,728	18,467
1992–93	17,391	12,863
1993–94	20,177	10,668
1994–95	23,411	12,609
1995–96	25,226	4,645
1996–97	7,931	233

Bilateral aid to Ethiopia

£000

	DFID programme	*of which: Humanitarian assistance*
1997–98	7,357	3,122
1998–99	8,733	3,489
1999–2000	6,969	3,076
2000–01	16,194	13,380

Source:

Statistics on International Development 1991–92 to 2000–01

Sudan

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the situation in southern Sudan. [62008]

Clare Short: In spite of renewed efforts to establish a lasting peace, fighting continues in many parts of southern Sudan. The humanitarian consequences for those affected by the conflict are devastating. The UK is supporting the latest round of IGAD peace talks in Nairobi this week through the DFID/FCO Sudan Unit and the UK Special Representative and with financial support to the IGAD Sudan secretariat. In addition to supporting the political process, we will continue to support the agencies and organisations in the field best placed to meet the humanitarian needs.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what *(a)* protocols and *(b)* treaties are in place to ensure access to southern Sudan by aid agencies for humanitarian assistance; and if she will make a statement. [62009]

Clare Short: Humanitarian access is based on a series of agreements dating from the 1988 Accords between the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) coalition partners and the Sudan Peoples Liberation Army (SPLA). Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS), agreed between the United Nations (UN), the Government of Sudan (GoS) and the SPLA followed this in 1989. OLS was based on unsigned informal agreements between UN officials and the GoS. In 1992, the UN Department for Humanitarian Affairs negotiated a new agreement with GoS and SPLA on access routes for humanitarian assistance. In 1993 the OLS Ground Rules were implemented. The Intergovernmental Authority on Drought and Development (IGADD) achieved agreement in May 1994 on the principles for a negotiated end to the conflict (the Declaration of Principles—DoP). In addition to the DoP, an agreement on humanitarian access was also signed and ratified. The latter agreement remains the only signed access agreement between all the parties.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what flight bans are in place in the Sudan, in *(a)* Bahr el-Ghazal, *(b)* Eastern Equatoria and *(c)* Western Upper Nile; and what the impact is on access to humanitarian assistance. [62010]

Clare Short: Flight bans are in place in all three areas.

In *(a)* Bahr el-Ghazal, the total of denied locations is 38 out of 63 sought (25 granted). 17 locations are denied as the Government of Sudan (GoS) says they are insecure and therefore not safe, plus a further 21 locations as GoS cannot be sure where they are as WFP/UN will not give them the required coordinates.

In *(b)* Eastern Equatoria, the total denied is five out of 15 sought (10 granted). Two locations are denied as GoS says they are not secure, plus three more denied as GoS have not been given coordinates.

In *(c)* Western Upper Nile (WUN), 13 locations are denied as GoS says they are not secure. 19 others are denied because no coordinates were provided and GoS says they cannot therefore verify the locations and give clearance. GoS has granted a further 45 clearances for WUN this week after representations were made by the United Nations: of these, 21 are new locations not requested by the UN.

Flight bans limit the access to humanitarian assistance and have a negative impact on the populations affected. We continue to work to improve the situation.

Ministerial Meetings

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development which Ministers and officials had meetings with representatives of *(a)* the Confederation of British Industry, *(b)* the Engineering Employees Federation, and *(c)* the Engineering Marine Training Authority during the last year; who they met; and what the subjects and outcomes of their discussions were. [62206]

Clare Short: We have no record of any meetings with these organisations over the period in question.

Afghanistan

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what funding *(a)* her Department and *(b)* other G8 countries have (i) pledged for and (ii) spent on the return of refugee programmes in Afghanistan. [61754]

Clare Short: Since September 2001, my Department has contributed over £3 million to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) for their programme of assistance to Afghan refugees, and over £3.5 million to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) for assistance to internally displaced persons (IDPs) and returnees to Afghanistan. We are also supporting a number of other humanitarian programmes which will help to create an environment for the sustainable return of both refugees and IDPs, including the United Nations-led programme of mine clearance and mine awareness in Afghanistan. We are currently considering what further support to provide for refugees, IDPs and returnees.

At the Tokyo conference in January, international donors pledged funds for the overall reconstruction of Afghanistan, including humanitarian programmes. Pledges were not broken down by sector. Therefore we are not aware of specific amounts pledged by G8 nations for refugee return.

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what representations her Department has made on the reduction of World Food Programme projects in Afghanistan. [61758]

Clare Short: My Department is liaising with the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) as it further targets and amends its activities in line with the developing situation on the ground and the availability of resources. Since September 2001, we have contributed £9 million towards WFP's programmes in Afghanistan, and are currently considering what further support to provide.

Sri Lanka

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance she has promised Sri Lanka following her meeting with the Sri Lankan Prime Minister on 28 May. [61864]

Clare Short: I agreed to provide additional funds for quick impact, fast disbursing programmes that will help nurture and build confidence in the peace process. We now await proposals from the Sri Lanka Government. In addition, I offered support from my Department in applying lessons and experience from other countries emerging from conflict.

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much and what proportion of the departmental expenditure limit for 2002–03 had been spent by 31 May; what the figures were for 2001–02; and if she will make a statement. [60997]

Clare Short: I refer the hon. Member to the answer which my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury gave on 17 June 2002, *Official Report* (reference to follow when known).

Advertising Campaigns

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much was spent on press and advertising campaigns in 2001–02; and what the planned expenditure is for 2002–03. [60902]

Clare Short: My Department did not manage any campaigns of this kind during the period in question.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Computers

Dr. Kumar: To ask the President of the Council what measures are *(a)* in place and *(b)* under discussion, in his Department in order to ensure compliance with the WEE Directive. [60729]

Mr. Robin Cook: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on 12 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 1266W.

Modernisation

Mr. Allen: To ask the President of the Council if he will make proposals to the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons that the oral questions to be tabled on a particular day should appear on the front page of the Order Paper. [61623]

Mr. Robin Cook: I will consider this suggestion in the light of the Procedure Committee's report on parliamentary questions.

Public Service Agreement Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council what has been the *(a)* cost and *(b)* saving from the pursuit of the Department's Public Service Agreement targets in each year since they were introduced. [60885]

Mr. Robin Cook: I refer the hon. Member to my answer on 21 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 514W.

Staff Numbers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council how many staff were employed by his Department on *(a)* 2 May 1997 and *(b)* 31 May 2002. [60892]

Mr. Robin Cook: Data are collected twice a year on 1 April and 1 October. Data for 1 April 2002 are currently being collected.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Cabinet Office, on 13 June 2002.

Advertising Campaigns

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council how much was spent on press and advertising campaigns in 2001–02; and what the planned expenditure is for 2002–03. [60912]

Mr. Robin Cook: No expenditure has been incurred by my Department on press and advertising campaigns in 2001–02. There is no planned expenditure for 2002–03.

Staff Training

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council how much the Department has spent on staff training and development in each of the last five years. [61064]

Mr. Robin Cook: The information requested is as follows:

	£
1997–98	9,586.40
1998–99	9,388.34
1999–2000	14,462.87
2000–01	11,305.69
2001–02	16,362.78

Entertainment Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council what the cost was of the Department's 2001 staff Christmas party; and how many people attended. [61661]

Mr. Robin Cook: My Department does not host parties for staff.

However, it has been the custom for the Leader of the House to host a Christmas reception to thank the staff who work in parliamentary sections in other Departments who provide advice for the business statement. Ministers, MPs and staff of the House and of my Department are also invited.

The total cost was £1,843.87 and approximately 200 people attended.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Judicial Delays

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General what action has been taken relating to management information about committal proceedings which failed because the prosecution was not ready to proceed. [60213]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* Since April 2002, the Crown Prosecution Service has recorded details of discharged committals in its quarterly Adverse Outcomes report. This will show the reason for the outcome against a list of 22 categories, but will not capture, as a distinct category, those discharged committals in which the prosecution was not ready to proceed.

The Compass Case Management system will be introduced in December 2003. This will provide a count of the number of discharged committals and an analysis of the reasons for the outcome. This will make available for the first time the number that occur because the prosecution is not ready to proceed.

Crown Prosecution Service

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General which CPS areas have been identified as sources of good practice; and what the nature is of their expertise. [60205]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate reports on individual CPS areas and highlights good practice which might usefully be adopted by other areas. Individual area inspectorate reports are circulated to all Chief Crown Prosecutors.

In addition, representatives of CPS HQ, areas, and the inspectorate meet to draw together identified good practice, which is then posted on the CPS intranet and also appears in the CPS weekly business publication.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Regional Organisation

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) which of the agencies and NDPBs sponsored by her Department have a regional organisation; and if she will list the counties and unitary authorities in each region in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2002; [58939]

(2) what regional organisation her Department has; and if she will list the counties and unitary authorities in each region in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2002. [58938]

Dr. Howells: My Department does not have its own regional organisation, but works with and through the Government offices for the regions. Since summer 1999, one member of staff with the responsibility for my Department's agenda, has been based in each of the nine regional Government offices.

In 1997, most regions had a gathering of cultural agencies such as arts, sport and heritage, but there was no forum which brought together wider cultural interests such as local government, regional development agencies and key cultural players. Since December 1999, each of the eight regions outside London has had a regional cultural consortium, sponsored by my Department, which brings together representatives of all cultural sectors.

The following non-departmental public bodies sponsored by my Department have a regional organisation whose regional boundaries match those of the Government office regions: Sport England, English Heritage, Arts Council of England, New Opportunities Fund, The Community Fund and Awards for All—a joint lottery distributor programme. All have offices in each of the nine regions. In addition, the Film Council is in the process of bringing together regional screen organisations throughout England and they too will have an office in each region.

The National Heritage Memorial Fund is in the process of opening up regional offices which should be operational by July. They will have an office in each region except that the south-east and London regions will both be based in the London office.

The Independent Television Commission has four regional offices. The regions covered by these offices are as follows: north of England (this covers the north-west, north-east and Yorkshire Government office regions); midlands and east of England (this covers the west midlands; east midlands and east of England Government office regions as well as parts of Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire); south and south-west England and the Channel Islands (this covers the London, south-east and south-west Government office regions; excluding parts of Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, Oxfordshire, Dorset and Somerset); Wales and the west of England (which includes parts of Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, Dorset and Somerset).

The English Tourism Council does not have a regional organisation of its own. However, much of its work is carried out by the 10 regional tourist boards, which are independent bodies. These are arranged as follows: Cumbria; east of England (this covers the east of England Government office region); heart of England (this covers the west midlands and east midlands Government office regions); London; Northumbria (this covers the north-east Government office region); north-west (this covers the north-west Government office regions except Cumbria); south-east of England (the counties of East and West Sussex, Kent and Surrey, and the unitary authorities of Brighton and Hove, and Medway); southern (the counties of Buckinghamshire, Hampshire, Oxfordshire, the unitary authorities of Bracknell Forest, Reading, Slough, West Berkshire, Windsor and Maidenhead, Wokingham, Portsmouth, Southampton, Isle of Wight, Milton Keynes, and East Dorset district); south-west (this covers the south-west Government office region, excluding the East Dorset district); Yorkshire (this covers the Yorkshire Government office region).

I am arranging for a list of the counties and unitary authorities in each region in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2002 to be placed in the House Library.

Performance Targets

Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the performance targets that her Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies are required to meet, apart from those set out in the public service agreements for 1999 to 2002 and 2001 to 2004; and if she will specify for each target *(a)* who sets it and *(b)* who monitors achievement against it. [60466]

Dr. Howells: In addition to the targets set out in the public service agreements (PSA), a number of targets, set and monitored by the Department, are in the Service Delivery Agreement underpinning the PSA. The Service Delivery Agreement may be obtained from the Library of the House and is also available on the DCMS website.

Performance targets for the Royal Parks Agency and the Department's non-departmental public bodies are set out in three-year funding agreements. These targets are agreed between the Department and its sponsored bodies and jointly monitored. I am arranging to have the funding agreements placed in the Library of the House.

Key targets for Lottery distributors are also agreed with the Department and jointly monitored. The targets appear in the distributors' Annual Reports and Accounts, which are available from the Library of the House.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what has been the *(a)* cost and *(b)* saving from the pursuit of the Department's Public Service Agreement targets in each year since they were introduced; [60888]

(2) what the *(a)* cost and *(b)* saving has been from the Department's pursuit of Service Delivery Agreement targets in each year since they were introduced. [61631]

Dr. Howells: The Department's Public Service Agreement sets out the key outcomes it is committed to deliver with the resources provided, and its Service Delivery Agreement sets out the key steps towards delivery of those targets. Every year the Department publishes information on performance against its targets, including on value for money and on the resources it has used in its departmental report.

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much and what proportion of the departmental expenditure limit for 2002–03 will be accounted for by staff costs; what the figures were for 2001–02; and if she will make a statement. [61031]

Dr. Howells: Information for 2002–03 is not available as the total for staff costs is dependent upon the outcome of pay negotiations. The figures for 2001–02 are available in the Department's 2002 Annual Report, Cm 5423, copies of which are available in the House of Commons Library.

Staff Training

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much the Department has spent on staff training and development in each of the last five years. [61068]

Dr. Howells: The Department has spent the following on training and development.

Financial year	*Sum (£)*
2001–02	388,397
2000–01	309,832
1999–00	348,692
1998–99	311,514

Figures are provided on an accruals basis.

Figures for the years before 1998 are not held centrally. Retrieving the information prior to that date would incur disproportionate cost.

School Sport

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much Sports Lottery funds has been allocated to capital sporting projects in state primary schools in each year; and if she will make a statement. [61373]

Dr. Howells: Sport England's data collection for lottery awards does not distinguish between primary and secondary schools. The total amounts awarded to state primary and secondary schools for capital projects are set out in the table.

£

Financial year	*Total*
1995–96	13,316,057
1996–97	12,117,208
1997–98	22,270,791
1998–99	24,197,506
1999–2000	27,983,606
2000–01	20,767,260
2001–02	25,460,744
2002–03	7,476,435
Total	153,589,607

In addition, Space for Sport and Arts is providing £130 million towards new or modernised sport and arts facilities in about 300 primary schools in deprived areas. Of this, £55 million is lottery money of which Sport England is contributing £25 million. The majority of building work will be under way during the financial year 2002–03.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the funding streams from the Government and the National Lottery available to secondary schools who wish to improve their sports facilities. [61292]

Dr. Howells: The Government fund the provision of sports facilities in schools predominantly through Sport England and other non-departmental public bodies. The Community Capital Fund, one element of the Sport England lottery fund, has allocated £200 million to primary and secondary schools for over 350 schemes since 1995 to assist with projects such as facility development. In addition, the New Opportunities Fund (NOF) recently allocated £750 million (£581 million in England) to LEAs across the country. Authorities are working with NOF and local organisations on the distribution of those funds to projects in primary and secondary schools designed to bring about a step-change in the provision of sporting facilities for young people and for the community.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many *(a)* school and *(b)* other playing fields have been sold since June 2001 (i) in England and (ii) broken down by constituency. [62983]

Mr. Caborn: Data on the number of playing fields sold are not collected. Sport England do, however, monitor the number of planning applications concerning playing fields in their role as statutory consultee. The Government will shortly be publishing combined figures for *(a)* applications from schools submitted to the Secretary of State for Education and Skills for the disposal or change of use of school playing fields (which are already published monthly), and *(b)* figures from Sport England giving details of planning applications affecting playing fields which have been referred to them as statutory consultee (which are already published quarterly), along with (c) relevant data from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many school sports co-ordinators are in place. [62985]

Mr. Caborn: The Government are well on their way to meeting their target of 1,000 school sport co-ordinators by 2004, with 577 currently in place, benefiting 1.26 million pupils. Another 165 co-ordinators have been designated, making a total of 742 in post by September, and increasing the total number of pupils benefiting to 1.8 million.

School Sports Co-ordinators Scheme

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the School Sports Co-ordinators Scheme. [61289]

Dr. Howells: The Government are well on their way to meeting their target of 1,000 School Sport Co-ordinators by 2004, with 577 currently in place, benefiting 1.26 million pupils. Another 165 Co-ordinators have been designated, making a total of 742 in post by September, and increasing the total number of pupils benefiting to 1.8 million.

Staff Numbers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many staff were employed by her Department on *(a)* 2 May 1997 and *(b)* 31 May 2002. [60927]

Dr. Howells: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Cabinet Office on 13 June 2002, *Official Report,* column 1402.

Advertising Campaigns

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much was spent on press and advertising campaigns in 2001–02; and what the planned expenditure is for 2002–03. [60906]

Dr. Howells: No press and advertising campaigns were undertaken in 2001–02 and none are planned for 2002–03.

Religious Broadcasters

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement regarding her policy with regard to allowing religious broadcasters to apply for *(a)* national analogue radio licences, *(b)* national digital sound programme licences, *(c)* analogue radio additional service licences, *(d)* local radio multiplex licences, *(e)* national radio multiplex licences, *(f)* all audiologue television licences, *(g)* national television multiplex licences and *(h)* local television multiplex licences. [61508]

Dr. Howells: The Government's aim is to ensure that the limited spectrum available is distributed so as to satisfy as many viewers/listeners as possible, and to avoid giving one religion an unfair advantage over another so that everyone's beliefs are equally respected. The Government's position is set out in the document "The draft Communications Bill—The Policy" which states that, where there is sufficient spectrum availability, restrictions on religious bodies holding licences will be removed (paragraph 9.3.3).

This means that religious bodies can hold none of the licences referred to in the question. However, the Radio Authority, which licences all independent radio services in the UK, is currently given discretion under the Broadcasting Act 1990 to award local analogue, satellite and cable licences to religious bodies, subject to compliance with the authority's codes on News, Current Affairs and Programming; Advertising and Sponsorship; and its Ownership Guidelines, and the ITC can also award cable and satellite TV licences to religious organisations. The draft Bill increases the number of types of licences which religious bodies can hold by giving Ofcom discretion to award a digital local sound programme service and a digital additional service licence to religious bodies. Further clauses are now being drafted which will give Ofcom discretion to award religious bodies digital additional service licences for TV and radio, TV licences for digital programme services and restricted service licences.

Public Library Standard 18

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what estimate she has made of the annual cost to each London borough if they are to comply with public library standard 18. [61158]

Dr. Howells: We are monitoring the application of the public library standards through the Annual Library Planning process. Analysis of the 2001 plans shows that nearly all authorities are using the introduction of the standards to plan for improvements in the quality of their library services but that, in many cases, authorities recognise that this will require them to direct more of their budgets into their library services than hitherto. Most authorities have shown that they will need to build this into their budgets for the financial years up to 2003–04. I shall continue to monitor the ability of authorities to increase their library service budgets through the Annual Library Plan process as, in many cases, authorities have clearly stated that their ability to meet the standards by 2003–04 is dependent on increases in the library budget.

PLS 18, in common with the other public library standards, helps to define authorities' existing statutory obligations under the Public Library and Museums Act 1964 to provide library services that are comprehensive and efficient.

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what additional resources she has provided to local authorities with large book stocks to enable them to replenish their stocks in accordance with public library standard 18. [61157]

Dr. Howells: Funding for public libraries is provided through the Environmental Protection and Cultural Services (EPCS) block administered by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. Subvention to the EPCS was increased by 4.3 per cent. for 2002–03, a real terms increase of 1.7 per cent.

PLS 18, in common with the other public library standards, helps to define authorities' existing statutory obligations under the Public Library and Museums Act 1964 to provide library services that are comprehensive and efficient.

We are monitoring the application of the public library standards through the Annual Library Planning process. Analysis of the 2001 plans shows that nearly all authorities are using the introduction of the standards to plan for improvements in the quality of their library services but that, in many cases, authorities recognise that this will require them to direct more of their budgets into their library services than hitherto. It is for library authorities to ensure that they make the right allocation of resources to ensure the provision of a comprehensive and efficient service within the meaning of the Act.

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the impact of public library standard 18 on levels of book stocks. [61159]

Dr. Howells: The public library standards have been introduced over a three year period, 2001–04, and, although we are monitoring the application of the standards each year through the Annual Library Planning process, it will not be possible to obtain an accurate picture of the impact of PLS 18 on stock levels until the end of 2003–04.

The public library standards help to define authorities' existing statutory obligations under the Public Library and Museums Act 1964 to provide library services that are comprehensive and efficient.

Stationery

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much was spent by her Department on stationery in *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97, *(c)* 1997–98, *(d)* 1998–99, *(e)* 1999–2000, *(f)* 2000–01 and *(g)* 2001–02; what suppliers were used in each of those years, and how much was spent per supplier; what tender processes were undertaken, and what the frequency was of the processes; and if she will make a statement. [61380]

Dr. Howells: Before 1998–99 no record was kept of the cost of specific office supplies such as stationery. The cost of stationery, in 1998–99 was £130,000, in 1999–2000 £136,000, in 2000–01 it was £128,000 and in 2001–02 £101,000. Stationery is purchased from a single supplier to achieve best value from volume purchasing. Contracts for the supply of goods and services are all subject to competitive tender and those for the supply of goods are normally for a period of three years, the last commencing in April 2001.

Inter-departmental Group on Sport

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will place copies of the minutes of the Inter-Departmental Group on Sport in the Library. [61291]

Dr. Howells: The inter-ministerial group brings together Departments and other related bodies with an interest in sport. The group was set up so those attending could raise issues and float ideas in the knowledge that their contributions would remain confidential. To publish the minutes would inhibit the discussions and reduce the effectiveness of the group. I do not, therefore, intend to place the minutes of the group in the Library.

Fair Trade

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what work her Department will be undertaking to help promote the launch of the new universal fair trade mark later this year. [61756]

Dr. Howells: The Department for Culture Media and Sport has no specific plans in respect of the launch of the mark but encourages all sponsored bodies, where the opportunities to further the aims of fair trade are greater, to provide support by using and marketing fair trade goods and promoting the trade mark.

Overseas Visitors

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what estimate she has made of the number of visitors to the UK from overseas *(a)* during the last three months and *(b)* in the same period, in (i) 2000 and (ii) 2001. [62062]

Dr. Howells: Data are collected in terms of visits rather than visitors. These are shown in the table.

Number of visits to the UK by overseas residents

	Number (million)
(a)	
February to April 2002	5.3
(b)	
(i) February to April 2001	5.3
(ii) February to April 2000	5.6

Source:

International Passenger Survey, Office for National Statistics

Broadband

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what estimate she has made of the costs of ensuring that internet access in public libraries is broadband enabled; and if she will make a statement; [61805]

(2) what targets she has set for the roll out of broadband services in public libraries; and if she will make a statement. [61806]

Dr. Howells: £100 million of lottery funding has been invested in ICT technical infrastructure and equipment to create a network of ICT learning centres in more than 4,000 public libraries across the UK. The programme is on target to connect all public libraries to the internet, wherever practical, by the end of 2002, and based on the information we have received from local authorities we estimate that around 90 per cent. of these libraries will have broadband connections of 2 Mb or more. It is not possible to disaggregate the cost of providing broadband access to libraries, since it is the policy of many local authorities to procure broadband connectivity across the range of local services.

Ministerial Meetings

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport which Ministers and officials had meetings with representatives of *(a)* the Confederation of British Industry, *(b)* the Engineering Employees Federation, and *(c)* the Engineering Marine Training Authority during the last year; who they met; and what the subjects and outcomes of their discussions were. [62203]

Mr. Caborn: My ministerial colleagues and I have met many representatives from industry in the course of our duties since 8 June 2001 as part of the process of policy development and analysis. All such contacts are conducted in accordance with the Ministerial Code, the Civil Service Code and Guidance for Civil Servants: Contacts with Lobbyists. Some of these discussions take place on a confidential basis, and in order to preserve this confidentiality, it is not the normal practice of Government to release details of specific meetings with private individuals, organisations or companies.

Members of Parliament (Personal Data)

Mr. Forth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what information is held by her Department on each hon. Member in relation to *(a)* personal relationships, both current and past, *(b)* financial status and dealings, *(c)* connections with companies and interest groups, *(d)* connections with Governments and *(e)* published works; and what was held in January 2002. [61835]

Dr. Howells: My Department holds no such information, nor was any such information held in January 2002.

Libraries

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps are being taken to increase the number of libraries in the United Kingdom. [61903]

Dr. Howells: It is for the 149 library authorities to make their own operational decisions about library provision within the requirements of the 1964 Public Libraries and Museums Act. The public library standards, including a target for the numbers of static libraries per household within an authority area, help define but do not increase those requirements.

In January 2002, my Department wrote to all English local authorities, notifying them of the arrangements for entering bids for the private finance initiative credits held by DCMS by 31 May. No library bids were received from Coventry.

Film Productions

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps are being taken to attract more film productions to the United Kingdom. [61907]

Dr. Howells: The Government seek to create an economic environment in which the film industry can flourish, including through tax relief.

The British Film Commission (BFC), which is a division of the Film Council, is responsible (with the British Film Office in Los Angeles) for promoting the use of British locations, facilities and production personnel to overseas film and television producers.

It delivers its objectives by working alongside a network of regional screen agencies to provide a comprehensive and free information service to international production executives. It compiles up-to-date information on all aspects of film production in the UK. The information is disseminated through its website, various marketing materials and by holding international seminars.

Earlier this year, the BFC completed a major US marketing exercise in both Los Angeles and New York to encourage inward investment into the UK. 20 seminars were held on film financing, production and post-production. They were attended by representatives from each of the seven major Hollywood studios, as well as independent producers, lawyers and film financiers.

Recent major productions attracted to the UK by the BFC include Band of Brothers, Chocolat, Lara Croft: Tomb Raider (and sequel currently in pre-production), The Mummy Returns, Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone and the sequel currently in production, Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Asylum Accommodation Centres

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will announce the *(a)* names of the successful bidder for the construction of asylum accommodation centres and *(b)* value of each contract awarded. [59077]

Beverley Hughes: We expect to be in a position to decide who will be selected to design, build and operate the first of the trial centres after the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill receives Royal Assent.

Contracts have not yet been awarded.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 23 May, Ref 57343, when the first asylum accommodation centre will be open. [60293]

Beverley Hughes: Firm opening dates have yet to be finalised, and will depend upon such issues as planning consent, the nature of each site, and the design proposals.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the full criminal record of all those detained at Yarl's Wood Detention Centre was known to the *(a)* police, *(b)* Immigration Service and *(c)* contractors. [60290]

Beverley Hughes: The full criminal record of all those detained at Yarl's Wood Detention Centre would not have been known. It must be remembered that the overseas backgrounds of individuals—including any criminal activities—will not usually be known at the time of their detention. However, where such details are known, they are passed to the removal centre contractor if they indicate that the individual poses a particular risk.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the criminal record of those admitted to the proposed asylum accommodation centre at Throckmorton will be known to *(a)* the police, *(b)* the Immigration Service and *(c)* the contractor. [60289]

Beverley Hughes: While there is no direct relationship between asylum seekers and criminality, for security reasons, criminal record checks will be carried out. Where such checks reveal information, which is relevant to those involved in the management of the sites or to the police, should placement occur, this will be made available.

Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if accommodation centres for asylum seekers will have a statutory obligation to *(a)* have a child protection policy and *(b)* have a designated member of staff with responsibility for child protection. [59717]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* We are discussing accommodation centres and child protection issues with the Department of Health.

Accommodation centres will not be statutorily obliged to have a child protection policy, but we will require those operating the centres to have a policy in place and appropriate arrangements for putting it into action.

Accommodation centres will come within the ambit of the Children Act 1989. Section 47 of that Act places a duty on a local authority to investigate if they have reasonable cause to suspect that a child who lives in their area is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm. In such circumstances, the authority has a duty to make such inquiries as they consider necessary to enable them to decide whether they should take any action to safeguard or promote the child's welfare.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department where on Throckmorton airfield he proposes to build the asylum accommodation centre. [59274]

Beverley Hughes: The planning notification to be submitted shortly will specify the suggested location for the proposed accommodation centre at Throckmorton.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements he is making to inform local communities in the area of sites proposed for asylum accommodation centres about these centres and to consult with them about their impact. [59083]

Beverley Hughes: I refer the hon. member to the reply my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle) gave him on 3 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 460W.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what formal offer has been made to QinetiQ for the purchase of land for an asylum accommodation centre at Throckmorton; what the size of such offer is; and if he will make a statement. [59370]

Beverley Hughes: Negotiations with QinetiQ are continuing, no formal offer has yet been made.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the nature of the sleeping arrangements planned for asylum accommodation centres is for *(a)* single men and *(b)* families; and if he will make a statement. [59276]

Beverley Hughes: The nature of the sleeping arrangements will depend upon design proposals submitted by bidders in response to the procurement competition within certain parameters to be established by the Home Office. Those parameters will include the stipulation that families will be accommodated separately from single people.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 10 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 795W, Ref 57089, for what reason he does not consider it appropriate to put into the public domain details of sites which were not considered to merit detailed assessment as possible sites for asylum accommodation centres. [61262]

Beverley Hughes: We do not consider there to be any genuine public interest in disclosing sites which were dismissed at an early stage and were not subject to detailed assessment. The disclosure of information of this nature would harm the frankness and candour of internal discussion in our view. We have given details of the sites where detailed assessments have been taking place and we will do likewise in future.

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if it is his policy to permit an asylum accommodation centre to be located close to a girls' school. [61185]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* All relevant factors will be considered when decisions are taken on the location of accommodation centres.

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment his Department is making of the suitability of Mayfield College, East Sussex, as a potential asylum accommodation centre. [61186]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* None.

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many additional asylum accommodation centres he estimates will be required; and what the anticipated timescale is for announcing their locations. [61188]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* On 29 October 2001, we announced our intention to provide 3,000 trial accommodation centre places. We have put into the public domain the location of all sites, which were considered to merit detailed assessment for the purpose of siting an accommodation centre and will continue to do so in the future.

Press Releases

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many press releases have been issued by his Department in each month of 2002. [59496]

Beverley Hughes: The information is as follows.

	Home Office	Prison Service
January	29	5
February	27	4
March	31	4
April	26	2
May	33	4

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many press releases have been issued by his Department *(a)* in each month between May and December 1997 and *(b)* in each year from 1998 to 2001 inclusive. [59495]

Beverley Hughes: *(a)* The number of press releases issued by the Home Department between May and December 1997 was:

	Number issued
May	16
June	24
July	43
August	19
September	31
October	59
November	40
December	39

In addition, the Prison Service issued 47 press releases during this period but a monthly breakdown is not available.

(b) The number of press releases issued in each year from 1998 to 2001 inclusive was:

	1998	1999	2000	2001
Home Office	512	450	422	336
Prison Service	75	78	93	91
Probation Inspectorate	3	—	11	14
Prison Inspectorate	7	39	38	59
Police Inspectorate	—	—	1	2
Fire Inspectorate	—	—	—	3

Drug Treatment

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the *(a)* cost and *(b)* accuracy of the methods used for testing for drug abuse; and if he will make a statement. [58513]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 23 May 2002]*: Information on the costs and accuracy of the various methods used for testing drug abuse is not held centrally. To answer this question would incur disproportionate costs.

The Pilot Programme for testing for drug misuse under the provisions of the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000 introduced the use of oral fluid (saliva) on-site screening tests, following an evaluation study by the Forensic Science Service. This found that oral fluid provided an effective and accurate alternative to urine for screening for heroine and cocaine.

Departmental Sponsors

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what the duties are of hon. Members appointed as sponsors to his Department; and what assistance is given by officials in his Department to them in carrying out these duties; [59981]

(2) which hon. Members have been appointed as sponsors to his Department since 7 June 2001; and when each of them were appointed. [59968]

Mr. Blunkett: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) on 10 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 809W.

Correspondence

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter of 29 January from the hon. Member for West Chelmsford concerning Mr. Wong of Chelmsford. [60675]

Beverley Hughes: I wrote to the hon. Member on 7 June 2002. I am sorry he did not receive an earlier response.

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when his Department *(a)* received the letter of 15 October 2001 from the hon. Member for Manchester Central, regarding Dr ECC reference PO18117/01, *(b)* granted a residence permit to Dr ECC and leave to remain to Ms LOR and daughter and *(c)* replied to the hon. Member for Manchester Central; and if he will give the reasons for the delay in resolving this case. [60554]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 13 June 2002]*: The letter of 15 October 2001 was received by the Immigration and Nationality Directorate on 18 October 2001. Dr ECC was granted a residence permit and leave to remain was granted to Ms LOR and her daughter on 29 December 2001.

My right hon. and noble Friend, the former Minister of State at Home Office (Lord Rooker) wrote to my hon. friend on 29 April 2002. I am sorry that there was a delay in replying.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for West Chelmsford of 28 February, Ref 4398/2. [60795]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 13 June 2002]*: I wrote to the hon. Member on 7 June 2002. I am sorry the delay in replying.

Animal Research

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he received the report of the Expert Group on Efficient Regulation concerning the licensing of animal research in the UK; when he formally responded to the report; and what steps the Government have taken to improve the efficiency of the licensing process. [60719]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: We received a copy of the report of the Expert Group on Efficient Regulation on 8 October 2001 and a formal response was sent to the Chairman of the Expert Group on 5 November 2001. This noted that the report did not suggest any changes in the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 and advised that we would look carefully at its recommendations regarding the administration of the 1986 Act. A further response will be sent when we have completed consideration of those recommendations.

Separately to our consideration of the Expert Group report, we have taken a number of recent steps to improve the efficiency of the licensing of scientific procedures under the 1986 Act, mainly arising from discussions conducted in 2000–2001 under the auspices of the Prime Minister's Pharmaceutical Industry Competitiveness Task Force. A review of the ethical review process was completed in November 2001 and best practice for more efficient working of the process is now being widely disseminated around establishments. New guidance has also been issued on completing project licence application forms, and industry has been given information on errors commonly found in licence application forms, which should help to reduce the number of applications submitted with such errors in future, and therefore reduce delays.

Most importantly, extra resources are starting to be devoted to the assessment and processing of licence applications. These include development of a new computer system, which is expected to enable electronic processing of all licence applications, in due course. There will also, as announced in March 2001, be a significant increase in the size of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Inspectorate from 21 inspectors to 33 by March 2004. We have also improved the relevant section of the Home Office website to provide easier access for applicants and licence holders to reference documents and best practice material. The new website will go live shortly.

Supply Teachers

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps his Department has taken to speed up the process of granting work permits to supply agencies and supply teachers. [60062]

Beverley Hughes: The current work permit policy excludes issuing work permits to recruitment agencies, employment agencies and other similar businesses. However, as part of a review of this specific issue, Work Permits UK (WP(UK)) who administer the work permit arrangements, are currently undertaking a formal consultation, which began on 18 March 2002, with customers and stakeholders as to whether the scope of the work permit arrangements should be extended to agencies. The consultation ended on 14 June 2002.

In conjunction with the consultation, WP (UK) are currently piloting a scheme which allows agencies within the education sector, subject to certain criteria, to apply for work permits for teachers. The cases are processed within one day of being received. The results of this pilot will be fed into the formal agency review.

I can assure my hon. Friend that I will give swift consideration to the opinions expressed in the consultation and I am hoping to announce a decision on the outcome by September 2002.

Age Discrimination

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if his Department enforces a maximum retirement age of most staff; and whether it has a policy of not considering applications for employment by persons over a particular age, and those ages. [59335]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* The normal retirement age for non-industrial staff Home Office staff is 60 and for industrial staff 65. The Department has recently reviewed its age retirement policy and from 1 April 2002 all non-industrial staff up to Grade 6 throughout the Home Office (including the agencies but excluding the Prison Service) have the option to retire at any point between the ages of 60 and 65.

The Prison Service is currently carrying out its own separate formal review of age retirement policy.

The Home Office has also revised its recruitment policy from 1 April 2002 to allow for the recruitment of staff up to the age of 64, subject to their meeting normal standards of health. Provided that there is an expectation of a reasonable period of employment and a return on recruitment and training, the primary criterion for selection will be the ability of a candidate to carry out the duties of the vacant post.

Commission for Racial Equality

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last met the chairman of the CRE; and if he will make a statement. [60569]

Beverley Hughes: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary last met with the chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality, Gurbux Singh, on 29 May 2002. They have regular meetings to keep each other updated on issues of current and mutual interest with regard to race relations and equality. They also met on other occasions during the year.

Performance Targets

Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the performance targets that his Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies are required to meet, apart from those set out in the public service agreements for 1999 to 2002 and 2001 to 2004; and if he will specify for each target *(a)* who sets it and *(b)* who monitors achievement against it. [60472]

Beverley Hughes: The supporting targets to the public service agreements (PSAs) are the service delivery agreements (SDAs). These are listed in full alongside the PSAs they support on the Home Office Website (www.homeoffice.gov.uk). These were set during the Spending Review process in consultation with Her Majesty's Treasury and key stakeholders. These are reported on regularly internally and on a quarterly basis to Her Majesty's Treasury.

Other Home Office targets are listed in the published Home Office Business Plan, which can also be viewed in full on our website. The Business Plan for 2002–03 will be published on the 13 June. Progress on targets listed in here, that are not PSAs and SDAs, is reported to the Permanent Secretary and the Home Office Group Executive Board on a regular basis. The Business Plan targets are set in relation to the agreed PSA and SDA targets and also in consultation with Directors and key stakeholders within the core Home Office and within agencies, NDPBs and local delivery areas. In addition, as part of the regular stocktake process between my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and my right hon. friend the Prime Minister, we provide a progress report on specific targets to the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit.

Due to the number of additional targets that are contained within the SDA and the Business Plan, it is not possible to list them all here.

Asylum Seekers

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average delay was between disposal of the appeal as defined in section 94(4) of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 and issue of papers granting leave to enter or remain as a refugee with respect to persons who won their asylum appeals in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [60536]

Beverley Hughes: The information requested is not available and could only be obtained by examination of individual case records thereby incurring a disproportionate cost.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers were in prisons run by the Scottish Prison Service, broken down by establishment, on 1 May; and how many are being held. [60821]

Beverley Hughes: The latest available data for asylum detainees are for 30 March 2002. At that date there were no asylum seekers detained solely under Immigration Act powers in Scottish prisons. Data for asylum seekers charged or convicted of a criminal offence are not available.

When detention is necessary, the Government are committed to pursuing a strategy of detaining both immigration offenders and asylum seekers in dedicated removal centres. Prisons are used for a small number of detainees who cannot be managed within the immigration removal estate.

Information on Immigration Act detainees as at 29 June 2002 will be published on 30 August 2002 on the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Leave to Remain

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for leave to remain in the United Kingdom were outstanding at the end of each *(a)* month since June 2001 and *(b)* June since 1997. [60831]

Beverley Hughes: Statistics on the number of outstanding applications for leave to remain are not currently available.

Refugee Applications

Mr. Tom Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many residents of Glasgow, Cathcart constituency are awaiting a decision on their application for refugee status; [62145]

(2) how many residents of Glasgow are awaiting a decision on their application for refugee status. [62147]

Beverley Hughes: Asylum applications data are not available at regional level except by port (for those applications made at port—these accounted for 36 per cent. of applications in 2001). Corresponding information on initial decision outcomes and cases outstanding relating to persons in particular areas of the United Kingdom is also unavailable. The requested information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost by examination of individual case records.

Animal Experiments

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how much public money the Government have invested in the marmoset experiment programme at Cambridge University; and if he will make a statement; [61114]

(2) whether *(a)* food and *(b)* water deprivation were part of the experiments carried out on marmosets at Cambridge University; [61116]

(3) how many marmosets have been experimented on at Cambridge University; what the tests were designed to achieve; and how successful the tests were; [61115]

(4) what steps he took to ensure that the marmosets subject to experimentation procedures at Cambridge University were *(a)* adequately supervised and *(b)* kept in conditions consistent with their physiological and behavioural needs. [61117]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 13 June 2002]*: I will write to the hon. Member.

Prison Population

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his estimate is of the percentage change in the *(a)* prison population and *(b)* the number of notifiable offences in (i) 1979 to 1994, (ii) 1994 to 1999 and (iii) 1999 to 2002; and if he will make a statement. [60138]

Hilary Benn: The percentage changes over the requested time periods for England and Wales are given in the table.

Percentage

	Change in average prison population	*Change in number of notifiable offences*[1]
1979 to 1994	+15.4	+107.1
1994 to 1999–2000	+32.8	+0.9
1999–00 to 2000–01	–0.5	–2.5
2000–01 to 2001–02	+4.6	[2]—

[1] Data showing the number of notifiable offences has been collected for financial years since 1999, and is shown as such. Prison population data has been given to match.

[2] Not available.

The percentage change in the average prison population from 1999 to 30 April 2002 (latest available data) was 9 per cent. The equivalent data are not available for the number of notifiable offences.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Baton Rounds

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many baton rounds were discharged by the British Army *(a)* in each year since 1 April 1999 to 31 March 2002 and *(b)* from 1 April 2002 to 24 May 2002. [60762]

Mr. Ingram: I have been asked to reply.

The number of baton rounds fired by the Army since 1 April 1999 are set out in the table.

Year	*Baton rounds fired*
1 April 1999 to 31 March 2000	0
1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001	6
1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002	15
1 April 2002 to 24 May 2002	14

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the guidelines under which the British Army operates when firing baton rounds in their support of PSNI operations. [60761]

Mr. Ingram: I have been asked to reply.

The armed forces are deployed to Northern Ireland to provide military support to the Police Service of Northern Ireland, which has primacy for security matters in the Province. Soldiers carry out their role using the same practices and procedures that are applicable to the rest of the British Army wherever they may be deployed in the world. While these practices and procedures may be different to those of the police, they are of a commensurate standard.

There are differences between the guidelines for the police and the Army on the use of baton rounds which stem entirely from the differences in their respective operational structures and practices. There are no plans to bring the guidelines exactly into line with the regime governing the use of those equipments by the police.

Soldiers are trained in the use of baton guns and when deployed are issued with guidelines about their use. Baton rounds may be fired, if authorised by the Army commander at the scene, when absolutely necessary to protect against physical violence. However, in exceptional circumstances where a soldier is required to act in self defence the use of a baton round does not require the commander's authority, but the soldier must be satisfied that the force used is proportionate to the threat. In all circumstances soldiers are trained to use no more force than is absolutely necessary.

If a baton round is fired, a Baton Log Report, giving details of the incident, is completed and forwarded, through the chain of command, to HQNI. If a member of the public wishes to lodge a formal complaint about the Army firing a baton round this can be done through the police who will conduct an investigation.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Pensions

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will report progress on the requirements for reporting by third party administrators and insurers of pension schemes without trustees. [61908]

Mr. McCartney: From 1 April 2002, we introduced a range of measures to help speed up the process of winding-up pension schemes and to increase the accountability of those involved in running schemes. These measures include a requirement for those involved in the administration of pension schemes to report to the Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority within 1 month of becoming aware that a scheme has no trustees.

As at 14 June 2002, 340 reports had been received by the Authority. These are under investigation.

Local Government Councillors

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what impact being an elected local government councillor has on an individual's ability to claim incapacity benefit; and if he will make a statement. [61948]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Incapacity benefit is intended for people who are unable to work due to their illness or disability. Benefit is not therefore normally payable to people who work and receive an income.

There is, however, an exception for local authority councillors. This special provision recognises the particular obligations placed on councillors by disregarding all work carried out in connection with their elected office in deciding entitlement to incapacity benefit. Any allowances paid are only taken into account if they exceed the permitted work rules limit of £66.00 in any week. In this event, benefit is reduced by the amount that the allowance exceeds the limit.

Overseas Patients (Benefit Entitlement)

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if it is his policy to treat persons sent abroad for hospital or other medical treatment under the National Health Service as having uninterrupted residence in the United Kingdom as regards their entitlement to benefits; and in what circumstances in relation to health condition and country involved such treatment extends to those seeking overseas treatment in the private sector. [61909]

Malcolm Wicks: As announced by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Pensions on 23 May 2002, *Official Report,* column 461, people in receipt of Income Support, Jobseeker's Allowance or the new Pension Credit who travel abroad for medical treatment funded by the National Health Service will be treated as being resident in the United Kingdom.

For all other benefits, and for those who go overseas to seek private medical treatment, the existing rules on periods of temporary absence abroad will continue to apply.

Universal Bank

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when it will be possible for benefit recipients to open accounts with the proposed universal bank. [60846]

Malcolm Wicks: Introduction of universal banking services by the Post Office is a matter for them. They tell us they are on schedule for introduction in April 2003.

Permitted Work Scheme

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what recent representations he has received on the implications and operation of the new permitted work scheme; how many *(a)* gainers and *(b)* losers she estimates there are (i) in this scheme and (ii) the previous therapeutic earnings arrangements; and if he will make a statement. [56588]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We consulted widely on the permitted work rules for people receiving incapacity benefits and the new arrangements which took effect from 8 April have been generally welcomed by disability organisations.

We want to give people on these benefits the opportunity to ease their way back into work without it affecting their benefit. Under the old rules, people had to show that the work would be beneficial to their medical condition. This was sometimes difficult to prove. The new rules help to open up employment opportunities for people of working age claiming a benefit because of their illness or disability. Both therapeutic work and the new permitted work rules allow people to try out some work without losing benefit.

We estimate that between 27,000 and 54,000 people receiving an incapacity benefit were undertaking therapeutic work at 8 April. People already doing therapeutic work when the rules changed can carry on doing it until April 2003, after which they can apply to do permitted work and will be subject to the new permitted work rules. These allow work for 16 hours a week on average and earnings of up to £66 a week for a 26 week period which can be extended for a further 26 weeks in certain circumstances.

We anticipate that the numbers doing permitted work will increase to around 70,000 in the first year of the new scheme and to around 110,000 over the next four years. In addition everyone receiving an incapacity benefit will be able to earn up to £20 a week indefinitely.

These changes, together with our other measures to support people in finding suitable work, will help more people to move off benefits and into employment.

Benefit Payments

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many persons in receipt of benefits, other than retirement pension, in each parliamentary constituency in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* Wales receive payment of their benefits (i) through local sub-post offices and (ii) directly into their bank accounts. [58126]

Malcolm Wicks: Information on how many persons in receipt of benefits other than Retirement Pension in each parliamentary constituency in Scotland and Wales is only available for certain benefits, and this has been placed in the Library.

Correspondence

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he will reply to the letter of 31 December 2001 from the hon. Member for Torbay in response to his letter ref MOS(W)01/0038. [58748]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I replied to the hon. Member on 14 June.

Remploy

Mr. Pound: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many firms of external consultants have been engaged by Remploy between April 2001 and March 2002; and if he will list them; [59246]

(2) which firms of consultants are engaged by Remploy; [59247]

(3) for what purposes consultants have been engaged by Remploy in the past 12 months; [59248]

(4) what the total cost is for services provided by consultants engaged by Remploy over the past 12 months, broken down by *(a)* consultancy firm and *(b)* individual projects. [59249]

Maria Eagle: In the period April 2001 to March 2002, Remploy has engaged 13 sets of consultants from 11 firms at a cost of £723,000. This represents 0.3 per cent. of Remploy's turnover in that year. The consultants were engaged to assist Remploy in the delivery of its modernisation strategy. Remploy currently has no consultancy support.

The further information requested is in the table.

Consultant	*Project details*	*Cost (£)*
OCP[1]	Refocus on growth areas/key accounts and develop a flatter organisational structure/reduced level of management layers.	193,000
OCP[1]	A separate piece of work to reorganise Interwork into a more efficient, flatter structure better able to deliver WORKSTEP support and to enable more people to progress to unsupported jobs outside of Remploy.	137,000
Peter Whittaker/Russam GSM	Refocusing packaging project to encourage growth of the business.	25,000
Ray Emptage	Improve the business planning process and help Remploy become more market focused in looking at its skills and strengths/abilities. Involved an in-depth study of market places to identify new areas of business and strategies to strengthen market penetration.	87,000
Flaxman Bros	Recommend site improvements at Barking.	10,000
Paul Clark	Recycling project, developing a new area of business.	31,000
Life Cycle Solutions	Recycling project, related to the above.	2,000
Deloitte Touche[2]	Improving financial control systems in furniture business.	6,000
Deloitte Touche[2]	Developing operational systems to support delivery of Interwork.	26,000

Consultant	Project details	Cost (£)
Ashridge	Productivity and continuous improvement project aimed at removing bottlenecks and barriers—process and attitudinal. A team of Remploy people has been trained in Ashridge methodology and is rolling out the programme. This is improving significantly employee involvement, morale and productivity in those sites where the programme has been run.	172,000
Bryan Harrison	Developing new areas of business for Interwork—links with NHS.	2,000
Fulcrum	Property portfolio review.	6,000
Quantum Edge	Developing new processes for the WORKSTEP programme—development plans and profiling.	26,000
Total	—	723,000

[1] Organisation, Consulting Partnership

[2] Remploy's external auditors

Child Support Agency

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what the average time is that the Child Support Agency has taken to produce a substantive reply to correspondence in the last 12 months for which figures are available; [59701]

(2) what steps have been taken to guarantee a response from the Child Support Agency to a correspondent within five working days. [59702]

Malcolm Wicks: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Doug Smith to Mr. Mark Todd, dated 17 June 2002:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in replying to your recent Parliamentary Questions about the Child Support Agency promised a substantive reply by me.

You ask two questions of the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions:

> what the average time the Child Support Agency has taken to produce a substantive reply to correspondence in the last 12 months for which figures are available is; and
>
> what steps have been taken to guarantee a response from the Child Support Agency to a correspondent within five working days.

I am sorry but information is not gathered in the format you have requested.

The 2001/2002 target for customer correspondence was to reply to 70% of correspondence within 10 days. In the event 82% of correspondence was replied to within 10 days.

The Child Support Reform Programme is intended to create a step improvement in the level of service provided to customers. This is a large undertaking and its implementation will be the prime focus of the Agency in the coming year. Against that background we are not, in the short term, looking to improve the timeliness of our responses to correspondence.

I hope this is helpful.

Press Releases

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many press releases have been issued by his Department in each month of 2002. [59470]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The information is as follows.

	Number
January	22
February	32
March	33
April	22
May 1 to date	27

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Computers

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures are *(a)* in place and *(b)* under discussion in his Department in order to ensure compliance with the WEE directive. [60733]

Mr. MacShane: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State (Energy) at the Department of Trade and Industry on 12 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 1266W.

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much and what proportion of the departmental expenditure limit for 2002–03 will be accounted for by staff costs; what the figures were for 2001–02; and if he will make a statement. [61019]

Mr. MacShane: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Resource DEL (departmental expenditure limit) for 2002–03 is £1,318,597,000. Due to pay negotiations we are unable to say how much of that we expect to be attributed to staff costs. Comparative provisional outturn figures for 2001–02 show a Resource DEL of £1,268,738,000, of which £316,811,000 or 24.97 per cent. represents the provisional outturn for staff costs. The figure for staff costs includes the cost of locally engaged staff overseas.

Advertising Campaigns

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much was spent on press and advertising campaigns in 2001–02; and what the planned expenditure is for 2002–03. [60914]

Mr. MacShane: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 19 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 199W.

We have no press and advertising campaigns planned for the United Kingdom in 2002–03. We intend to print two public information leaflets on Britain and the European Union at a total cost of approximately £4,000.

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what has been the *(a)* cost and *(b)* saving from the pursuit of the Department's Public Service Agreement targets in each year since they were introduced; [60886]

(2) what the *(a)* cost and *(b)* saving has been from the Department's pursuit of Service Delivery Agreement targets in each year since they were introduced. [61633]

Mr. MacShane: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Public Service Agreement sets out the key outcomes it is committed to deliver with the resources provided, and its Service Delivery Agreement sets out the key steps towards delivery of those targets. Every year the Foreign and Commonwealth Office publishes performance against its targets, including on value for money and the resources it has used in its departmental report.

BAE Systems

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what meetings his Department has had with representatives of BAE Systems since June 2001. [62263]

Mr. MacShane: Officials and Ministers at the FCO frequently meet representatives of BAES and other British businesses with major overseas interests.

Kashmir

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the number of UK citizens involved in terrorist groups in Kashmir; and if he will make a statement. [61845]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: This country should not be used as a base for supporting terrorism overseas. The Terrorism Act 2000 (which entered into force in February 2001) is designed to help the UK police and courts take effective action against those who seek to plan, carry out or support terrorism from or in the UK.

We have proscribed three Kashmiri terrorist groups. Membership of these groups and support for their activities are criminal offences in the United Kingdom and we will continue to take action to prevent these groups from fund-raising or recruiting here.

Chemical Weapons

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) of 21 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 261W, on the OPCW, if he will make a statement on the financial and administrative management differences referred to. [62196]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We understood the main financial and administrative differences to be:

(a) The failure of the OPCW Secretariat to implement the Financial Regulations in 2000, leading to expenditure exceeding income by £2.5 million.

(b) Presentation by the Secretariat of incomplete and occasionally inaccurate information on the financial situation in 2001.

(c) The drastic cuts in the operational programme intended to resolve the 2001 financial situation, before the scale of the problem was clear and the options evaluated.

(d) Presentation of unrealistic budgetary proposals, over a number of years, that required extensive revision.

(e) The handling of a staff grading review which led to legal action at the ILO Administrative Tribunal, and the handling of action subsequent to the ILO judgment.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) of 21 May 2002, *Official Report*, columns 261–62W, on the OPCW, if he will list the evident shortcomings referred to. [62197]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The shortcomings relate to the failure to comply with the OPCW financial regulations. These regulations require the Director-General to "prudently manage appropriations ... to ensure that expenditures can be kept within funds available". Expenditure in 2000 exceeded income by £2.5 million. The OPCW external auditor's report on the 2000 financial statements confirmed that these provisions had not been complied with and recommended corrective action. The external auditor also drew attention to the failure to comply with regulations governing transfers of funds between appropriations, and recommended action to minimise excessive use of transfers.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 24 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 603W, if he will make a statement on *(a)* the views expressed by the members of the OPCW represented on the Executive Council, and *(b)* the views expressed by the UK at that time. [61989]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: A significant number of the members of the Executive Council expressed the view that they had lost confidence in the Director-General. As a result, the UK concluded that it would be in the best interests of the OPCW and the Chemical Weapons Convention if the Director-General were to step down voluntarily to make way for someone who could enjoy the full confidence of all the members of the organisation. The Director-General was informed of the UK's position prior to the vote of no confidence at the Executive Council meeting in March.

MOX Shipments

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what communications Her Majesty's Government have received from the New Zealand Government in respect of the return shipment of substandard MOX plutonium fuel from Japan to BNFL Sellafield. [61966]

Mr. MacShane: No communications have been received from the New Zealand Government on this issue.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations Her Majesty's Government have received from *(a)* other states and *(b)* non-governmental organisations in respect of the shipment of rejected MOX plutonium fuel from Japan back to Sellafield. [61972]

Mr. MacShane: Her Majesty's Government have received representations from Chile and the Republic of Mauritius, and from Greenpeace.

Greece

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which members of the Greek Government have visited the United Kingdom in the past two months in an official capacity; and what discussions the Government have had with visiting members of the Greek Government. [61991]

Peter Hain: The Greek Minister for Defence, Mr. Papantoniou, visited the UK on 8 and 9 May. He met my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence. They discussed a number of bilateral and multilateral issues. The Greek Deputy Minister for Transport, Dr. Spyros Vougias, visited the UK from 28 to 31 May, but his programme did not involve Ministers.

Mrs. Sonia Gandhi

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his discussions with Mrs. Sonia Gandhi in New Delhi. [62191]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary met Sonia Gandhi (leader of the Indian Congress Party in opposition) during his India visit on 29 May. They had a constructive and useful discussion focusing on the current high tensions between India and Pakistan.

Human Rights

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which countries the UK delegation to the Human Rights Commission in Geneva has *(a)* voted for and *(b)* voted against with regard to a visit by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [62419]

Mr. MacShane: In accordance with her mandate established by the UN General Assembly, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson, has a central role to play in ensuring that human rights are fully integrated in the work of the UN. Mrs. Robinson determines her own travel programme. Since she took office in 1997, she has visited a large number of countries in all regions of the world at the invitation of their Governments or other organisations (eg to attend a conference). It is rare for country resolutions at the Commission on Human Rights to include provision for a visit by the high commissioner. When that is the case, the UK voting position is determined by the merit of the resolution.

Self-government

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the status accorded by the United Nations to *(a)* Ceuta, *(b)* Melilla and *(c)* Gibraltar. [62361]

Mr. MacShane: For the purposes of Article 73 of the United Nations Charter, Gibraltar appears on the list of territories which have not yet attained a full measure of self-government. Ceuta and Melilla do not appear on this list, and have not been considered by the UN to be non-self-governing territories.

General Affairs Council

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the prospects for reform of the common agricultural policy in the light of the conclusions reached at the General Affairs Council at Luxembourg on 10 June. [61877]

Peter Hain *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* The General Affairs Council on 10 June discussed the enlargement of the European Union. It did not reach any formal conclusions.

Along with Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden, the UK wants to put to one side the question of extending direct payments to the candidates for farming until later in the enlargement negotiations. Most European Union member states are content with this proposal.

Reform of the common agricultural policy was not on the agenda at the General Affairs Council. Her Majesty's Government consider that the Commission's on the mid-term review of the common agricultural policy, due in mid-July, should make a substantive contribution to the process of reform of the common agricultural policy. Our objectives for reform are well known and are shared with a growing number of EU member states. We believe that the reform of the common agricultural policy should take place in parallel with, but not be a pre-condition for, enlargement.

Visitors' Liaison Officers

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many visitors' liaison officers were dismissed from their posts in each year since 1990. [62784]

Mr. MacShane: As stated in my reply to the hon. Member on 26 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 815W, liaison officers are employed freelance, therefore the question of dismissal does not arise.

Iraq

Mr. Mahmood: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what goods on the Military List have recently been approved for export to Iraq. [63320]

Mr. MacShane: Following consultation with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence, the Department for Trade and Industry recently approved two licences for the export to Iraq of protective de-mining vests, which appear on the Military List, for use by the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) de-mining team in Iraq.

The UN Iraq Sanctions Committee approved this export to Iraq under the Oil for Food programme (OFF). Under OFF, Iraq is allowed to export unlimited quantities of oil to fund the purchase of humanitarian goods. The export is consistent with the consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has collated on the prevention of medical supplies and medical journals from entering Iraq by the United Nations Sanctions Committee. [R] [61598]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Medical journals and medicines are not prevented from entering Iraq by the UN Sanctions Committee. Other medical supplies are only very rarely denied where there is real concern that they will be abused for military-related purposes.

European Youth Convention

Mr. Tom Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs who will represent the United Kingdom at the Youth Convention on the Future of Europe. [63321]

Peter Hain: The Youth Convention is an initiative proposed by Valery Giscard d'Estaing, President of the European Convention, to involve young people in the 'Future of Europe' debate. Representatives nominated by member states and accession countries, and the European Parliament, will hold a plenary session on 9–10 July, before reporting to the convention on 11–12 July.

The UK's delegation has six members. Three were selected by a national essay competition, for which there was over 80 entries, organised jointly by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and The Independent: Claire McCarthy, Miles Kemp and Carina Dunkerly. Three others were appointed by the main UK political parties represented at the convention. They are Blair McDougall (Labour); Sam Dobbyn (Conservative); and Alison Goldsworthy (Liberal Democrat).

Special Advisers

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 10 June 2001, to the hon. Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyne), *Official Report*, column 816W, on special advisers, what the accommodation and subsistence costs were for each trip; if those costs are included in the figures in the answer; and what the *(a)* starting point, *(b)* means of transport, *(c)* destination, *(d)* overnight accommodation and *(e)* point of return were of his predecessor's special adviser's trip to Montenegro on 24/25 April 2001. [62628]

Mr. Straw: The Montenegro visit started and ended in London; Dr. Williams flew by RAF aircraft and was accommodated by British forces. The full breakdown for trips listed in my answer of 10 June is:

£

	Destination	*Means of transport*	*Cost of transport (£)*	*Accommodation cost (£)*	*Subsistence cost (£)*	*Total (£)*
Michael Williams						
4–5 April 2001	Belgrade and Skopje	RAF flight	—	150.06	32.00	182.06
24–25 April 2001	Montenegro	RAF flight	—	[1]—	6.37	6.37
30 August 2001	Macedonia (day trip)	RAF flight	—	n/a	n/a	—
5–6 September 2001	Abuja	RAF flight	—	314.29	78.00	392.29
17–18 October 2001	Luxembourg and Turkey	RAF flight	—	[2]—	33.74	33.74
9–14 November 2001	New York	Flight	2,645.50	c.670.00	c.300.00	c.3,615.50
22–23 November 2001	Iran and Pakistan	RAF flight	—	115.58	19.52	135.00
21–23 January 2002	Congo, Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi	Flight[3]	—	197.90	99.06	296.96
26–28 February 2002	India	Flight	3,352.81	c.50.00	22.36	3,425.17
Ed Owen						
11 June 2001	Luxembourg (day trip)	RAF flight	—	n/a	12.43	12.43
9 July 2001	Paris (day trip)	RAF flight	—	n/a	n/a	—
11–12 July 2001	Washington	Flight	4,346.80	151.82	129.90	4,628.52
17–18 July 2001	Brussels	Eurostar	380.00	[4]—	n/a	380.00
24–27 September 2001	Jordan, Iran, Israel, Palestinian Authority and Egypt	RAF flight	—	200.66	97.18	297.84
23–24 October 2001	Washington	Flight	3,048.70	149.17	79.00	3,276.87
19–20 November 2001	Brussels and Barcelona	RAF flight	—	52.00	74.19	126.19
6–7 December 2001	Gibraltar	Flight	852.40	[5]—	20.00	872.40
31 January to 2 February 2002	Washington	Flight	4,095.90	307.14	132.32	4,537.36
12–16 February 2002	Turkey, Israel, Palestinian Authority and Afghanistan	RAF and charter flights	—	391.36	71.00	462.36
21 February 2002	The Hague (day trip)	RAF flight	—	n/a	n/a	—

[1] British Forces accommodation

[2] Ambassador's residence

[3] French Foreign Minister's official aircraft

[4] Counsellor, UK Representative

[5] Governor's residence

Nagorno-Karabakh

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has hadwith representatives of the Minsk group and Azerbaijan in respect of Nagorno-Karabakh; and if he will make a statement. [R] [61599]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office is in frequent contact with representatives of the Minsk group. The French ambassador in Baku briefed EU embassies on 17 May about the Prague meeting on 13–15 May between the personal representatives of the Presidents of Azerbaijan and Armenia. The Azeri Deputy Foreign Minister, Araz Azimov (who has been appointed as President Aliev's special representative on Nagorno

Karabakh) visited the UK in February. His Armenian counterpart, Armen Martirosian, visited in March. They both had discussions in the Foreign Office, including with the then Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr. Bradshaw).

Counter Terrorism

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 24 May 2002, *Official Report,* column 605W, on counter terrorism, if he will place in the Library a copy of the additional information submitted to the UNSC Counter Terrorism Committee by the United Kingdom. [62003]

Mr. MacShane: Yes.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average pupil-teacher ratio was within maintained *(a)* nursery schools, *(b)* primary schools and *(c)* secondary schools in (i) St. Helens South constituency, (ii) St. Helens metropolitan borough council area, (iii) Liverpool, (iv) Manchester, (v) the north-west, (vi) the south-east, (vii) England and (viii) Scotland in (1) 1991, (2) 1997, (3) 1998, (4) 1999, (5) 2000, (6) 2001 and (7) the quarter to March 2002. [50007]

Mr. Stephen Twigg *[holding answer 24 April 2002]:* The available information is shown in the table.

Maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools: Pupil:teacher ratios by type of school

Position in January each year[1]

	1991	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	[2]*2002*
Maintained Nursery Schools							
England	19.1	18.9	18.6	18.4	18.1	17.7	15.6
Scotland[3]	25.7	24.7	23.1	31.3	28.9	33.9	n/a
North-west	19.3	19.6	19.3	19.0	18.7	18.1	16.8
South-east	18.1	16.3	16.5	16.4	16.3	15.9	13.8
Liverpool	17.9	18.7	16.7	16.9	16.2	13.7	12.6
Manchester	14.8	17.3	16.7	15.9	11.8	11.6	7.8
St. Helens	17.9	20.5	21.3	21.6	22.0	19.4	18.9
St. Helens South	[4]—	21.8	25.3	[5]—	24.8	25.0	[6]—
Maintained primary schools[7]							
England	22.2	23.4	23.7	23.5	23.3	22.9	22.5
Scotland	19.5	19.6	19.9	19.4	19.1	19.0	n/a
North-west	22.8	23.9	24.0	23.9	23.4	22.9	22.3
South-east	22.8	23.2	23.6	23.6	23.2	22.9	22.3
Liverpool	22.4	23.6	23.5	23.1	22.7	22.3	21.6
Manchester	22.3	23.4	24.7	24.6	24.0	22.7	21.8
St. Helens	23.0	23.3	23.2	23.6	23.2	22.9	22.4
St. Helens South	[4]—	23.2	23.2	23.7	23.1	22.9	[6]—
Maintained secondary schools[7]							
England	15.7	16.7	16.9	17.0	17.2	17.1	16.9
Scotland	12.2	13.0	13.2	13.0	12.9	13.0	n/a
North-west	15.4	16.6	16.7	16.8	16.8	16.6	16.3
South-east	16.2	16.7	16.9	17.1	17.3	17.4	17.2
Liverpool	14.9	16.7	16.7	16.8	16.7	16.2	15.5
Manchester	14.1	15.9	16.1	16.1	16.0	16.0	15.6
St. Helens	15.0	15.6	16.0	15.9	16.1	16.1	15.8
St. Helens South	[4]—	15.7	16.2	16.2	16.1	16.0	[6]—

[1] September of previous year for Schools' Census in Scotland

[2] Provisional

[3] Figures for Scotland from 1998–99 include pre-school education centres (including those in partnership with local authorities).

[4] Date is not available by parliamentary constituency prior to 1997.

[5] No schools of this type in 1999.

[6] 2002 data are not yet available by parliamentary constituency.

[7] Includes middle schools as deemed.

Note: n/a—Not available

Source:

Annual Schools Census in England; Schools Census/Pre-school Census/Pre-school and Daycare Census in Scotland.

Intermediate GNVQs

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what representations she has received urging the retention of intermediate GNVQs. [60878]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Ministers have met a number of heads of schools and colleges, and other interested parties, to hear their views on the timing of the withdrawal of the 6-unit GNVQ. In addition, a number of letters have been received. We are currently considering all these representations.

Advertising Campaigns

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much was spent on press and advertising campaigns in 2001–02; and what the planned expenditure is for 2002–03. [60899]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: In respect of 2001–02, I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to his hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) on 17 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 963W and 964W.

Planned expenditure from the Department's central advertising and publicity budget for 2002–03 is £14.35 million. Departmental advertising spend may be subject to alteration during the year.

Small Schools

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many small schools in the UK have been amalgamated since 1997. [61199]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* Since 2000 the number of small schools in England that have been amalgamated is as follows:

	Number
2000	17
2001	25
2002	5

The Department only holds data on schools in England. It does not have reliable data on the number of small schools that were amalgamated before 2000.

Educational Institutions (Governors)

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to ensure that educational institutions in receipt of public funds publish a full list of governors. [61781]

Mr. Miliband: Maintained schools are already required to publish a list of governors, including each governor's category and the date their current term of office ends, in their annual report.

City academies are required to notify the Charity Commission and Companies House of their trustees (governing body), and public access is through these bodies. For city technology colleges, the same applies to trustees. A list of governors is generally available through the governors annual report to parents. Although there is no specific requirement on further and higher education colleges to do so, public access requirements to FE college minutes mean that this information is in the public domain and most HE institutions publish the names of governing body members in their annual reports or elsewhere.

Computer Literacy

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps are being taken to increase computer literacy at *(a)* adult and *(b)* adolescent levels. [61902]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Department for Education and Skills aims to create, implement and support a dynamic framework for information and communications technology (ICT) skills. It has initiated a range of measures to increase computer literacy and widen access to the skills required for a modern knowledge economy.

(a) For Adults: By the end of 2002 there will be over 6,000 UK online centres throughout England with access points in public libraries, colleges, local community centres and elsewhere. Older people are one of the key client groups for this initiative. In addition there are over 1,600 learndirect centres, which along with Further Education colleges and adult and community learning centres, offer many opportunities for adults to improve their ICT skills.

(b) For adolescents: The national curriculum for ICT prepares pupils to participate in a rapidly changing world, in which work and other activities are increasingly transformed by access to varied and developing technology. Reforms to the national curriculum in England have ensured that all pupils aged five to 16 are taught ICT, either as a separate subject or through other subjects. We have also set challenging national targets for pupils' achievements in ICT at the end of Key Stage 3.

Postgraduate Teaching Courses (North-east)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* courses and *(b)* places are available in the north-east of England providing postgraduate teaching qualifications. [62021]

Mr. Miliband: In 2002–03 there are 1,194 places available on 38 postgraduate courses of initial teacher training in the north-east Government office region.

Educational Attainment

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many and what percentage of children who lived *(a)* in a residential care home and *(b)* with foster parents (i) left their higher education course and (ii) completed higher education; and what grades were achieved, in the last five years for which figures are available. [62172]

Margaret Hodge: The requested information is not held centrally.

Teachers (Ethnic Origin)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teachers are *(a)* black and *(b)* Asian. [62176]

Mr. Miliband: This information is not collected centrally.

School Visits

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many schools she has visited since 7 June 2001. [62177]

Estelle Morris: Since 7 June 2001 the Secretary of State has visited 29 schools.

Examinations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps she takes to *(a)* monitor the performance of local authorities and schools in SATs and public examinations and *(b)* audit the quality of information provided by local authorities to her Department. [62249]

Mr. Miliband: All LEAs and schools are required to set annual targets for the performance of their pupils in the Key Stage 2 and 3 National Curriculum tests and GCSE examinations. Schools' Key Stage 2 and GCSE results are published in performance tables and the Key Stage 3 results will also be published for the first time later this year.

LEAs are required to set out their targets in their Education Development Plans (EDPs) and submit them to the Secretary of State for approval. The Department and Ofsted worked together to assess the quality of the second generation of EDPs submitted by local education authorities in January 2002. The Department's Standards and Effectiveness Unit continues to provide challenge and support for LEAs' implementation of their EDPs. Ofsted inspections also report on the quality and effectiveness of implementation of EDPs.

Teacher Training

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what provision is available for teachers to use a proportion of their statutory Inset days to increase their awareness and understanding of industry and commerce. [62459]

Mr. Miliband: The timing, organisation and content of in-service training days (Inset) are entirely for individual Local Education Authorities (LEAs), governing bodies and head teachers to determine. If agreed by those above, there is no reason why a school cannot use Inset days to increase awareness and understanding of industry and commerce.

Reading

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what empirical evidence she has collected on the relative success of teaching of reading by *(a)* whole language and real books method, *(b)* the national literacy strategy and *(c)* synthetic phonics. [62613]

Mr. Miliband: A wide range of research evidence about the teaching of reading was considered in the development of the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) as documented in the "Review of Research and other Related Evidence", published by the Department in 1998. National test results have shown that the NLS has improved the standards achieved in reading. In 2001, 84 per cent. of pupils achieved the expected level for their age (level 2) in the Key Stage 1 reading tests—a rise of 4 percentage points since 1998; 82 per cent. of pupils achieved the expected level (level 4) in the Key Stage 2 reading tests—a rise of 11 percentage points since 1998. Phonics is a key part of the NLS, which advocates the use of both synthetic and analytic phonics.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average reading age is of pupils in each age cohort. [62615]

Mr. Miliband: The Department does not collect centrally national data regarding the average reading age of pupils in each age cohort. The table therefore shows the percentage of pupils achieving the expected level for their age in the 2001 national Key Stage tests:

Percentage of pupils achieving expected level in 2001 tests in all schools in England

Key Stage	*Percentage*
KS1 Reading—Level 2 or above	84
KS2 Reading—Level 4 or above	82
KS3 English—Level 5 or above	65

Parenting

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what her policy is towards parents supporting school age children by providing appropriate help at home; [62774]

(2) what her policy is on penalising children who have had parental assistance with school work. [62773]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The Government have no policy to penalise children for being helped by their parents with their school work. Indeed, we strongly endorse parents playing an active part in supporting their children's learning at home. We believe that children's education really benefits when parents create a learning-friendly environment at home and have a positive attitude to school and to learning. We have helped them in this by providing a range of information, resources, and guidance on how to get involved in their children's education. These include the "Parents' Centre" website, which contains information for parents about education, as well as how they can get involved, and links to useful resources for learning at home; the "Learning Journey" booklets, a series of guides to the curriculum informing parents of what their children will learn and how they can help; and "Parents + Schools" magazine, a termly publication informing parents of developments in the field of education, and containing hints, tips, and suggestions for becoming involved.

The Department published national homework guidelines for schools in 1998 that, among other things, emphasise that schools should ensure they work closely with parents and ensure that they are given guidance about how best to help their children.

Literacy

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many 11-year-olds are functionally illiterate. [62614]

Mr. Miliband: There is no measure of functional illiteracy. In 2001, however, 75 per cent. of 11-year-olds achieved at least the expected level for their age (level 4) in the Key Stage 2 English tests, and a further 17 per cent. achieved level 3.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Fire Service

Bob Spink: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what action he is taking to *(a)* recruit, *(b)* retain and *(c)* train firefighters; and if he will make a statement. [61854]

Mr. Raynsford: The Fire Services (Appointments and Promotion) Regulations 1978 (statutory instrument 436), as amended, set criteria for appointment to the rank of firefighter. Matters of recruit selection and staff retention are, however, the responsibility of each individual fire authority. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister does, however, prepare recruitment literature for the fire service.

Responsibility for the efficient training of members of each fire service also rests with the local fire authority, under section 1(1)(b) of the Fire Services Act 1947. However, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister works closely with the fire service on training and development. The Fire Service College is an executive agency of the office. We are seeking, with the fire service, to implement an over-arching development strategy encompassing all fire service staff at every career stage. Our goal is to promote the development of a fire service which better reflects the communities it serves and which, through effective and relevant training and development, maintains its high standards of professionalism.

Housing Demand

Andrew George: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what *(a)* advice he has received from (i) local authorities, (ii) the Housing Corporation, (iii) other statutory agencies and (iv) Government Departments about and *(b)* estimate he has made of the level of unmet housing need in each of the districts of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly in each of the last five years for which records are available. [62593]

Mr. McNulty: The Government do not make estimates of housing need. Because of the wide variation in need between different parts of the country, the Government believe that local authorities are best placed to carry out local housing needs assessments, which should be reflected in local authorities housing strategies, investment plans, and in the implementation of planning powers for affordable housing.

Ensuring an adequate supply of housing, and a suitable balance between general market and affordable housing, is a key priority for the Government. We regularly receive letters from local authorities and other bodies concerning the need for housing, and take an interest in all such communication. The Government have increased investment in affordable housing through the Housing Corporation to £1.2 billion in 2003–04, nearly double 2000–01 levels.

Andrew George: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what recent assessment he has made of the demand for *(a)* social rented, *(b)* private rented, *(c)* part purchase/ part rent, *(d)* other forms of managed partly-owned accommodation and *(e)* private market housing from (i) newly formed family units and (ii) first time occupiers and purchasers. [62617]

Mr. McNulty: This Government do not produce national assessments of housing demand or targets for house building. Annual rates of housing provision to be kept under regular review are established through regional planning guidance and the spatial strategy it sets out. The strategy is prepared having regard to a number of matters including regional economic needs, the household projections produced by the ODPM, the capacity of urban areas to accommodate more housing, the physical and social infrastructure needed to support additional housing and the environmental implications of doing so.

Second Homes

Andrew George: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what assessment he has made of the extent of *(a)* central Government and *(b)* local government finance employed to subsidise the costs of the council tax rebate for (i) second homes and (ii) other residential properties entitled to a council tax discount or rebate for each of the past five years for which records are available; [62618]

(2) what level of *(a)* central Government and *(b)* local government moneys have been used to provide the necessary subsidy for the delivery of the council tax rebate for (i) second homes and (ii) all other residential properties entitled to a council tax discount rebate in each of the past five years for which records are available in (A) each of the six districts of Cornwall, (B) Cornwall county and (C) the council of the Isles of Scilly. [62619]

Mr. Raynsford: Local authorities are compensated through revenue support grant paid by central Government for council tax income foregone as a result of dwellings in their area being entitled to council tax discounts.

The total council tax income foregone in respect of second homes is estimated at £80 million for England in 2001–02. Information for individual local authorities is not centrally available. Further work is being done to calculate the total council tax income foregone as a result of 25 per cent. and 50 per cent. discounts and I will write with further details when this has been completed.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what arrangements he is making for the consideration of local authorities' objections to the provisional financial settlement for 2003–04. [62345]

Mr. Raynsford: We will announce the arrangements for the 2003–04 provisional local government finance settlement in the autumn, following the consultation on options for the new system over the summer.

Planning

Norman Baker: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many requests were made, broken down by

Government office region, for planning applications to be called in for the last year for which figures are available; and, for each region, how many were called in. [62580]

Mr. McNulty: The number of requests to call in planning applications is not recorded. The number of planning applications called-in within each Government office region between 1 April 2001 and 31 March 2002 is as follows.

Government office	*Called-in*
North-east	11
North-west	14
Yorkshire and the Humber	13
West Midlands	23
East Midlands	16
East	7
South-west	12
South-east	22
London	4
Total	122

Homelessness

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what steps are being taken to increase the number of homes for homeless single mothers. [61904]

Mr. McNulty: Under current legislation, local authorities have a statutory duty to provide accommodation for people who are homeless through not fault of their own and who have a priority need for accommodation. The priority need categories include households with dependent children or a pregnant woman.

The Government are committed to ensuring homeless families are provided with decent housing. The supply of affordable housing has a vital role to play in increasing the homes available to house homeless single mothers. The Government have raised investment in affordable housing through the Housing Corporation to over £1.2 billion by 2003–04, almost double 2000–01 levels. In 2000–01, the Corporation approved schemes to the value of £4.5 million for vulnerable mothers with babies and £418 million for homeless people. In addition, where a single mother has a support need that makes it difficult to sustain a tenancy, the Supporting People programme, to be launched in April 2003, will help prevent tenancy breakdown.

In March this year the Government announced a new approach to tackling homelessness backed by £125 million. This includes ensuring that no homeless families with children have to live in bed-and-breakfast accommodation except in an emergency.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many homeless shelters in major cities serve free meals. [61905]

Mr. McNulty: Information relating to the number of homeless shelters in major cities which serve free meals is not held centrally, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Evictions

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what steps are being taken to restrict the power of landlords to evict renters with little or no notice. [61906]

Mr. McNulty: For most tenancies landlords must give two months notice to end a let. If the tenant does not leave, repossession of the property involves a court order enforced by bailiffs. It is not for a landlord to carry out an eviction.

Local authorities have powers to investigate any complaints of illegal eviction and to caution or prosecute as appropriate. The then Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions published the research report "Harassment and Unlawful Eviction of Private Rented Sector Tenants and Park Home Residents" in 2000. At the same time separate guidance to local authorities was published. Copies of both documents are available in the House Library.

Cornish Language

Andrew George: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what evidence he has collated that supports the conclusion that Cornish is not an appropriate language to be specified for the purposes of the European Charter for regional or minority languages. [62648]

Mr. Raynsford: I look forward to receiving the Government office for the south-west's report and supporting evidence, which will inform the Government's decision on whether or not Cornish meets the charter's definition of a regional or minority language.

Parish Councils

Mr. Boris Johnson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the total cost was of sending out the literature from the Standards Board to all parish councils; and if he will make a statement. [62650]

Mr. Raynsford: In May 2002, the Standards Board for England sent copies of guidance on the operation of new codes of conduct to all local authorities within its remit, including parish councils. The total cost of this guidance, including the costs of despatch, was £188,380, some 80 per cent. of which it is estimated relates to providing the material to the 8,500 parish councils in England. This indicates an average cost of a little under £18 per parish council.

Competitive Tendering

Mr. Collins: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister on how many occasions in the last 12 months the requirement to engage in a competitive tendering process has been waived by his Department due to national security obligations under paragraph 6(h) of the supply regulations. [62824]

Mr. Leslie: There have been no occasions.

Local Government Elections

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has for allowing 18-year-olds to stand for election to local councils. [62689]

Mr. Raynsford: We have no current plans to allow 18-year-olds to stand for election to local councils.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what proportion of ordinary written questions for his Department were answered within a week of tabling in each month since June 2001; and what proportion of questions for named day received a substantive answer on that day in each month since June 2001. [58975]

Mr. Alexander: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested is as follows.

Percentage

Date	*Named day question answered on the nominated day*	*Ordinary written question answered within a week of being tabled*
2001		
June	60	0
July	85	63
October	63	48
November	73	47
December	100	54
2002		
January	53	27
February	65	27
March	36	27
April	37	20
May	52	33

Public Bodies

Tony Wright: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the statutes which require public bodies to make reports to Parliament. [59749]

Mr. Alexander: I have been asked to reply.

The Cabinet Office is compiling this information and I shall write to my hon. Friend once it has been collated.

SCOTLAND

EU Enlargement

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps she is taking to make Scottish companies aware of the business opportunities presented by the enlargement of the European Union. [45786]

Mrs. Liddell: I take every opportunity to outline the opportunities for Scottish business which are presented by EU enlargement. I also work with organisations such as CBI Scotland and Scottish Council for Development and Industry in their work in promoting these opportunities. Together with the DTI, the Scotland Office is anxious to encourage maximum benefit for Scotland from enlargement of the EU.

Special Advisers

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many special advisers there were in her Department; and what their salaries were in each of the last five years. [46954]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* There are two special advisers in my Department. On salaries, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 11W.

Clydesdale Bank

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps she will take to protect Clydesdale bank staff whose jobs are threatened by plans to cut the European work force of National Australia bank [50515]

Mrs. Liddell: I am aware of concerns about the National Australia bank's announcement that it expects to cut 500 jobs across its European operations and the potential impact on the group's Clydesdale bank operations in Scotland. I hope to meet shortly with senior management of the bank to discuss their future plans for their operations in Scotland.

Pensions

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much was spent by her Department on paying pensions to retired employees of his Department in 2001–02; if she will estimate the corresponding amounts to be spent in *(a)* five years' time, *(b)* 10 years' time, *(c)* 20 years' time and *(d)* 30 years' time; if she will estimate in each case the proportion of such liabilities which will arise from (i) unfunded pension schemes and (ii) pre-funded pension schemes; and in the case of pre-funded schemes, if she will estimate the value of the corresponding pre-funded funds in each of these years. [57359]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend, the former Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 23 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 561W.

Euro

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment she has made of the impact on Scotland if the United Kingdom joined the euro. [58657]

Mrs. Liddell: The Government's policy on membership of the single currency remains as set out by the Chancellor in October 1997, and restated by the Prime Minister in 1999. The determining factor underpinning any Government decision on membership of the single currency is the national economic interest and whether the economic case for joining is clear and unambiguous. The five economic tests will define whether a clear and unambiguous case can be made. The Government have said that the Treasury will complete an assessment of the five tests within two years of the start of this Parliament. The five tests will assess the economic case for entry of the whole of the UK, including Scotland.

Scottish Executive

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many times her Office has made representations to the Scottish Executive since May 1999 broken down by *(a)* department approached, *(b)* subject and *(c)* date; [59533]

(2) how many representations the Scottish Executive has made to her Department since May 1999 broken down by *(a)* Scottish Executive department, *(b)* subject and *(c)* date. [59532]

Mrs. Liddell: Information is not held in the form requested. There are frequent communications, many of them informal, between the Scotland Office and the Scottish Executive, both at ministerial and at official level.

Reserved Powers

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans she has to seek the transfer of the administration of reserved powers or functions of UK Government Departments, their executive agencies and non-departmental public bodies within their remit from those departments to the Scotland Office. [59531]

Mrs. Liddell: None.

Postal and Electronic Voting

Mr. Tom Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans her Department has to consult on the use of postal and electronic voting in future elections. [58883]

Mrs. Liddell: Local government election pilots in Scotland, England and Wales are currently being evaluated by local authorities and the Electoral Commission. Proposals on any changes to the electoral system will take the results of these and any other pilots into account.

Young People

Mr. Tom Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which organisations representing young people her Department regularly consults. [58882]

Mrs. McGuire: Although the Scotland Office has meetings with a wide range of representative bodies, my right hon. Friend rarely has need to consult formally. However, she launched an exercise in December last year seeking views on the size of the Scottish Parliament. Youthlink Scotland and the Scottish Youth Parliament were among the bodies consulted.

Budget

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what input she has into the findings and presentation of Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland prior to its publication; [59379]

(2) how much it cost the Government to produce the Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland report in each year since its inception; [59378]

(3) what Ministers have an opportunity to view and comment on Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland prior to its publication; [59380]

(4) if work has begun on Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland for 2000–01. [59381]

Mrs. Liddell: The Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland (GERS) reports are produced by the Scottish Executive. The report draws on information produced by HM Treasury, Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise and the Office of National Statistics. Since 1999 publication of the reports has been announced in a joint Scottish Executive/Scotland Office news release. Advance copies of the final text of the GERS report are available to Ministers from the Scotland Office, Treasury and Scottish Executive. The timetable for the Scottish Executive's work on the 2000–01 report is a matter for the Scottish Executive as are the production costs, but I understand that the total cost of printing, publishing and distributing the GERS report for 1999–2000 was £6,200. Details of costs for the earlier years are not readily available.

Gas Pipelines

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations she has made to the Chancellor of the Exchequer about the differential levels of taxation for different gas pipelines within Scotland and England. [58892]

Mrs. Liddell: I have regular discussions with my ministerial colleagues on a wide range of matters.

Departmental Sponsors

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what the duties are of hon. Members appointed as sponsors to her Department; and what assistance is given by officials in her Department to them in carrying out these duties; [59987]

(2) which hon. Members have been appointed as sponsors to her Department since 7 June 2001; and when each of them were appointed. [59974]

Mrs. Liddell: Ministers in this Department have made no such appointments.

Animal Transportation Directive

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment she has made of the impact on the Scottish livestock industry of the proposed EU directive on animal transportation. [59665]

Mrs. Liddell: Animal welfare is a devolved subject within the competence of the Scottish Parliament and Executive.

EU Driving Regulations

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment she has made of the impact on the livestock industry in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland of the proposed EU regulations on drivers' hours. [59677]

Mrs. Liddell: Responsibility for the regulation of drivers' hours in Great Britain rests with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport. The previous Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions carried out an extensive public consultation exercise on the proposal in question as part of its assessment of the likely impact on British industry. The National Farmers' Union Scotland was among the bodies consulted.

Public Bodies

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when she last met representatives of *(a)* Legalise Cannabis Campaign Scotland, *(b)* Amnesty International, *(c)* Scottish Human Rights Centre, *(d)* Unison Scotland, *(e)* WWF Scotland, *(f)* Cancer Research Campaign Scotland, *(g)* National Asthma Campaign Scotland, *(h)* Transform Scotland, *(i)* Charter 88 Scotland, *(j)* Equality Network, *(k)* BDA Scotland, *(l)* Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, *(m)* Capital Rail Action Group, *(n)* Children 1, *(o)* Help the Aged Scotland, *(p)* Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations, *(q)* Ash Scotland, *(r)* Shelter Scotland, *(s)* Church of Scotland, *(t)* Scottish Trades Union Congress, *(u)* Friends of the Earth Scotland, *(v)* Scottish Refugee Council, *(w)* Age Concern Scotland, *(x)* Equal Opportunities Commission, Scotland and *(y)* Scottish Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament; what was discussed; and what future plans she has to meet them. [60785]

Mrs. Liddell: I regularly meet representatives from a wide range of organisations, including some of those listed by the hon. Member, and discuss an appropriately wide range of issues with them.

WALES

Local Government

Kevin Brennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what responsibility he has for amendments to electoral law in relation to local government in Wales. [62852]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Policy on electoral law in relation to local government elections in Wales and England is a matter for my noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor.

Performance Targets

Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the performance targets that his Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies are required to meet, apart from those set out in the public service agreements for 1999 to 2002 and 2001 to 2004; and if he will specify for each target *(a)* who sets it and *(b)* who monitors achievement against it. [60464]

Mr. Paul Murphy: My Department's targets are set out in its service delivery agreement (published in November 2000 and available at http://www.walesoffice.gov.uk/2000/news2000.html) and in its departmental report (Cm 5121). They are monitored internally and reported on in the departmental report.

Regulations (Cost-effectiveness)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the Children's Homes Amendment (Wales) Regulations; [60996]

(2) what discussions he has had with the First Minister about the cost effectiveness of the Pig Industry Restructuring Grant (Wales) Scheme. [60979]

(3) what discussions he has had with the First Minister about the cost effectiveness of the Financing of Maintained Schools (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations; [60988]

(4) what discussions he has had with the First Minister about the cost effectiveness of the Foot-and-Mouth Disease (Amendment) (Wales) (No. 4) Order; [60953]

(5) what discussions he has had with the First Minister about the cost effectiveness of the Import and Export Restrictions (Foot-and-Mouth Disease) (No. 3) (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations; [60957]

(6) what discussions he has had with the First Minister about the cost effectiveness of the Foot-and-Mouth Disease (Ascertainment of Value) (Wales) (No. 2) Order; [60961]

(7) what discussions he has had with the First Minister about the cost effectiveness of the Community Charges, Council Tax and Non-Domestic Rating (Enforcement) (Magistrates' Courts) (Wales) Regulations; [60965]

(8) what discussions he has had with the First Minister about the cost effectiveness of the National Health Service (General Medical Services) Amendment (Wales); [60975]

(9) what discussions he has had with the First Minister about the cost effectiveness of the Local Education Authority (Behaviour Support Plans) (Amendment) (Wales); [60983]

(10) what discussions he has had with the First Minister about the cost effectiveness of the Feeding Stuffs (Wales) Regulations; [60992]

(11) what discussions he has had with the First Minister about the cost effectiveness of the Education (Education Standards Grants) (Wales) Regulations; [60971]

(12) what discussions he has had with the First Minister about the cost effectiveness of the Education (National Curriculum) (Key Stage 3 Assessment Arrangements) (Wales) (Amendment) Order; [60973]

(13) what discussions he has had with the First Minister about the cost-effectiveness of the Care Standards Act 2000 (Commencement No. 2 and Transitional Provisions) (Wales) Order; [60981]

(14) what discussions he has had with the First Minister about the cost-effectiveness of the Organic Farming Scheme (Wales) Regulations; [60990]

(15) what discussions he has had with the First Minister about the cost-effectiveness of the Smoke Control Areas (Exempted Firep[illegible] (Wales) Order; [60955]

(16) what discussions he [illegible]d with the First Minister about the cost-effectiveness [illegible] the Tir Mynydd (Cross-Border Holdings) (Wales) Regulations; [60959]

(17) what discussions he has had with the First Minister about the cost-effectiveness of the Education (School Information) (Wales) [illegible]mendment) Regulations; [60963]

(18) what discussions he has had with the First Minister about the cost-effectiveness of the National Health Service (Professions Supplementary to Medicine) (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations; [60967]

(19) what discussions he has had with the First Minister about the cost-effectiveness of the Import and Export Restrictions (Foot and Mouth Disease) (Wales) Regulations; [60977]

(20) what discussions he has had with the First Minister about the cost-effectiveness of the Highways Noise Payments (Movable Homes) (Wales) Regulations; [60985]

(21) what discussions he has had with the First Minister about the cost-effectiveness of the School Milk (Wales) Regulations; [60994]

(22) what discussions he has had with the First Minister about the cost-effectiveness of the Education (Individual Pupils' Achievements) (Information) (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations; [60972]

(23) what discussions he has had with the First Minister about the cost-effectiveness of the Diseases of Animals (Approved Disinfectants) (Amendment) (Wales) Order; [60980]

(24) what discussions he has had with the First Minister about the cost-effectiveness of the National Park Authorities Levies (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations; [60989]

(25) what discussions he has had with the First Minister about the cost-effectiveness of the Food Irradiation Provisions (Wales) Regulations; [60954]

(26) what discussions he has had with the First Minister about the cost-effectiveness of the Foot and Mouth Disease (Ascertainment of Value) (Wales) (No. 3) Order; [60958]

(27) what discussions he has had with the First Minister about the cost-effectiveness of the Foot and Mouth Disease (Ascertainment of Value) (Wales) Order; [60962]

(28) what discussions he has had with the First Minister about the cost-effectiveness of the Education (Pupil Registration) (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations; [60966]

(29) what discussions he has had with the First Minister about the cost-effectiveness of the Foot and Mouth Disease (Amendment) (Wales) (No. 3) Order; [60970]

(30) what discussions he has had with the First Minister about the cost-effectiveness of the Education (Pupil Records) (Wales) Regulations; [60976]

(31) what discussions he has had with the First Minister about the cost-effectiveness of the National Assistance (Assessment of Resources) (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations; [60993]

(32) what discussions he has had with the First Minister about the cost-effectiveness of the Import and Export Restrictions (Foot-and-Mouth Disease) (No. 3) Regulations; [60968]

(33) what discussions he has had with the First Minister about the cost-effectiveness of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (Commencement No. 1) (Wales) Order; [60995]

(34) what discussions he has had with the First Minister about the cost-effectiveness of the Import and Export Restrictions (Foot and Mouth Disease) (No. 2) (Wales) Order; [60974]

(35) what discussions he has had with the First Minister about the cost-effectiveness of the Homeless Persons (Priority Need) (Wales) Order; [60982]

(36) what discussions he has had with the First Minister about the cost-effectiveness of the Tir Sofal (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations; [60991]

(37) what discussions he has had with the First Minister about the cost-effectiveness of the Tir Mynydd (Wales) Regulations; [60987]

(38) what discussions he has had with the First Minister about the cost-effectiveness of the Non Domestic Rating (Alterations of Lists and Appeals) (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations; [60956]

(39) what discussions he has had with the First Minister about the cost-effectiveness of the National Health Service Trusts (Cardiff and Vale National Health Service Trust) (Originating Capital) (Wales) Order; [60960]

(40) what discussions he has had with the First Minister about the cost-effectiveness of the School Governors' Annual reports (Wales) Regulations; [60964]

(41) what discussions he has had with the First Minister about the cost-effectiveness of the Foot and Mouth Disease (Amendment) (Wales) No. 2 Order; [60978]

(42) what discussions he has had with the First Minister about the cost-effectiveness of the Local Authorities (Alteration of Requisite Calculations) (Wales) Regulations. [60986]

Mr. Paul Murphy: These are matters for the National Assembly for Wales. Section 65 of the Government of Wales Act 1998 provides for an appraisal of the costs and benefits of complying with Assembly general subordinate legislation to be carried out before a draft of the statutory instrument is laid before the Assembly.

CABINET OFFICE

Members of Parliament (Personal Data)

Mr. Forth: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what information is held by his Department on each hon. Member in relation to *(a)* personal relationships, both current and past, *(b)* financial status and dealings, *(c)* connections with companies and interest groups, *(d)* connections with Governments and *(e)* published works; and what was held in January 2002. [61836]

Mr. Alexander: Ministers and officials in this Department have access to published reference sources, as well as to the information about hon. Members made publicly available by the House authorities, for the purpose of parliamentary business.

Entertainment Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what the cost was of the Department's 2001 staff Christmas party; and how many people attended. [61655]

Mr. Alexander: The Cabinet Office did not hold a Christmas party for its staff in 2001.

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how much and what proportion of the departmental expenditure limit for 2002–03 will be accounted for by staff costs; what the figures were for 2001–02; and if he will make a statement. [61035]

Mr. Alexander: The Cabinet Office departmental expenditure limit (DEL) for 2001–02 was £402.8 million. Approximately 40 per cent. of the DEL was for budgeted staff costs. The 2001–02 Resource account is undergoing final adjustments and awaiting audit. As a result, the percentage figure quoted may change.

The information regarding how much and what proportion of the DEL for 2002–03 will be accounted for by staff costs is not yet available.

Public Service Agreement Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what has been the *(a)* cost and *(b)* saving from the pursuit of the Department's Public Service Agreement targets in each year since they were introduced. [61046]

Mr. Alexander: The Department's Public Service Agreement sets out the key outcomes it is committed to deliver with the resources provided, and its Service Delivery Agreement sets out the key steps towards delivery of those targets. Every year the Department publishes performance against its targets—including on value for money—and the resources it has used, in its departmental report.

Ministerial Meetings

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office which Ministers and officials had meetings with representatives of *(a)* the Confederation of British Industry, *(b)* the Engineering Employees Federation, and *(c)* the Engineering Marine Training Authority during the last year; who they met; and what the subjects and outcomes of their discussions were. [62212]

Mr. Alexander: Ministers and civil servants have meetings with a wide range of organisations and individuals as part of the process of policy development and analysis.

As with previous Administrations it is not this Government's practice to provide details of all such meetings. All such contacts are conducted in accordance with the Ministerial Code, the Civil Service Code and Guidance for Civil Servants: Contacts with Lobbyists.

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what the *(a)* cost and *(b)* saving has been from the Department's pursuit of Service Delivery Agreement targets in each year since they were introduced. [61641]

Mr. Alexander: The Department's Public Service Agreement sets out the key outcomes it is committed to deliver with the resources provided, and its Service Delivery Agreement sets out the key steps towards deliver of those targets. Every year the Department publishes performance against its targets—including on value for money—and the resources it has used, in its departmental report.

PRIME MINISTER

Prime Minister's Question Time

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister whether civil servants involved in providing preparatory material for him in advance of Prime Minister's Question Time supply information relating to *(a)* the previous Conservative Government and *(b)* alternative policies held by opposition parties. [62662]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 27 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1268–1269W. Briefing is provided in accordance with the Ministerial and Civil Service Code.

TREASURY

Forward Tax Payment Contracts

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate how many *(a)* income tax payers and *(b)* corporation tax payers have negotiated forward tax payment contracts with the Inland Revenue. [59873]

Dawn Primarolo: Following a review by the Inland Revenue, 15 such cases were identified. The majority of these cases are no longer current, and the remainder are under review in the light of a recent court judgment. All the agreements primarily concerned individuals but in five cases provision was made for companies considered to be under their control.

Minimum Wage

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action has been taken on enforcement of the national minimum wage in Scotland. [62155]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue has two specialist teams, one based in Aberdeen, the other in East Kilbride who are responsible for enforcing the national minimum wage in Scotland. Since April 1999 the two teams have completed over 1,700 investigations in Scotland, recovering over £627,000 in wage arrears.

Entertainment Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the cost was of the Department's 2001 staff Christmas party; and how many people attended. [61653]

Ruth Kelly: There was no departmental Christmas party. Treasury Christmas parties tend to be held on a team or directorate basis.

HIPC Initiative

Ms Drown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what contribution the UK Government plan to make to the estimated shortfall in funding for the HIPC initiative; from which departmental budget contributions will come; and whether contributions will be made *(a)* directly and *(b)* through the EU, IDA or other institutions. [61998]

John Healey: Total bilateral pledges to the HIPC trust fund currently total more than US$2.5 billion. However, current estimates of the funding requirements for countries expected to be eligible for HIPC relief in the near term suggest a possible shortfall of $700 million. In his speech to the United Nations General Assembly Special Session the Chancellor called for a $1 billion contribution from richer countries to support the HIPC initiative. At present the UK is the second largest contributor to the trust fund and has pledged a total of $306 million. Of that total $221 million was paid directly by the Department for International Development (DfID) to the World bank with the remaining $85 million representing the UK share of a European Union contribution of $661 million in total.

Debt Relief

Ms Drown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps are being taken to support *(a)* Guinea-Bissau's and *(b)* Guinea's IMF debt relief programme. [62149]

John Healey: As highly indebted poor countries (HIPCs) both Guinea-Bissau and Guinea are eligible for debt relief under the enhanced HIPC initiative. In December 2000 both countries reached Decision Point under the initiative and qualified for interim debt relief on any payments due. For its part the UK goes further than is required under the HIPC initiative and provides 100 per cent. debt relief. The UK Government are working with other donors, the World bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to help both countries reach Completion Point under the HIPC initiative, at which point their debts will be irrevocably cancelled. To reach this point these countries will need to have demonstrated a clear commitment to poverty reduction and how their country-owned poverty reduction strategies will be able to use the resources released by debt relief to reduce poverty. The IMF and World bank estimate that Guinea-Bissau and Guinea could reach Completion Point as early as October 2003 and December 2002 respectively.

Inland Revenue

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the budget of the Portsmouth Inland Revenue Contact Centre was in each of the last five financial years. [62622]

Dawn Primarolo: Portsmouth Contact Centre was opened on 6 November 2001, therefore the 2001–02 budget allocated to the site was for the period November 2001 to March 2002. The budgets for the two years to date are as follows:

£ million

	2001–02	*2002–03*
Paybill	0.8	3.14
Other running costs	0.15	0.3

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what performance measures there are at Inland Revenue call centres; if they are being met; and if he will make a statement. [62621]

Dawn Primarolo: The IRCC target to have no more than 5 per cent. of calls engaged and no more than 5 per cent. abandoned, with 90 per cent. of the balance answered in 20 seconds. Some of the new taxpayer sites have faced call volumes well above those predicted.

For the year ended March 2002, including the new sites, the overall achievement for all lines of business covered by contact centres and helplines was:

41 per cent. engaged

6 per cent. abandoned

59 per cent. answered within 20 seconds.

A number of issues are being addressed in particular:

ensuring that there are the right number of advisers to match call volumes;

working with service offices to see if other changes can be made to reduce call volumes and sharing best practice from larger established sites where service level targets are being met.

This, together with greater staff experience, has allowed substantial improvements in performance. For example, the Longbenton Contact Centre (which offers a national insurance service) has reduced engaged tones to a sixth of the level 12 months ago, while answering 90 per cent. of calls in 20 seconds.

The experimental call centre, which opened in East Kilbride, suffered similar variable service levels. The centre has since demonstrated that the processes are sound, achieving for example, a service level for the year ended March 2002 of:

4 per cent. engaged

2 per cent. abandoned

91 per cent. answered within 20 seconds.

Third-world Debt

John Mann: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he plans to cancel debt owing to the UK by Uganda. [62354]

John Healey: There is no longer any debt owing to the UK Government by Uganda. As a highly indebted poor country (HIPC) Uganda was eligible for debt relief under the enhanced HIPC initiative; for its part the UK goes further than is required and provides 100 per cent. debt relief to all qualifying countries such as Uganda. In February 2000 Uganda reached decision point under that initiative and qualified for interim debt relief on payments due, and in May 2000 Uganda reached completion point and its debts were irrevocably cancelled.

ECOFIN Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the outcome was of the ECOFIN Council held on 4 June; what the Government's stance was on the issues discussed, including its voting record; and if he will make a statement. [62929]

Mr. Gordon Brown: I attended the ECOFIN meeting on 4 June.

ECOFIN had an orientation discussion on the Broad Economic Policy Guidelines. These will be considered further at the ECOFIN meeting on 20 June prior to the Seville European Council.

The Council noted that a qualified majority existed on a presidency compromise text on the occupational pensions directive.

ECOFIN also had an orientation discussion on the draft directive on prospectuses, and the Commission presented its sixth half-yearly progress report on the Financial Services Action Plan.

ECOFIN adopted conclusions on the tax package. I reported on the significant progress the UK has made in discussions with our overseas and dependent territories on taxation of savings, which was welcomed by the Council. The Commission gave an oral update on progress on negotiations with third countries. ECOFIN called for greater progress to be made, and a presidency letter to the Swiss President was agreed.

Presidency guidelines on energy taxation were discussed. These were discussed further by the High Level Group (HLG) on Energy Taxation on 11 June, and the chairman of the HLG will report back to ECOFIN on 20 June.

There was a conciliation meeting with the European Parliament to examine the remaining outstanding items on the recasting of the financial regulation. Agreement was reached on the draft text.

ECOFIN discussed the VAT treatment of cross-border motor vehicle leasing, and invited the presidency and the Commission to examine the situation and report at the end of 2002.

The Council noted a preliminary oral report on issues of corporate governance by Professor Winter (Chairman of the High Level Group on Company Law).

ECOFIN also adopted texts on the preparations for the World Summit on Sustainable Development and on the implementation of the new EIB Euro-Mediterranean Facility.

No votes were taken at the meeting.

Commonwealth Finance Ministers Meeting

Barbara Follett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the 2002 Commonwealth Finance Ministers Meeting. [63191]

Mr. Boateng: The UK will host the 2002 Commonwealth Finance Ministers Meeting (CFMM) from 24–26 September. This is an annual event whose timing is intended to provide Finance Ministers with an opportunity to prepare for the annual meetings of the IMF and World bank.

The overall theme of the 2002 CFMM is "Stability; Growth; Poverty Reduction". Within this theme, Finance Ministers will discuss the world economy, IMF/World bank issues and Commonwealth issues.

They will also discuss the special theme which this year will be "Delivering the Monterrey Consensus". The International Conference on Financing for Development took place in Monterrey, Mexico, in March 2002. The resulting 'Monterrey Consensus' achieved a significant breakthrough by recognising the mutual responsibilities of both donors and developing countries to advance the development process. But to impact on the lives of the poor, these commitments require effective follow-up. The aim of the special theme session is therefore to develop an action plan for Commonwealth Finance Ministers to take forward the Monterrey Conclusions.

Prior to the ministerial meetings, senior officials only will discuss a technical theme. This year, the technical theme will be "Managing Resources for Development" and include such issues as budgetary systems and public expenditure management.

At the Chancellor's request, the 2002 CFMM will be the first to engage civil society, whose views will be sought on the special theme. The Commonwealth Foundation is facilitating this process. After an initial introductory meeting in Monterrey, a number of regional civil society consultations are planned. The first has already taken place in Ghana. Further consultations are scheduled for Jamaica, Fiji, Bangladesh and the UK. The outputs of these consultations will then be combined into a single paper at a larger civil society event in London in July. This paper will be presented to Finance Ministers at CFMM.

The UK is hosting the 2002 CFMM to mark the Queen's Golden Jubilee year. In recognition of this, Her Majesty will open the meetings on 24 September.

In addition, there will be a number of events taking place in the margins of the ministerial sessions:

An exhibition of UK/Commonwealth links in 2002 will run over the three days of CFMM. Exhibits are planned to cover the Commonwealth games, the Spirit of Friendship Festival and the Golden Jubilee celebrations;

an evening event to showcase the diversity of the Commonwealth;

a business forum immediately prior to the CFMM (23–24 September). This is being organised by the Commonwealth Business Council and will include a pre-conference dinner at the Guildhall.

To help ensure that Commonwealth citizens have access to information about the CFMM and that preparations for the meeting are as transparent as possible, a CFMM website has been established (www.cfmm2002.org). The site has been designed to give people across the Commonwealth quick access to information about both the policy aims and logistics of CFMM.

The website design takes into account potential technological limitations that may affect many developing Commonwealth countries. It is simple, easy to navigate and has a fast download speed.

World Debt

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the total costs to the Exchequer of the recent UK developing world debt cancellation, as announced since 1 May 1997, in each year from 1997–98 to 2020–21; and if he will make a statement. [62392]

John Healey: Prior to 1 May 1997 the UK had already cancelled its aid loans to all the poorest countries and payments are written off as they become due. Remaining debts are owed to the Export Credits Guarantee Department (ECGD). The original highly indebted poor countries (HIPC) initiative was launched in October 1996 and in 1999 the UK was at the forefront of the international debate on debt relief in helping to secure agreement for the enhanced HIPC initiative. In December 1999, the UK Government announced that we would provide 100 per cent. debt relief on all ECGD debt for qualifying HIPCs to free up more resources for poverty reduction. The table sets out, by country and calendar year, all developing country debts to ECGD that have been written off since May 1997.

Some countries have benefited from both the original and the enhanced HIPC initiative but figures on the exact attribution between each initiative are not readily available. The total future costs to the Exchequer of debt relief under the enhanced HIPC initiative will depend upon the progress of the remaining countries towards decision point, when they begin to receive interim debt relief on any payments due, and the subsequent completion point when debts are irrevocably cancelled.

Developing country debts to ECGD written off since 1 May 1997

£ million[1]

	1997[2]	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Bolivia	0.00	6.49	0.00	0.00	12.31
Bosnia	0.00	3.22	0.00	0.00	0.00
Cameroon	4.74	2.71	3.15	5.06	9.17
Central African Republic	0.00	0.16	0.04	0.03	0.01
Cote D'Ivoire	1.14	2.82	1.17	0.00	0.00
Egypt	2.35	0.98	0.00	0.00	0.00
Ethiopia	0.00	0.00	0.29	0.52	0.23
Guinea Republic	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.12	0.52
Guyana	0.00	0.00	12.50	0.00	0.00
Madagascar	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.19	1.30
Malawi	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.10
Mauritania	0.11	0.05	0.66	0.53	0.53
Mozambique	3.63	5.39	12.45	0.00	78.54
Niger	0.21	0.31	0.34	0.72	1.23
Senegal	0.00	1.53	0.00	0.02	0.05
Tanzania	1.98	4.62	5.57	18.14	15.12
Togo	0.48	0.29	0.00	0.00	0.00
Uganda	0.00	8.68	0.00	5.96	0.00
Zambia	0.00	0.00	20.74	16.87	15.94
Totals	14.64	37.24	56.91	48.13	135.04

[1] Amounts written off.

[2] From 1 May 1997 onwards.

Mr. Romano Prodi

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he last met Mr. Romano Prodi; and if he will make a statement. [62189]

Mr. Gordon Brown: I meet Mr. Prodi regularly at meetings of European Councils.

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the mandate of the Advisory Committee on Customs and Indirect Taxation is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [61700]

John Healey: There is no record of the existence of an Advisory Committee on Customs and Indirect Taxation.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what the mandate of the EEC-Hong Kong Customs Co-operation Sub Committee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [61730]

(2) what the mandate of the EEC-United States of America Customs Co-operation Sub Committee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [61733]

(3) what the mandate of the EEC-Israel Customs Co-operation Sub Committee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [61732]

(4) what the mandate of the EEC-Mexico Special Committee on Customs Co-operation is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [61731]

John Healey: All of the committees listed below have been set up by the Council in accordance with obligations under agreements between the EC and the third country or economic grouping in question:

EEC-Israel Customs Co-operation Sub-Committee
EEC-Hong Kong Customs Co-operation Sub-Committee
EEC-United States of America Customs Co-operation Sub-Committee
EEC-Mexico Special Committee on Customs Co-operation.

They normally meet annually (one year Brussels, the following year in the subject country). Their aim is to maintain co-operation agreements in the customs field, particularly in exchanging information. The agenda for these meetings is broad—any part of the agreements being potentially included.

HM Customs attends preparatory Council meetings (approximately six per year) which co-ordinate, as part of a wide-ranging agenda, for the bilateral EC/third country committee meetings. Travel expenses for two officials are reimbursed by the Commission. The usual cost of overnight accommodation and subsistence per day per official is 217.95 euro (£134.70). HM Customs officials do not normally attend the bilateral meetings. In the Customs area, the EC has exclusive competence and leads in the bilateral meetings, normally accompanied by the member state holding the presidency. If, exceptionally, there is a point of direct interest to the UK, representatives from the Permanent Representation in Brussels would attend the meeting.

Accountability and transparency to Parliament are ensured by the regular EU scrutiny process. Prior to agreement at the various Councils (ECOFIN, JHA, GAC), documents are submitted to Parliament along with Explanatory Memoranda and are examined by the European scrutiny committees.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 19 June 2002

WALES

Coastal Emergencies

8. **Mr. Simon Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received regarding placing planning for coastal emergencies on a statutory footing in Wales. [59913]

Mr. Paul Murphy: None.

Respite Facilities

9. **Ann Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the First Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales about the provision of respite facilities in Wales. [59914]

Mr. Touhig: My right hon. Friend and I discuss health issues on a regular basis with the First Minister and the Health and Social Services Minister.

The principal services providers of respite facilities in Wales are: the social services department of local authorities; the NHS; the voluntary sector; and the independent care home sector.

Refrigerators

10. **Mr. Jack:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what facilities are in operation in Wales to recycle refrigerators in accordance with the EU Ozone Depleting Substances Regulations 2037/2000. [59916]

Mr. Touhig: I meet regularly with the First Minister to discuss a range of issues including recycling.

It is expected that two facilities for the recovery of ozone depleting substances from refrigerators and freezers will be operational in Wales by the end of the year.

Responsibility for disposal lies with the local authorities, with the policy responsibility resting with the National Assembly for Wales.

Millennium Stadium

11. **Kevin Brennan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the Home Department about additional resources for the policing of events of national significance at the Millennium Stadium, Cardiff. [59917]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I have regular discussions with colleagues about a number of issues affecting Wales, including policing matters.

In recognition of additional policing costs arising in Cardiff while major football matches are being played at the Millennium Stadium, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has approved special payments of £300,000 to South Wales police in both 2001–02 and 2002–03.

Further and Higher Education

12. **Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with *(a)* the National Assembly and *(b)* his Cabinet colleagues about cross-border access to higher and further education. [59919]

Mr. Touhig: My right hon. Friend and I meet regularly with colleagues to discuss a range of issues, including access to higher and further education.

M4 and Severn Bridge Closures

13. **Mr. Edwards:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received about the recent closures of the M4 and Severn Bridge. [59920]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I recently had the pleasure of meeting my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth (Mr. Edwards) to discuss this issue. I have received no other representations on this matter.

Family Farms

14. **Sir Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the future viability of small family farms in Wales. [59921]

Mr. Paul Murphy: None. Such assessments are a matter for the National Assembly for Wales, who have responsibility for agriculture in Wales.

I do, however, have regular discussions with the First Minister, which include agricultural matters.

The National Assembly has launched "Farming for the Future: a New Direction for Farming in Wales"—a distinctively Welsh agriculture strategy produced with the help and support of the industry. The strategy recognises the importance of family farms; gives prominence to developing high quality produce; and most importantly, sets out a vision based on sustainability in all its aspects—economically, environmentally and socially.

Unemployment

15. **Chris Ruane:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the level of unemployment in North Wales. [59922]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The Government's long-term ambition is that by the end of the decade there will be a higher proportion of people in work than ever before.

The latest labour market statistics, published last Friday, show that we are making excellent progress—3,000 more people in Wales are in work, compared to a year before. The statistics also show that claimant rates are down compared to a year before across the whole of North Wales.

21. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement about the effect in Wales of Government measures to create job opportunities for unemployed people. [59928]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Employment measures such as the New Deal have been a huge success in Wales and we have seen a 65 per cent. fall in youth claimants and a 58 per cent. fall in long-term claimants since those policies were introduced. The latest labour market statistics for Wales, published last Friday, show that 3,000 more people in Wales are in work, compared to a year before.

Regeneration

16. **Mark Tami:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with the First Secretary regarding economic regeneration in towns. [59923]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I have regular meetings with the First Minister to discuss a range of issues including economic regeneration in towns.

The Welsh Development Agency published its community regeneration policy for Wales in May 2000. The document sets out an area-based approach to community regeneration, integrating economic, social, cultural and environmental measures.

Building on its Market Towns Initiative, Small Towns and Villages Initiative and earlier work on both urban and rural regeneration, the WDA has developed a community regeneration toolkit, providing both revenue and capital support. This allows for mixing and matching of a number of support mechanisms for community regeneration.

SMEs in WDA project areas can also access the WDA's mainstream grant schemes, for example town improvement grants and environmental improvement grants.

Crime

17. **Huw Irranca-Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for the Home Department about the impact in Wales of measures to reduce crime. [59924]

23. **Julie Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for the Home Department about the impact in Wales of measures to reduce crime. [59930]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I have regular discussions with colleagues about a number of issues that impact on Wales.

Tackling crime is a priority for the Government. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales regularly meets the Crime Reduction Director for Wales, Mr. David A'Herne, who is charged with taking forward our key policies and initiatives aimed at fighting crime and disorder. Our co-ordinated approach is making a marked difference in communities throughout Wales.

Departmental Representation

18. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how often, in the last year, his office has been represented on Cabinet committees dealing with home affairs. [59925]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Both my hon. Friend and I are members of committees dealing with home affairs, which we attend on a regular basis.

Appeals Service

19. **Mrs. Betty Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the Appeals Service in Wales to ensure that bilingual medical officers are available to users. [59926]

Mr. Touhig: Responsibility for the Appeals Service rests with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions. Persons are appointed to the appeal tribunal panel, including those medically qualified, by my right hon. Friend the Lord Chancellor. Operational matters rest with the chief executive of the Appeals Service.

Where an appeal tribunal requires a medically qualified panel member it is normally the case that the panel member will reside locally. However it will not always be the case that the medically qualified panel member will be bilingual. An interpreter will be made available where necessary.

Red Dragon Project

20. **Mr. John Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he next plans to meet the Secretary of State for Defence to discuss the Red Dragon project; and if he will make a statement. [59927]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I have regular discussions with my ministerial colleagues at the Ministry of Defence.

Very little has changed since my earlier reply to a parliamentary question from the hon. Gentleman. The Welsh Development Agency continues to work with the Defence Aviation Repair Agency (DARA) and Defence Estates on the proposals to develop the site facilities, including the possibility of establishing an aerospace park at St. Athan.

There have been seven public meetings so far and I understand that the Ministry of Defence will continue to work closely with the local community, to keep it informed of developments as they take shape.

Agriculture

22. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he next expects to meet representatives of the National Assembly for Wales to discuss agriculture. [59929]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I meet the First Secretary on a regular basis and we often discuss agriculture. I also frequently meet the Welsh Assembly Rural Affairs Minister, as does the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, as part of his rolling programme of quarterly liaison meetings.

Employment

24. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on employment levels in North Wales. [59931]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The Government's long-term ambition is that by the end of the decade there will be a higher proportion of people in work than ever before.

The latest labour market statistics, published last Friday, show that we are making excellent progress—3,000 more people in Wales are in work, compared to a year before. The statistics also show that claimant rates are down compared to a year before across the whole of North Wales.

Coal Subsidies

25. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with ministerial colleagues regarding the extension of the subsidy to coal produced beyond July 2002; and if he will make a statement. [59932]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I have regular meetings with ministerial colleagues and discuss a range of issues including coal state aid, and understand the deep concerns of the people of Wales about the coal industry.

A new European framework for coal state aid, post July 2002, was agreed at the Energy Council on 7 June. We are particularly pleased, that we have been successful in negotiating the flexibility to pay investment aid, where appropriate. This allows support to be given for the development of economically viable mines. The new framework provides us with the basis on which to decide the future of coal policy in the UK, but discussion on the future of UK aid is still ongoing.

Elderly Care

26. **Mr. Roger Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the Secretary for Health and Social Services in the National Assembly for Wales about the funding of free care for the elderly in Wales. [59933]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I am aware of this matter but, thus far, I have not received any official request from the Assembly to discuss this issue with the Assembly Minister for Health and Social Services.

European Capital of Culture

27. **Geraint Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on Cardiff's bid to become the European capital of culture. [59934]

Mr. Touhig: Cardiff is Europe's youngest capital, a multicultural city which serves a country rich in both traditional and contemporary culture. Sense of place is a defining quality of Welsh culture. Our locality and our community is a strong part of our identity. Cardiff's European capital of culture bid looks at the new ways that the city can work for the people and the cultural communities across the whole of Wales, and my right hon. Friend and I wholeheartedly endorse it.

Health Service Auditing

28. **Hywel Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Health on the auditing of the health service in Wales. [59935]

Mr. Touhig: My right hon. Friend has discussed this issue with both the Assembly First Minister and the Secretary of State for Health, my right hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn). I have also discussed it with the Assembly Minister for Health and Social Services.

The First Minister and the Welsh Assembly Cabinet are content, in principle, to the proposed amalgamation of the Commission for Health and Improvement (CHI) and the Audit Commission which are England and Wales bodies. It will be necessary to make sure that this works properly and effectively for Wales, and those detailed issues will be addressed during the framing of the necessary legislation.

Farming

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he last met the First Secretary to discuss farming. [59918]

Mr. Touhig: My right hon. Friend has a weekly meeting with the First Minister at which a range of issues are discussed. I also have regular meetings with the Assembly Rural Affairs Minister.

PRIME MINISTER

Zimbabwe

Q20. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Prime Minister if he plans to request a recall of his Commonwealth counterparts to consider the developing situation in Zimbabwe. [59955]

The Prime Minister: The Commonwealth Troika of Australia, Nigeria and South Africa suspended Zimbabwe from the Councils of the Commonwealth on 19 March 2002. The Troika had been mandated by Heads of Government to address Commonwealth concerns on Zimbabwe. Its decision will be reviewed after 12 months. We welcomed the Troika's decision to suspend Zimbabwe at the time, and support the ongoing efforts of Presidents Mbeki and Obasanjo, and Prime Minister Howard, to resolve Zimbabwe's political problems.

The Troika set out what Zimbabwe needs to do for the suspension to be lifted. It also decided to facilitate dialogue between Zimbabwe's two main political parties so that legitimacy could be restored in Zimbabwe. Talks, facilitated by South Africa and Nigeria, were scheduled for 13 May but the ruling party withdrew at the last moment. We await further information on whether or not the dialogue will be resumed.

The wider Commonwealth remains engaged on Zimbabwe, as does the Secretary-General. Zimbabwe was discussed at the meeting of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group on 15–17 May in Botswana. We continue to discuss the situation in Zimbabwe with a range of Commonwealth partners.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Prime Minister on how many occasions between 31 March 2001 and 31 March 2002 special advisers of *(a)* the Chief Whip and Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury and *(b)* Minister without Portfolio and Party Chairman have travelled abroad in an official capacity. [58752]

The Prime Minister: None.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Prime Minister what proportion of ordinary written questions for his Office were answered within a week of tabling in each month since June 2001; and what proportion of questions for named day received a substantive answer on that day in each month since June 2001. [58973]

The Prime Minister: Information on the written parliamentary questions answered in this period is as follows:

Month	*Percentage of named day questions answered on day named*	*Percentage of ordinary written questions answered within five working days*
June	43	73
July	94	95
October	79	90
November	66	85
December	91	100
January	95	85
February	84	72
March	82	75
April	88	84
May	97	83

Computers

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Prime Minister what measures are *(a)* in place and *(b)* under discussion in his Office in order to ensure compliance with the WEE directive. [60731]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to him by the Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry on 12 June 2002.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Prime Minister how many computers were replaced in his Office in each of the past three years; how the replaced units were disposed of and by which companies; and at what cost. [60730]

The Prime Minister: The general policy is that computers in No. 10 have a three-year life cycle. On average, 60 have been replaced in each of the last three years. Since 2002, the replaced units, minus the hard drive, are given to charity. Costs of this can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

G8 Summit

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Prime Minister if he will prioritise debt cancellation at the G8 summit in Canada; and if he will make a statement. [60766]

The Prime Minister: The UK has consistently been at the forefront of international progress on debt relief. The Government played a key role in securing agreement for the enhanced Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative at the Cologne summit in 1999, that aims to deliver a sustainable exit from debt for the world's poorest countries. At the G8 summit in Canada, the UK will continue to promote this aim and urge the G8, under the leadership of the Canadian Government, to make further progress on debt relief and ensure poor countries have a sustainable exit from debt. Ahead of the summit, the UK has outlined a number of proposals to strengthen HIPC, and in particular, has called for richer countries to provide an additional financial contribution for the HIPC initiative.

The G8 committed last year to looking at how their policies can support African efforts to reduce poverty and bring sustainable development to the continent. African countries have been engaged in developing the New Partnership for Africa's Development, which highlights the importance of sound political and economic governance. The UK has been active in arguing further concrete action, building on our existing strategies for conflict prevention and resolution, health and education, and of the importance of market access for African products. The G8 will come back with proposals in Kananaskis.

Staff Numbers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister how many staff were employed by his Office on *(a)* 2 May 1997 and *(b)* 31 May 2002. [60929]

The Prime Minister: As of the start of the financial year, at 1 April 2002, there were 190 staff on the No. 10 payroll.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) on 5 November 2001, *Official Report,* column 8W.

Iraq

Harry Cohen: To ask the Prime Minister what evidence he has received of Iraqi involvement in the anthrax mail attacks in the United States; and if he will make a statement. [62012]

The Prime Minister: We have no evidence linking Iraq with the recent anthrax attacks in the United States.

Investigations into who was responsible for the anthrax attacks and into the source of the anthrax itself are still continuing in the United States. We await the outcome of these investigations.

Unpaid Advisers

Mr. Willis: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 25 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 620W, on unpaid advisers, if he will list the steps that were taken to ensure no conflicts of interest arose as a result of these appointments. [62968]

The Prime Minister: Paragraph 51 of the Ministerial Code sets out the processes for appointing unpaid advisers, including the handling of any conflict of interests.

DEFENCE

Performance Targets

Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the performance targets that his Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies are required to meet, apart from those set out in the public service agreements for 1999 to 2002 and 2001 to 2004; and if he will specify for each target *(a)* who sets it and *(b)* who monitors achievement against it. [60467]

Dr. Moonie: The performance targets that the Ministry of Defence is required to meet are those contained in the Department's Public Service Agreement and its underpinning Service Delivery Agreement. These targets are captured in the MOD's performance management framework—the Defence Balanced Scorecard. The scorecard also tracks high-level internal objectives on which PSA performance depends. The Defence Management Board reviews the scorecard annually, and monitors performance against it on a quarterly basis.

Key targets for the 36 Defence Agencies are still being finalised for financial year 2002–03, and are being announced to Parliament as and when they are agreed. Defence Ministers approve all agency key targets, taking into account past performance. Agency performance is monitored during the year by the agency's nominated "owner" within MOD, and is published in the agencies' annual reports. More information on performance can be obtained from the appropriate agency chief executive.

Information on the performance of the MOD's seven executive non-departmental public bodies is published in their annual reports.

Armed Forces (Suicides)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 23 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 473W, on armed forces personnel (deaths on military premises), *(a)* how many and *(b)* what proportion of the suicides involved a person below (i) 18 and (ii) 21. [61389]

Mr. Ingram: The data detailed in the table represent the number of armed forces personnel, whose deaths were recorded as suicides, which involved personnel below 18,21 and over 21 years respectively.

	Number	Percentage
Under 18		
1994	0	0
1995	0	0
1996	0	0
1997	0	0
1998	0	0
1999	0	0
2000	0	0
2001	0	0
All years	0	0
Under 21		
1994	5	17
1995	2	10
1996	4	17
1997	5	24
1998	2	18
1999	0	0
2000	2	20
2001	1	33
All years	21	17
21 and over		
1994	25	83
1995	18	90
1996	20	83
1997	16	76
1998	9	82
1999	9	100
2000	8	80
2001	2	67
All years	107	83
All ages		
1994	30	100
1995	20	100
1996	24	100
1997	21	100
1998	11	100
1999	9	100
2000	10	100
2001	3	100
All years	128	100

Figures for reported suicides are subject to revision as further coroner's verdicts are reported to the Defence Analytical Services Agency.

Verdicts of suicide are determined by Her Majesty's coroner.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 17 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 942W, on firearm deaths, *(a)* how many and *(b)* what proportion of the members of HM Forces whose deaths were recorded as a result of firearms incidents were (i) also recorded as suicide or self-inflicted deaths and (ii) below (A) 18 and (B) 21 years old. [61386]

Mr. Ingram: Those members of the armed forces whose deaths, as a result of firearm related incidents, were recorded as suicide and those who were below and over 21 years of age respectively, are shown in the table:

	Number	Percentage
Suicide		
Under 21		
1994	4	15
1995	2	10
1996	4	24
1997	0	0
1998	0	0
1999	0	0
2000	1	10
2001	0	0
Total	11	11
21 and over		
1994	8	30
1995	6	30
1996	5	29
1997	3	60
1998	0	0
1999	0	0
2000	0	0
2001	0	0
Total	22	23
Suicide total		
1994	12	44
1995	8	40
1996	9	53
1997	3	60
1998	0	0
1999	0	0
2000	1	10
2001	0	0
Total	33	34

	Number	Percentage
Other deaths due to firearms		
1994	15	56
1995	12	60
1996	8	47
1997	2	40
1998	1	100
1999	7	100
2000	9	90
2001	9	100
Total	63	66
Total		
1994	27	100
1995	20	100
1996	17	100
1997	5	100
1998	1	100
1999	7	100
2000	10	100
2001	9	100
Total	96	100

In total, 33 of the 96 firearm related deaths have been recorded as suicide. Cause of death can by determined only by Her Majesty's Coroner, therefore, deaths due to firearms excluding suicides may include deaths where a coroner's verdict is awaited. There have been no confirmed suicides in personnel aged under the age of 18 years in the years specified.

Pakistan Ordnance Factories

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the answer of 12 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 175W, on Pakistan ordnance factories, if he has ascertained the exact amount of training provided under the technology transfer and training arrangements with Pakistan ordnance factories for the manufacturing of the 105mm L64 Tungsten core Armour Piercing Fin Stabilised Discarding Sabot tank ammunition. [62181]

Dr. Moonie: As previously stated, arrangements between the Royal Ordnance Factories (ROF) and the Pakistani Ordnance Factories (POF) related to assistance with the production of 105mm and L64 tank ammunition. As part of this assistance

> "suitable periods of training ... in the United Kingdom on manufacturing, inspection and proof techniques"

for that ammunition were available to the POF. Despite extensive searches of Defence archives, and the archives of Royal Ordnance Defence plc (ROD), it has not been possible to find definitive information relating to the exact nature or quantity of the training provided.

Further inquiries by officials into this subject could be undertaken only at disproportionate cost.

Licence Production Agreements (Iran)

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what licence production agreements have been signed with the *(a)* Ammunition Industries Group (Iran) and *(b)* Defence Industries Organisation of Iran for the production of L2A2 rubber or plastic baton rounds since 1972; [62183]

(2) what licence production agreements have been signed with Iran for the production of *(a)* rubber and *(b)* plastic baton rounds since 1972. [62182]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence does not hold systematic records of commercial licence agreements. A more detailed search in files going back to 1972 could be provided only at disproportionate cost and any commercially confidential information would be protected under third party's commercial confidences in Part II Section 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Defence Costs

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will estimate the total cost in the current financial year of providing and maintaining the Royal Navy's ballistic missile submarine fleet. [62041]

Mr. Ingram: The estimated total cost for the current financial year of providing and maintaining the Royal Navy's ballistic missile submarine fleet including the costs of manpower and facilities is expected to be about 3 per cent. of the total defence budget.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will estimate the cost in the current financial year of maintaining the capability to research, design, produce, store, move and carry out decommissioning of the British stock of nuclear weapons. [62042]

Mr. Ingram: The estimated cost for these items in the current financial year is about one per cent. of the total defence budget.

Tornado

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if AMRAAM has been equipped on Tornado F3 flying on operations. [62237]

Dr. Moonie: There are currently no Tornado F3 aircraft equipped with the advanced medium range air-to-air missile flying on operations.

Tanks

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many Challenger 2 tanks are allocated to each tank regiment in the British Army; and how many are off-road in each case; [62223]

(2) how many Scimitars there are in the British Army; and how many are off-road; [62225]

(3) how many Warrior armoured personnel carriers are allocated to each armoured infantry regiment in the British Army; and how many are off-road in each case. [62224]

Mr. Ingram: The numbers of Challenger 2 tanks and Warrior armoured personnel carriers allocated to tank and armoured infantry regiments in the British Army and their availability are shown in the tables.

Challenger 2

Regiment	*Allocated*	*Not fully operational*
The Royal Scots Dragoon Guards	48	9
2nd Royal Tank Regiment	44	8
The Royal Dragoon Guards	44	16
The Queen's Royal Hussars	30	13
The Queen's Royal Lancers	54	18
The King's Royal Hussars	44	0
Total	264	64

Warrior

Battalion (Bn)	*Allocated*	*Not fully operational*
1st Bn The Irish Guards	53	7
1st Bn The Duke of Wellington's Regiment	44	22
1st Bn The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers	54	3
1st Bn The Black Watch	53	13
1st Bn The Royal Regiment of Wales	18	0
1st Bn The Light Infantry	35	8
1st Bn The Staffordshire Regiment	39	3
1st Bn The King's Regiment	31	8
1st Bn The Princess of Wales' Royal Regiment	39	14
Total	366	78

The information is recorded quarterly and the figures represent the position as at 31 March 2002.

As at 31 March 2002, 64 of the 316 Scimitars in the British Army were reported not to be fully operational.

The overall totals for vehicle types are broadly in line with availability targets and, as shown in the following table, vehicle availability has improved significantly, particularly in the case of the Challenger 2, since the last return in December last year.

	Equipment type		
	Challenger 2	*Warrior*	*Scimitars*
Total fleet	264	366	316
% operational 31 December 2001	62	72	83
% operational 31 March 2002	76	79	80
% target availability	80	75	70

In addition, it should be noted that if any of the units were required to deploy on operations, any shortfalls would be made good to ensure that the units deployed with a full complement of vehicles.

Fighter Combat Training

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence with which foreign aircraft types RAF and Fleet Air Arm pilots have participated in fighter combat training in the past 24 months. [62240]

Mr. Ingram: The following list details the foreign aircraft types with which RAF and Fleet Air Arm pilots have participated in fighter combat training in the past 24 months:

Tornado F3, PA200

BAe Hawk, Hawk 200

Sepecat Jaguar

Dassault Mirage F1, Mirage 2000

Dassault Super Etendard

Douglas A-4K Skyhawk

General Dynamics F-111 Aardvark

General Dynamics F-16 Fighting Falcon

Grumman F-14 Tomcat

Lockheed F-104 Starfighter

McDonnell Douglas AV8B Harrier II

McDonnell Douglas F-15, F-15C, F-15E Eagle

McDonnell Douglas F-18, CF-18 Hornet

Mig-29

North American F4 Phantom

Northrop F5 Freedom Fighter

Saab Viggen

Sukhoi Su-22.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which RAF armed Fleet Air Arm squadrons have participated in fighter combat training exercises with overseas air forces in the past 24 months. [62239]

Mr. Ingram: The following table details the fast jet squadrons that have participated in fighter combat training exercises in the past 24 months:

Aircraft type	*Squadron number*
Tornado F3	11, 25, 43, 111
Tornado GR1/4	2, 9, 12, 13, 14, 31, 617
Harrier GR7	1, 3, 4
Harrier FA2	800, 801, 899
Jaguar	6, 41, 54

Educational Allowances

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what w[illegible] the uptake of individual educational allowances in each year since 1997; [62466]

(2) what categories of educational opportunity the IEA has been used for since 1997; [62338]

(3) what would be the total cost of individual educational allowances if each serviceman made use of it; [62339]

(4) what the value is to an individual serviceman of the individual education allowance; [62337]

(5) if he will make a statement about individual educational allowances for the armed services. [62467]

Mr. Ingram: I assume that the hon. Member is referring to what is now known as the learning credits scheme. This scheme comprises two forms of allowance: standard learning credits and enhanced learning credits.

The standard learning credits scheme (SLC) was launched on 1 April 1999 and operates on similar lines to the individual refund scheme (IRS) it replaced, but its value, £175 per year, is 25 per cent. higher. Individuals must contribute at least 20 per cent. of the cost of any learning for which it is claimed. The SLC can, therefore, fund up to 80 per cent. of the cost of learning. This 80/20 split encourages development of individual understanding and buy-in to the learning process.

Both the SLC and the IRS which preceded it are applicable to a wide range of learning purposes in support of an individual's personal development. The only limitation is that the learning must have a benefit to the services, but, in practice, this still allows almost all forms of development. A representative list of the range of courses includes:

- GCSE—e.g. Maths, English, Psychology, Physics, Accounting, Geography
- A-Level—e.g. Law, Sociology, Economics
- AS Levels—French
- OU modules
- Degrees
- City and Guilds teaching certificates for basic skills
- Book keeping and accounts
- Business studies
- Accounting
- Counselling
- Sports therapy
- Human physiology and health
- NVQs of all types
- Language training
- Computer courses
- European computer driving licence
- Microsoft Office user specialist
- IT practitioner courses
  - C++ programming
  - Windows 2000 networking
  - Microsoft Project.

The uptake of IRS/SLC since 1997 for the armed forces is shown in the table.

FY	*Number of claimants*	*Trained strength of armed forces*	*Claimants as a percentage of trained strength*
1997–98	[1]8,297	[2]97,523	8.5
1998–99	11,580	192,155	6
1999–2000	12,773	189,574	6.7
2000–01	21,779	187,874	11.6
2001–02	24,550	186,610	13.2

[1] Army figures unavailable.

[2] Excludes Army.

The second part of learning credits, which will be known as enhanced learning credits (ELC), complements the SLC scheme and is due to be launched on 1 April 2004. This is an imaginative and large-scale initiative to provide partial funding for personnel wishing to undertake academic or vocational education for their own personal development. ELC will enable personnel to access a considerably higher level of sponsorship than SLC and is available for a maximum of three claims (one in each of three separate years which need not be consecutive) during a service person's career and for up to 10 years after leaving the service.

The ELC scheme requires a minimum period of service in order to qualify and there are two levels of claim depending on length of service. The initial qualification period is four years' service after which an individual can claim the lower tier level of funding (£1,000 pa). A further four years' service allows access to the higher tier of funding (£2,000 pa). As with the SLC scheme, an individual must show commitment to learning by funding at least 20 per cent. of the overall cost.

The enhanced learning credit scheme will enable the individual to make substantial plans for self improvement in a coherent and long-term fashion and will also encourage employing officers to factor major lifelong learning activities into a subordinate's personal development plan. This will have a positive effect on retention of personnel who wish to lay the foundations for success in their second career while maximising their military potential.

Based on the strength of the armed forces on 1 April 2002 (204,686) and the maximum available credit (£175) the total cost of SLC if every service person were to apply would be some £36 million. However, this does not take account of personnel on operations or already in intensive training who would be unlikely to claim; moreover, it does not reflect the historical take-up of the SLC scheme. Taking this into account, and using the latest figures in the table, a more realistic total cost would be some £4 million.

Elementary Flying Training

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to continue RAF involvement in *(a)* the Joint Elementary Flying Training Service and *(b)* university air squadrons; and if he will make a statement. [62278]

Mr. Ingram: *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* The RAF's Director of Elementary Flying Training is, and will continue to be, responsible for the Joint Elementary Flying Training School (JEFTS). JEFTS provides elementary flying training (EFT) for all three services (except for RAF graduate entrants who have completed EFT at a university air squadron), flying grading for the Army and multi-engine aircraft lead-in training for the RAF. RAF EFT is undertaken at RAF Church Fenton, Royal Navy and Army EFT is undertaken at RAF Barkston Heath, multi-engine lead-in training is undertaken at RAF Cranwell and flying grading for the Army is undertaken at the School of Army Aviation at Middle Wallop.

JEFTS use Firefly aircraft to meet all their training needs and these aircraft are provided by Babcock HCS. The contract to provide these aircraft expires on 7 July 2003. There is a need for a short four-year replacement contract to allow for the potential change to the way flying training will be delivered under the United Kingdom Military Flying Training System project planned to commence in 2007. The cost-effective way to deliver the task for the next four years is to undertake the RAF element of the EFT task at university air squadrons, where the majority of RAF pilots already undertake their EFT. The university air squadrons can absorb this work with only a small increase in activity at individual air squadrons, and it will result in a significant overall saving on the cost of providing EFT. The balance of the JEFTS task has been completed and the new contract will be let shortly.

The RAF will continue to maintain university air squadrons under the command of the Director of Elementary Flying Training. The RAF have recently undertaken a review of RAF university air Squadron flying and ground training to recommend how university air squadrons could better meet the needs of the RAF and of undergraduates. The outcome of this review will be available soon and it is expected to recommend some improvements to the UAS operations, without making changes to the present structure.

Nepal

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has had from the Government of Nepal concerning the Maoist rebellion; what advice his Department has offered; and if he will make a statement. [62893]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave on 17 June 2002, *Official Report*, columns 3–5, to my hon. Friend the Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) and the Members for Newark (Patrick Mercer) and for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth).

Jubilee Medal

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the membership of the ministerial group for the Queen's Golden Jubilee; and which members will receive the Golden Jubilee Medal. [61287]

Tessa Jowell: I have been asked to reply.

The membership of this group, which I chair, is being adjusted to reflect the recent changes of ministerial responsibilities. The previous membership was as follows:

President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons
Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions
Secretary of State, Northern Ireland Office
Secretary of State, Wales Office
Secretary of State, Scotland Office
Secretary of State for Trade and Industry
Secretary of State for Education and Skills
Minister for Sport, Department for Culture, Media and Sport
Minister of State, Cabinet Office
Financial Secretary, HM Treasury
Minister of State for the Armed Forces
Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department
Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Parliamentary Secretary, Home Office
Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Work and Pensions
First Minister, Scottish Executive
First Minister, National Assembly for Wales
Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure, Northern Ireland Executive
Private Secretary to Her Majesty The Queen
The Mayor of London
Head of the Golden Jubilee Office.

The Queen's Private Secretary received a medal as a member of the Royal Household.

NATO

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his meeting with his NATO counterparts on 14 and 15 May in Reykjavik, Iceland. [59821]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I have been asked to reply.

The NATO Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Reykjavik was an important step in the Alliance's preparation for the NATO Summit in Prague in November. Ministers agreed on the need further to adapt the Alliance to enhance its capacity to provide defence against the threat of terrorism; on the need to develop new defence capabilities; on the process for the enlargement of NATO; on the creation of a new security relationship with Russia; and on the development of NATO's relationships with Ukraine and its other partners.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Credit Unions

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will authorise Consignia and Post Office Counters to act as collection points for credit unions; and if she will make a statement. [61372]

Mr. Timms: Neither Consignia or Post Office Ltd. require the authorisation of the Secretary of State to act as collection points for credit unions. Whether they do so is a commercial matter for Consignia and Post Office Ltd.

Employment Tribunal Cases

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many employment tribunal claims, where a deposit at a preliminary hearing was required as a condition of proceeding, were proceeded to a full hearing in *(a)* 2001 and *(b)* to date; and in how many such cases the (i) claimant won, (ii) case was withdrawn and (iii) case was settled before a full hearing. [62696]

Alan Johnson: The information requested is displayed in the table.

	2001	*[1]2002*
Number of cases which withdrew after a PHR deposit order	43	14
Number of cases which settled after a PHR deposit order	4	3
Number of cases which proceeded to a full hearing after a PHR deposit order	17	0
Of which, successful at full hearing	0	0

[1] Only covers the period from 1 January 2002 to 30 April 2002

Source:

Employment Tribunals Service

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry in employment tribunal cases in 2001 where parties were required to pay a deposit, what the mean average deposit was at preliminary hearings as a condition of continuing to proceed with the case. [62694]

Alan Johnson: The mean average deposit required at a pre-hearing review as a condition of continuing to proceed with the case was £133.40 for 2001.

Arms Exports

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what licences have been granted for equipment on the military list to Israel in each month of 2002, including military list and dual-use ratings; what equipment is covered under these licences; and if she will make a statement. [60627]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 11 June 2002]:* The number of Standard Individual Export Licences (SIELs) and Open Individual Export Licences (OIELs) covering items on the military and dual use lists, issued to end users in Israel in each month since January 2002, is set out in the table. Individual licences might cover a range of items with various ratings. Where this is so, the licence is included in the tables in the total for all of the relevant ratings.

Rating	*No. of SIELS issued for Israel*	*No. of OIELS issued for Israel*
January 2002		
ML4	1	—
ML5	4	—
ML9	1	—
ML11	1	—
0C004	2	—
1C350	1	—
2B230	1	—
3A001	1	—
6A001	—	1
End use	1	—
February 2002		
ML5	4	—
ML9	2	—
ML10	2	—
ML18	1	—
ML22	1	—
PL5031	—	1
1C202	—	1
2B350	1	—
5A002	1	1
5B002	1	—
5D002	1	—
End use	1	—
March 2002		
ML4	4	—
ML9	1	—
ML10	1	—
ML11	2	—
ML15	2	—
PL5031	—	1
0C004	1	—
1A002	1	—
1C202	—	—
1C352	—	1
2B230	2	—
2B350	2	—
3A001	1	—
5A002	1	—
7A103	1	—
End use	3	—
April 2002		
ML11	1	—
ML15	1	—
PL5031	1	—
4A003	1	—
5A002	—	1
5B002	—	1
5D002	—	1
5E002	—	1
6A203	1	—
May 2002		
PL5031	2	—
2B350	1	—
3A001	1	—
3B001	—	1
3D002	—	1
5A002	—	1
5D002	1	—
6A001	—	1
End use	3	—

The summary description of the items covered by these ratings will be published in the Government's 2002 Annual Report on Strategic Export Controls, copies of which will be available in the Libraries of the House. In addition, Israel is a permitted destination on certain Open

General Export Licences, copies of which are also placed in the Libraries of the House. I refer the right hon. and learned Member to the reply from my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary to him of 15 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 722–23W.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the policy of the Government on the granting of export licences for defence-related equipment to *(a)* India and *(b)* Pakistan. [62034]

Nigel Griffiths: I refer the hon. Member to the statements made by my hon. Friend the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on 15 March 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1296–98W and by my noble Friend the Lord Sainsbury of Turville in another place on 28 May 2002, *Official Report, House of Lords*, columns 1147–149.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many licences for defence-related exports have been *(a)* granted and *(b)* refused to (i) Pakistan and (ii) India in each of the last five years. [62040]

Nigel Griffiths: The number of Standard Individual Export Licences and Open Individual Export Licences for defence-related exports that have been granted and refused to Pakistan and India in each of the last five years is published in the Government's annual reports on strategic export controls. Copies of the 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2000 annual reports are available in the Libraries of the House. The 2001 annual report will be published soon.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what export licences have been granted since 2 May 1997 for the export of *(a)* Accuracy International sniper rifles and *(b)* sniper rifles to Switzerland where the final end-use destination was a different country. [62016]

Nigel Griffiths: The export of sniper rifles is controlled under entry ML1 in Part III of Schedule 1 of the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994 as amended. Between 2 May 1997 and 6 June 2002 no Standard Individual Export Licences (SIELs) were issued covering the rating ML1 where the consignee was Switzerland and the end-user was in a different country.

"Your Guide"

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which Government Departments' and agencies are involved in discussions with Consignia about participating in the "Your Guide" scheme to use sub-post offices in a Government general practitioner role when it is introduced across the UK. [57945]

Mr. Timms: I understand that Post Office Ltd. has engaged in discussions with a wide range of Government Departments and with representatives of local government. Discussions are currently focused on the Department for Work and Pensions, the Inland Revenue, the Department for Education and Skills, and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Oil and Gas Directorate

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many of her Department's Oil and Gas Directorate posts that are in Aberdeen *(a)* have been transferred from London and *(b)* are new posts created in Aberdeen; and if she will list these jobs by grade of employment. [56327]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 14 May 2002]:* Responsibilities of the Oil and Gas Directorate have changed considerably over the years since the Aberdeen office was first set up in 1993. This has led to many changes in posts in both London and Aberdeen. For example:

a new pay and grading structure was introduced in 1997;

19 posts were transferred to the Oil and Gas Directorate in Aberdeen from British Trade International in 2000;

14 Oil and Gas Directorate Aberdeen posts were transferred to the Inland Revenue's offshore taxation office in Aberdeen in 2000.

Details of the number of Oil and Gas Directorate posts in Aberdeen and London by grade is provided today in my answer to the hon. Member's parliamentary question no. 56326.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many of her Department's Oil and Gas Directorate posts are in *(a)* Aberdeen and *(b)* London; and if she will list the jobs in each location by grade of employment in each year since 1994. [56326]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 14 May 2002]:* The number of Oil and Gas Directorate posts located in *(a)* Aberdeen and *(b)* London in each year since 1994 were as follows. A breakdown by grade of employment is only available from 1997 onwards:

	Aberdeen	*London*
1994	44.2	115.3
1995	44.2	120.8
1996	45.5	118.9

Grade of employment	*Aberdeen*	*London*
1997		
SCS	1	3
R11	1	2
R10	7	17
R9	12	20.6
R8	6	6
FS	0	3
R7	5	12
R6	6.5	12.4
R5	5	6
R4	0	10
R3	8.4	8
R2	1.7	5
Total	53.6	105
1998		
SCS	0.6	3.4
R11	1	2
R10	7	17
R9	14	18.6
R8	7	5
FS	0	3
R7	5	12
R6	6.5	12.4
R5	5	6
R4	0	10
R3	8.5	8
R2	1.7	4.9
Total	56.3	102.3

Grade of employment	*Aberdeen*	*London*
1999		
SCS	1	3
R11	1	3
R10	7	16
R9	15	16.6
R8	9	9
FS	0	3
R7	3	10
R6	7	10.4
R5	6	6
R4	0	8
R3	8.5	8.5
R2	2.8	5.8
Total	60.3	99.3
2000		
SCS	2	3
R11	1	3
R10	10	17
R9	13	17.3
R8	15	13
FS	0	3
R7	3	9
R6	8	12.4
R5	2	6
R4	5	9
R3	8	6.5
R2	5.3	4.6
Total	72.3	103.8
2001		
SCS	2	3
R11	2	4
R10	10	17
R9	15	15.6
R8	21	13
FS	0	3
R7	2	4.4
R6	11	10
R5	2	5
R4	11	8
R3	3	8.5
R2	5.5	5.1
Total	84.5	96.6

British Telecom

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she last held discussions with British Telecom. [56154]

Mr. Timms: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I regularly meet major UK companies. I have met the Chairman of BT today.

Correspondence

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will respond to the letter from the hon. Member for Eastleigh dated 18 March regarding the funding for supply chain companies constructing the A380 Airbus. [62311]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 18 June 2002]:* I apologise for the delay in responding to this letter which is due to an administration error. I will be responding to the hon. Member very shortly.

Liabilities Management Unit

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) of 10 June 2002, *Official Report,* column 993W, if she will state *(a)* the preferred bidder, *(b)* the private sector source for the loan of a Director to the Liabilities Management Unit, *(c)* whether that source is meeting the staff costs involved and *(d)* the sources of loans and secondments of all other private sector staff within the LMU. [62934]

Mr. Wilson: I am not yet in a position to give details of the partner contractor but I expect to be able to make an announcement shortly. The Director of the Liabilities Management Unit (LMU) is seconded to the Department from the Ford Motor Company. The Director continues to receive his salary from the Ford Motor Company but the Department is making a contribution towards it. The other secondees currently in the LMU are drawn from BNFL and UKAEA. Costs are being met by the Department.

Lean Manufacturing

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how often during the past year the Manufacturing Advisory Service has *(a)* given advice to firms about lean manufacturing and *(b)* acted as a medium between firms implementing lean manufacturing and (i) lean manufacturing experts and (ii) firms that have already had success in this area. [62681]

Alan Johnson: The Regional Centres for Manufacturing Excellence (RCMEs) delivering the Manufacturing Advisory Service (MAS) in each region are coming on stream at present and are the responsibility of the Regional Development Agencies in the regions concerned. They are not expected to provide information to the Department in the degree of detail requested by the hon. Member.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures are being taken by the Manufacturing Advisory Service to inform domestic firms about lean manufacturing. [62680]

Alan Johnson: All the Regional Centres for Manufacturing Excellence being established to deliver the Manufacturing Advisory Service in their respective regions will be communicating to manufacturers the merits of lean manufacturing. The associated MAS website (www.dti.gov.uk/manufacturing/MAS) includes a fact sheet on lean manufacturing.

In addition the service will refer manufacturers to the lean manufacturing experts within the group of Industry Forum Adaptation Projects that the Department supports.

Californian Energy Crisis

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment her Department has made of the lessons to be learned from the Californian energy crisis. [60056]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* The Department has monitored the situation in California closely, and continues to do so. The underlying cause of the problems in the Californian electricity market appears to have been a shortage of generation capacity. By contrast, capacity margins in Great Britain are healthy and demand growth in GB has been much more modest than it was in California. Overall, the Department believes a similar combination of circumstances is unlikely to occur in Great Britain, although the Department is not complacent. The Department and Ofgem set up a joint Security of Supply Working Group in July 2001 which, among other matters, is monitoring capacity issues carefully.

University Research

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of public funding of research in UK universities in each of the last five years has been for *(a)* military application and *(b)* other purposes. [61091]

Ms Hewitt: The information required can be found in Tables 6.4 and 6.5 on the Science, Engineering and Technology Statistics website at http://www.dti.gov.uk/ost/setstats.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate she has made of the proportion of research in UK universities in each of the last five years that has been funded *(a)* privately and *(b)* publicly. [61090]

Ms Hewitt: The information required is as follows.

Per cent.

	Private[1]	*Public*[2]
1999–2000	26	74
1998–99	25	75
1997–98	24	76
1996–97	23	77
1995–96	22	78

[1] Private includes income from UK based charities, industry, commerce and public corporations.

[2] Public includes income from OST/Research Councils, Funding Councils, UK central Government bodies/local authorities, health and hospital authorities.

Sources:

Higher Education Statistics Agency. Office for National Statistics.

The figures are derived from data on income received by universities as research grants, contracts and infrastructure support.

End-of-life Vehicles Directive

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what extra funding has been provided to local authorities to finance the end-of-life vehicles directive; and if she will make a statement. [62560]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* The directive contains no provision which applies directly to local authorities. Additional costs incurred by local authorities as a consequence of our transposition and implementation of the directive would, under the "New Burdens" arrangements, fall to be met by DTI.

Plutonium

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what studies have been undertaken by *(a)* her Department, *(b)* non-departmental public bodies responsible to her Department and *(c)* consultants, in respect of the management of plutonium. [61962]

Mr. Wilson: The Department, in collaboration with other interested Government Departments and agencies is currently undertaking a study of the possible options for the future management of UK owned civil plutonium.

Export Licences

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 20 May 2002, *Official Report,* column 50W, on export licences, when she will complete processing the export licence application number 32368 made on 7 March by Pultrex Ltd. of Colchester; what the explanation is for the delay in dealing with the application; and what action she plans to take to improve the timescale of processing export licence applications. [61504]

Nigel Griffiths: Licences to export arms and other items whose export is controlled for strategic reasons are issued by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, acting through the Export Control Organisation (ECO). A decision has not yet been reached on export licence application number 32368, but will be taken as quickly as possible, consistent with the need to give full consideration to the issues involved including the status of end-users. The application is currently outstanding with our advisers.

The Government recognise that the system for processing export licence applications requires continuous improvement if we are to deliver a more efficient and effective export licensing system, which is both accountable and transparent. The ECO has introduced a number of initiatives to reduce the time taken to process export licence applications. These include the roll-out of new enhanced IT systems that will mean, for example, allowing exporters to apply for a standard individual export licence over the internet.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Teachers' Pay

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to equalise rates of pay between teachers in *(a)* sixth forms and *(b)* further education colleges. [48222]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Teachers in sixth forms are subject to national school teachers' pay and conditions. Further education colleges are free to set their own pay and conditions and my right hon. Friend has no plans to change that state of affairs.

Departmental Appointments

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list her Department's appointees to DCMS sponsored bodies, broken down by age group. [60037]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* There are no Department for Education and Skills appointees on public bodies sponsored by DCMS.

GCSEs

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to make provision for a GCSE in performing arts and related disciplines. [60877]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: As indicated in the Green Paper: "14–19 Extending Opportunities, Raising Standards", the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority has been asked by the Department to begin work on the development of additional titles for new GCSEs in vocational subjects. Advice is awaited on the range of possible titles, and timings for implementation.

Small Schools

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on pupil achievements and pupil teacher ratios in *(a)* small schools and *(b)* larger and amalgamated schools. [61200]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* The latest performance data for the cohorts of pupils taking Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 for all schools was published in May 2002 in the Statistical Bulletin "Statistics of Education: National Curriculum Assessments of 7, 11 & 14 year olds in England: 2001". The GCSE/GNVQ performance was also published in May 2002 in "GCSE/GNVQ and GCE A/AS/VCE/Advanced GNVQ Examination Results 2000/2001—England". Both publications are available on the Department's website http://www.dfes.gov.uk/statistics. The Keystage and GCSE/GNVQ performance of schools with a small cohort is shown.

Tables showing the pupil:teacher ratios (PTRs) for primary and secondary schools, by school size are also shown. School size refers to the total number of full time equivalent pupils in the school as reported in the Annual Schools' Census (January 2002).

Copies of the relevant tables have been placed in the House of Commons Library.

Table 1: Key Stage one 2001—percentage of pupils at Level 2 or above (test)

	Maintained schools[1]	All schools
Reading[2]	88	84
Writing	88	86
Mathematics	94	91
Number of schools	1,114	15,937

[1] Schools with fewer than 10 eligible pupils.

[2] These percentages are based on achievements at Level 2C/B/A in the reading task and Level 3 and 4 in the reading test.

Table 2: Key Stage two 2001—percentage of pupils at Level 4 or above (test)

	Maintained schools[1]	All schools
English	79	75
Mathematics	75	71
Science	91	88
Number of schools	975	14,780

[1] Schools with fewer than 10 eligible pupils

Table 3: Key Stage three 2001—percentage of pupils at Level 5 or above (test)

	Maintained mainstream schools and CTCs[1]	All schools
English	50	66
Mathematics	55	67
Science	58	67
Number of schools	22	3,163

[1] Schools with fewer than 50 eligible pupils.

Notes for tables 1, 2 and 3:

1. Number of schools is the largest of the available subjects.
2. Small schools and all schools figures published in the statistical Bulletin published in May 2002.
3. Maintained schools cover mainstream maintained schools and CTCs.
4. Independent schools include independent special schools.
5. Special schools cover all maintained and non-maintained special schools and pupil referral units.
6. All pupils reaching the end of a Key Stage are "eligible pupils", although not all sit the tests (due for example to disapplication or absence).

Table 4: GCSE/GNVQ achievements of 15-year-old pupils in schools in England 2000–01—percentage of 15-year-old pupils reaching the relevant qualification—maintained mainstream schools and CTCs

	Schools with 50 or fewer 15-year-olds	All schools
Five or more A*-C	41.6	48.6
Five or more A*-G	88.6	91.0
No passes	5.6	3.9
Average point score	35.4	39.1
Number of schools	21	3,133

Table 5: Maintained primary and secondary schools—pupil:teacher ratio by size of the school[1]—2002 (provisional)

Size of school	Primary	Secondary
Up to 100	18.2	8.6
101 to 200	21.1	13.6
201 to 300	22.8	16.4
301 to 400	23.1	17.0
401 to 500	23.8	17.2
501 to 600	23.3	16.8
601 to 700	23.8	16.9
701 to 800	23.4	16.9
801 to 900	24.1	16.9
901 to 1,000	28.0	17.0
1,001 to 1,100	[2]—	17.1
1,101 to 1,200	[2]—	16.9
1,201 to 1,300	[2]—	17.0
1,301 to 1,400	[2]—	16.8
1,401 to 1,500	[2]—	16.9
1,501 to 1,600	[2]—	17.0
1,601 to 1,700	[2]—	16.8
1,701 to 1,800	[2]—	17.1
1,801 and over	[2]—	17.1
Overall	22.5	16.9

[1] Based on full time equivalent pupil numbers.

[2] No schools of this size.

Source:

Annual Schools Census—January 2002 (provisional).

Children in Care

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if schools are required to record whether a pupil is living in *(a)* a residential care home or *(b)* with foster parents. [61783]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Schools are not currently required to record this information. However with effect from January 2003 the returns for the Pupil Level Annual Schools Census (PLASC) will include three new data items about looked after children to show:

whether or not the pupil was looked after on the Census day;

whether or not the pupil has, to the school's knowledge, been looked after at any time since they joined the school;

and the identity of the caring authority for the pupil's current (or most recent) looked-after episode.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what provision the Government makes to ensure children in care remain in the same educational institution until the age of 16 years. [61785]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Government recognise that changes in care arrangements can disrupt the education of children who are looked after, and are determined to promote stability.

This Department, jointly with the Department of Health, issued guidance to all authorities in May 2000 on the education of children and young people in public care. The guidance emphasises the importance of a stable care and education placement in order to promote educational success for children in public care. The Department of Health also set targets within the Quality Protects programme to promote stability and reduce placement moves.

Under s22(3) of the Children Act, local authorities have a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children and young people who are looked after, education being a critical dimension of their welfare. It is for local authorities to decide on a case-by-case basis whether it is in the best interests of a child in public care to remain in the same educational establishment.

Child Care

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans the Government have to make access to child care less dependent on families' income, location and their employment status. [62156]

Mr. Miliband: The Government's national child care strategy was introduced in May 1998 to ensure that affordable, accessible and quality child care is available in every neighbourhood and complements early education, schools and other family services. By March 2004, we will have created 900,000 new child care places for 1.6 million children which, taking into account turnover, should allow around 1 million extra children to benefit. We are working in particular to extend child care provision in disadvantaged areas through Neighbourhood Nurseries and other programmes, and to make it more affordable, through measures like the working families tax credit, under which lower income families can receive help with up to 70 per cent. of their eligible child care costs. Support with child care costs is a feature of the New Deal, particularly the New Deal for Lone Parents, and is also available to further and higher education student parents.

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the Government's long-term objective is for child care by 2010. [62158]

Mr. Miliband: The inter-departmental review of child care being led by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Early Years and School Standards is developing a 10-year vision and strategy for child care, focusing on the provision of quality, affordable and accessible child care. Final decisions on the outcomes of the review will be taken in the context of the 2002 spending review.

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when the PIU review of the national child care strategy will be published. [62159]

Mr. Miliband: We expect that outcomes from the inter-departmental review of child care being led by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Early Years and School Standards will be announced in the 2002 spending review this summer.

Religious Education

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what policy changes she plans for *(a)* school assemblies and *(b)* religious education in (i) primary and (ii) secondary schools; and if she will make a statement. [61856]

Mr. Miliband: We have no particular policy on school assemblies as it is for schools to decide the frequency, format and content of any assembly which takes place.

The current policy regarding religious education (RE) is set out in circular 1–94. The detail of RE is determined locally and we do not have any plans to change that.

Sign Language

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what discussions she has had with the British Deaf Association and RNID about whether teachers of the deaf should be required to have a BSL qualification; and if she will make a statement; [61874]

(2) whether teachers of the deaf are given British sign language training at public expense; and to what extent they are required to pay fees to achieve that training. [61875]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* In addition to holding qualified teacher status, teachers who are employed to teach classes of pupils with hearing impairment are required by regulations to undertake an additional specialist mandatory qualification (MQ). In July 1999, at the request of the then Secretary of State, the Teacher Training Agency carried out a review of existing arrangements in order to develop a new specification for MQ provision. The resulting specification, amended in light of consultation with a wide range of organisations, including those representing children with hearing impairment, requires teachers pursuing the hearing impairment MQ to acquire a minimum competence in signing equivalent to the stage one qualification offered by the Council for the Advancement of Communications with Deaf People.

Under the special educational needs category of the Department's standards fund, grant support is available to local education authorities and schools for training and professional development of teachers and other staff. It is open to them to use this funding to help staff to secure necessary mandatory qualifications, or other training in signing including British sign language.

Music Therapy

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what support her Department gives for the use of music therapy to assist people with disabilities. [62089]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* Under the Standards Fund 2002–03, the Department is supporting local expenditure of £91 million to enhance provision for children with special educational needs and disabilities. One of the expenditure headings is therapies and it would be open to local education authorities to use part of their allocation to support music therapy if they so wish.

Educational Attainment

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many and what percentage of pupils awarded educational maintenance allowances were living *(a)* in a residential care home and *(b)* with foster parents in the last three years for which figures are available. [62173]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 18 June 2002]:* We do not require local education authorities, who administer the pilot EMA schemes, to collect this information. However, across three pilot areas which are specifically targeting vulnerable young people, around 40 EMA recipients have been identified as being in residential care. The purpose of these pilots is to examine how the effectiveness of EMA in reaching out to the most vulnerable groups in society can be maximised.

Overseas Students

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many overseas students there are in England and Wales universities, broken down by university; and what percentage overseas students represent of the student population. [62175]

Margaret Hodge: The requested information is given in the table. The student numbers shown cover full-time and part-time courses of higher education, including both undergraduate and postgraduate levels of study.

Student enrolments[1] in English and Welsh higher education institutions 2001–02 (provisional)

Census counts as at 1 December 2001

Higher education institution	*Overseas students*	*Total students (all domiciles)*	*Overseas as a proportion of total (Percentage)*
England			
Anglia Polytechnic University	2,290	19,500	12
Aston University	860	6,930	12
Bath College of Higher Education	210	4,170	5
Birkbeck College	360	11,860	3
Bishop Grosseteste College	0	1,020	0
Bolton Institute of Higher Education	390	5,940	7
Bournemouth University	1,190	12,890	9
Brunel University	1,520	13,410	11
Buckinghamshire College of Higher Education	830	8,610	10
Canterbury Christ Church College	370	11,400	3
Central School of Speech and Drama	80	620	13
Chester College of Higher Education	150	6,250	2
Chichester Institute of Higher Education	50	4,040	1
City University	2,820	12,880	22
College of St. Mark and St. John	230	3,130	7
Conservatoire for Dance and Drama	90	340	26
Coventry University	2,440	16,240	15
Cranfield University	1,130	3,560	32
Cumbria Institute of the Arts	60	840	7
Dartington College of Arts	60	480	13
De Montfort University	1,760	21,570	8
Edge Hill College of Higher Education	170	7,930	2
Falmouth College of Arts	90	1,530	6
Goldsmiths College	1,310	7,270	18
Harper Adams Agricultural College	170	1,740	10
Homerton College	50	2,390	2
Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine	3,850	11,840	33
Institute of Advanced Nursing Education	40	760	5
Institute of Education, University of London	580	3,460	17
Institute of Cancer Research	60	470	13
Kent Institute of Art and Design	470	2,030	23
King Alfred's College, Winchester	110	4,240	3
King's College London	3,100	17,270	18
Kingston University	1,990	15,850	13
Leeds Metropolitan University	1,680	21,890	8
Liverpool Hope	330	6,480	5
Liverpool John Moores University	1,710	19,580	9
London Business School	970	1,450	67
London Guildhall University	1,720	12,440	14
London School of Economics and Political Science	5,030	8,080	62
London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine	400	780	51
Loughborough University	1,640	13,550	12

Student enrolments[1] in English and Welsh higher education institutions 2001–02 (provisional)

Census counts as at 1 December 2001

Higher education institution	*Overseas students*	*Total students (all domiciles)*	*Overseas as a proportion of total (Percentage)*
Middlesex University	5,280	22,150	24
Nene College	510	9,940	5
Newman College	80	1,450	6
Northern School of Contemporary Dance	40	150	27
Norwich School of Art and Design	20	730	3
Oxford Brookes University	2,540	14,220	18
Queen Mary and Westfield College	1,960	9,440	21
Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication	110	710	15
Roehampton Institute of Higher Education	650	7,000	9
Rose Bruford College	130	800	16
Royal Academy of Music	270	610	44
Royal Agricultural College	90	580	16
Royal College of Art	260	850	31
Royal College of Music	170	540	31
Royal Holloway and Bedford New College	1,430	5,760	25
Royal Northern College of Music	130	600	22
Sheffield Hallam University	1,440	23,130	6
South Bank University	1,110	16,730	7
Southampton Institute	970	10,600	9
St. George's Hospital Medical School	190	2,790	7
St. Martin's College	300	7,920	4
St. Mary's College	190	2,660	7
Staffordshire University	1,140	16,280	7
Surrey Institute of Art and Design	350	2,820	12
Thames Valley University	1,420	13,330	11
The Arts Institute of Bournemouth	80	1,090	7
The London Institute	3,120	10,160	31
The Manchester Metropolitan University	1,860	28,560	7
The Nottingham Trent University	1,590	22,210	7
The Open University	0	150,890	0
The Royal Veterinary College	170	900	19
The School of Oriental and African Studies	1,520	3,540	43
The School of Pharmacy, University of London	160	780	21
The University of Bath	1,940	10,450	19
The University of Birmingham	4,000	25,200	16
The University of Bradford	1,710	10,606	17
The University of Brighton	2,010	15,150	13
The University of Bristol	2,340	17,350	13
The University of Cambridge	4,690	21,450	22
The University of Central England in Birmingham	1,430	18,060	8
The University of Central Lancashire	2,370	23,250	10
The University of East Anglia	1,640	12,540	13
The University of East London	2,030	12,420	16
The University of Essex	2,630	8,240	32
The University of Exeter	1,520	12,080	13
The University of Greenwich	2,510	17,100	15
The University of Huddersfield	880	16,420	5
The University of Hull	2,260	16,400	14
The University of Keele	910	9,430	10
The University of Kent at Canterbury	2,250	12,470	18
The University of Lancaster	2,180	11,240	19
The University of Leeds	4,810	32,820	15
The University of Leicester	2,830	16,630	17
The University of Lincoln	1,460	11,270	13
The University of Liverpool	3,080	21,860	14
The University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology	2,090	6,970	30
The University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne	2,210	17,370	13
The University of North London	2,410	14,030	17
The University of Northumbria at Newcastle	2,240	19,570	11
The University of Nottingham	3,900	23,930	16
The University of Oxford	4,560	20,850	22
The University of Plymouth	1,650	21,780	8
The University of Portsmouth	2,970	16,880	18
The University of Reading	2,500	13,570	18
The University of Salford	1,670	17,100	10
The University of Sheffield	3,200	22,970	14
The University of Southampton	2,090	19,150	11
The University of Sunderland	1,340	11,340	12
The University of Surrey	2,370	11,500	21

Student enrolments[1] in English and Welsh higher education institutions 2001–02 (provisional)

Census counts as at 1 December 2001

Higher education institution	*Overseas students*	*Total students (all domiciles)*	*Overseas as a proportion of total (Percentage)*
The University of Sussex	2,320	11,280	21
The University of Teesside	640	13,650	5
The University of Warwick	4,160	20,210	21
The University of Westminster	3,540	21,340	17
The University of Wolverhampton	1,790	19,360	9
The University of York	1,140	9,450	12
The Victoria University of Manchester	3,750	24,990	15
Trinity and All Saints College	80	2,590	3
Trinity College of Music	120	490	24
University College London	4,970	19,210	26
University of Derby	590	11,400	5
University of Durham	1,410	13,560	10
University of Gloucestershire	260	7,960	3
University of Hertfordshire	2,140	18,300	12
University of London (Central Institutes and activities)	270	790	34
University of Luton	2,510	9,390	27
University of the West of England, Bristol	1,390	21,060	7
Wimbledon School of Art	90	620	15
Worcester College of Higher Education	190	5,290	4
Writtle College	140	1,240	11
York St. John College	210	4,860	4
Wales			
Swansea Institute of Higher Education	180	4,840	4
The North-East Wales Institute of Higher Education	350	4,890	7
The University of Wales, Lampeter	340	4,560	7
Trinity College, Carmarthen	110	2,260	5
University of Glamorgan	1,360	15,900	9
University of Wales College of Medicine	270	3,330	8
University of Wales College, Newport	420	7,530	6
University of Wales Institute, Cardiff	490	7,900	6
University of Wales, Aberystwyth	980	9,700	10
University of Wales, Bangor	680	8,420	8
University of Wales, Cardiff	2,740	19,030	14
University of Wales, Swansea	1,330	10,890	12
Welsh College of Music and Drama	50	600	8
Total England and Wales	199,300	1,642,300	12

[1] Includes full-time and part-time enrolments on undergraduate and postgraduate courses of HE in higher education institutions in England and Wales. Institution numbers have been rounded to nearest 10 and totals to nearest 100.

Source:

Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) December 2001 Student Record.

Examinations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many complaints she has received in 2002 about falsification or cheating in SATs or public examinations in schools. [62248]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The marking of the national curriculum tests and public examinations is still taking place, so figures on the confirmed cases of falsification or cheating are not available.

Sixth Form Provision

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent assessment the Government have made of the need to increase funding to retain academic staff in sixth form colleges. [62255]

Margaret Hodge: The Department has not carried out a specific assessment of the potential link between the funding gap and the retention of academic staff in sixth form colleges. We are, however, aware of the funding gap between schools and the further education sector, and remain committed to bringing up levels of funding for colleges over time and as resources allow. This issue is being considered as part of the current spending review.

We are investing significant funding in the FE sector, including more than £310 million in the Teaching Pay Initiative (TPI) during the period 2001–04 to allow colleges, including sixth form colleges to recruit, reward and retain, high quality teachers. A survey conducted by the Sixth Form Colleges' Employers' Forum has shown that 85 per cent. of eligible teaching staff are in receipt of a professional standards payment within TPI.

Education Maintenance Allowance

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many students have been awarded an education maintenance allowance in *(a)* Staffordshire and *(b)* Stoke-on-Trent, North for the academic year 2001–02. [62384]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: 2,659 young people in Stoke-on-Trent have received an allowance in this academic year. We are unable to break this down into figures for different areas of the city.

Staffordshire LEA is not taking part in the EMA pilot scheme, although students living in Stoke-on-Trent who study at institutions in Staffordshire can receive an award.

Individual Learning Plans

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what support and resources are made available to young people when developing their individual learning plans. [62460]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 18 June 2002]:* The Green Paper "14–19: extending opportunities, raising standards" proposes a broader choice of learning options for young people during the 14–19 phase of education. It recognises that in order to understand the range of choices open to them and their implications for future learning and career paths, young people will need additional advice and guidance, both from schools and the Connexions Service, at the beginning and throughout the 14–19 phase. The Green Paper suggests that the start of the 14–19 phase should begin with a review with each young person, to record achievements to date and identify learning and career goals through until age 19. It further proposes that the outcomes of the review should be recorded in an individual learning plan.

The consultation on the Green Paper ended on 31 May 2002. Ministers are currently reviewing the responses and, in the light of these, will make an announcement on the outcome of the consultation later this year.

Language Teaching

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when modern foreign language teaching is to be excluded from the compulsory curriculum for those aged 14. [62463]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 18 June 2002]:* This is a proposal in the Green Paper "14–19: extending opportunities, raising standards". Consultation closed only on 31 May 2002 and we are reflecting carefully on the views expressed during consultation before reaching our decision. We have indicated in the Green Paper that curriculum changes would be subject to further consultation before their introduction.

Our proposals seek a balance between the need to offer pupils greater choice, and the importance of foreign languages. We propose a statutory entitlement to them in all schools. We have also expressed our aspirations to boost language learning in primary schools.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how the Government intend to encourage the integration of language learning within modern apprenticeship frameworks as stated in the Green Paper "14–19: extending opportunities, raising standards", with reference to the availability of an optional foreign language. [62464]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 18 June 2002]:* Languages are already an option as part of a modern apprenticeship and can be included in the young person's training plan where they are deemed necessary or desirable, if the employer agrees.

We are in discussion with the LSC to establish how opportunities to develop language skills might be better signposted to employers and learners so that they are more easily integrated into learning programmes.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what research into the study of languages and the benefits of studying a foreign language is being undertaken by her Department. [62465]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 18 June 2002]:* We have considered the findings of recent research including the final report of the Nuffield Languages Inquiry (2000); the University of Warwick, Centre for Language Teacher Education (CELTE) report on the analysis and evaluation for teaching of modern foreign languages at Key Stage 2 in England, (2000) and the European Commission's survey of the languages spoken in the EU 'Eurobarometer 54', (2001).

These reports have informed our aspirations for the future of teaching and learning languages outlined in our 'Language Learning' pamphlet and the discussions of the Languages National Steering Group. Our long term national language strategy, which we plan to publish in the autumn, will contain our proposals to widen the opportunities for language learning.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if her Department intends to provide peripatetic language *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary school teachers. [62518]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 18 June 2002]:* We are examining the overall issue of teacher supply to deliver our language learning aspirations set out in our recently published 'Language Learning' pamphlet. The use of peripatetic language teachers is one of the options we are considering. Our national languages strategy, which we plan to publish in the autumn, will outline our intentions.

Brookfield School

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when a decision will be made on the application to dispose of the playing fields element of Brookfield school in the constituency of Bradford, North. [62671]

Mr. Miliband: The application by Bradford metropolitan district council to dispose of playing fields at the closed Brookfield school is under consideration and we expect to be in a position to announce a decision shortly. I will arrange for officials to let you know the outcome of Bradford's application as soon as a final decision is made.

City Technology Colleges and Academies

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the initial capital costs of *(a)* Emmanuel City Technology College in Gateshead, *(b)* each approved city technology college and *(c)* each

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approved city academy, together with the proportion of (i) capital costs and (ii) running costs met in each case by the sponsors of those colleges and academies; and if she will list the continuing financial obligations in each case. [62839]

Mr. Milliband: In answer to my hon. Friend's question, the following two tables show the initial capital costs of each city technology college (CTC), including Emmanuel, and each approved academy. As far as academies are concerned, five have signed funding agreements with the Secretary of State. These projects are still at a very early stage and their final capital costs will not be known until much further into their construction stages.

Year-on-year running costs for CTCs and academies are met by the Department. As charitable companies, CTCs and academies are also free to generate additional income through charitable donations or any trading arms to supplement departmental funding. For CTCs, the first table gives the total amount of sponsorship, including any initial costs, provided to each college up until February 2002, as reported to my Department. Similar information will be collected on academies once they begin to operate. There are no continuing financial obligations on CTC or academy sponsors beyond the initial contribution to capital costs. However, CTCS are required to meet at least 20 per cent. of the costs of any capital project funded by the Department.

CTC initial capital costs

£000

College	*DfES*	*Sponsors*	*Total*
ADT	9,056	2,264	11,320
Bacons[1]	13,665	1,800	15,465
Britschool	8,000	2,332	10,332
Brooke Weston	8,152	2,038	10,190
Dixons	7,331	2,074	9,405
Djanogly	8,196	1,749	9,945
Emmanuel	6,887	1,722	8,609
Habs	5,700	3,445	9,145
Harris[1]	7,010	1,683	8,693
John Cabot	8,922	2,234	11,156
Kingshurst	7,598	2,112	9,710
Landau Forte	8,160	2,040	10,200
Leigh[1]	7,804	1,589	9,393
Macmillan	6,704	1,696	8,400
Telford	8,399	2,396	10,795
Totals	121,584	31,174	152,758

[1] These are not the originally agreed funded levels. The DfES contributions were later reduced to the agreed levels by adjustments to funding

CTC sponsorship returns—summary up to February 2002

	£000[1]
ADT	4,256
Bacons[2]	2,064
Britschool	4,431
Brooke Weston	3,383
Dixons	3,943
Djanogly	2,823
Emmanuel	2,289
Habs	5,597
Harris[2]	2,061
John Cabot	2,720
Kingshurst	4,295
Landau Forte	2,405
Leigh[2]	1,955
Macmillan	3,943
Telford	3,595
Total	49,760

[1] These figures are total sponsorship including initial capital costs. They are as reported to the DfES by each CTC. They have not been confirmed by the DfES.

[2] These are not the originally agreed funded levels. The DfES contributions were later reduced to the agreed levels by adjustments to funding

Agreed academies capital budgets

£

Academy	*DfES contribution*	*Sponsor contribution*	*Total cash limit*
Bexley Business Academy, Bexley	25,750,000	2,410,000	28,160,000
Capital City Academy, Brent	21,404,000	2,000,000	23,404,000
Greig City Academy, Haringey	11,000,000	2,000,000	13,000,000
South Middlesbrough City Academy, Middlesbrough	19,171,360	2,000,000	21,171,360
Walsall City Academy, Walsall	14,560,000	2,500,000	17,060,000

Parenting

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make it her policy to require children to declare that they have received parental support on the cover sheet of public examinations. [62857]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The awarding bodies already require teachers to confirm that they have taken steps to satisfy themselves that coursework assessed for public examinations is solely that of the candidates concerned. Teachers must present a written declaration that a candidate's coursework was produced under the required conditions.

Schools (Community Cohesion)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she plans to publish for consultation her draft guidance to school organisation committees on the effect of proposals for new schools on community cohesion. [62840]

Mr. Miliband: We plan to consult on draft guidance to school organisation committees, which will include guidance on community cohesion from July this year.

Voluntary Schools

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what arrangements are made for the transfer of assets, land and buildings, when voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools close. [62842]

Mr. Miliband: The normal pattern of property ownership at a voluntary aided or voluntary controlled school is for the trustees to own the site and buildings and for the local education authority to own the playing fields. When a voluntary aided or voluntary controlled school closes, the playing fields remain the property of the local education authority but what happens to the site and buildings depends on the type of school and the circumstances of the closure.

When a church voluntary school which is located on its original site closes, the Secretary of State may be asked to make an order under section 554 of the Education Act 1996, which allows the diocese in which the school is situated to use proceeds from the sale for the benefit of other church schools within its area.

However, where a local education authority has provided new or additional premises for a voluntary school, the local education authority may later claim compensation from the proceeds of sale of the former premises. If the local education authority and the trustees are unable to reach agreement on the amount of compensation the local education authority should receive, the Secretary of State may be asked to determine the amount.

Where the trustees of a voluntary school have given notice to terminate the school's occupation of any land, the Secretary of State may require the trustees to repay to the Department any funds it has provided, or to transfer to the local education authority any part of the premises it needs for educational purposes. The Secretary of State may require the local education authority to pay compensation to the trustees, or vice versa, depending on whether she has ordered land to be transferred to the local education authority, and on the extent of any public expenditure on the premises.

School Sports

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many specialist sports schools there are in *(a)* England and *(b)* each local education authority. [62982]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* The total number of schools designated as specialist sports colleges in England is 142. The table shows the number of specialist sports colleges in each local education authority.

Number of schools designated as specialist sports colleges by LEA (as at 17 June 2001)

Local education authorities	*Number of sports colleges*
Barking and Dagenham, London Borough of	1
Barnet, London Borough of	1
Barnsley	1
Bath and North-East Somerset	1
Bedfordshire (from 2 October 1998)	—
Bexley, London Borough of	—
Birmingham	6
Blackburn with Darwen	—
Blackpool	1
Bolton (from 1 September 1998)	1
Bournemouth	—
Bracknell Forest	—
Bradford	4
Brent, London Borough of	—
Brighton and Hove	1
Bristol, City of	2
Bromley, London Borough of	—
Buckinghamshire	2
Bury	—
Calderdale	1
Cambridgeshire	2
Camden, London Borough of	—
Cheshire	2
Corporation of London	—
Cornwall	3
Coventry	—
Croydon, London Borough of	1
Cumbria	1
Darlington	—
Derby, City of	1
Derbyshire	1
Devon	2
Doncaster	1
Dorset	1
Dudley	1
Durham	2
Ealing, London Borough of	2
East Riding of Yorkshire	1
East Sussex	3
Enfield, London Borough of (from 1 September 1998)	—
Essex	5
Gateshead	1
Gloucestershire	2
Greenwich, London Borough of	1
Hackney, London Borough of	—
Halton	—
Hammersmith and Fulham, London Borough of	—
Hampshire	2
Haringey, London Borough of	1
Harrow, London Borough of	1
Hartlepool	1
Havering, London Borough of	1
Herefordshire	—
Hertfordshire	2
Hillingdon, London Borough of	—
Hounslow, London Borough of	—
Isle of Scilly	—
Isle of Wight	1
Islington, London Borough of	—
Kensington and Chelsea, Royal Borough of	—
Kent	4
Kingston upon Hull, City of	1
Kingston-upon-Thames, Royal Borough of	—
Kirklees	1
Knowsley	1
Lambeth, London Borough of	—
Lancashire	—
Leeds	2
Leicester City (from 2 October 1998)	1
Leicestershire	1
Lewisham, London Borough of	—
Lincolnshire	1
Liverpool	2
Luton	—
Manchester	2
Medway	—
Merton, London Borough of	—
Middlesborough	1
Milton Keynes	1
Newcastle upon Tyne	1
Newham, London Borough of	1
Norfolk	2
North East Lincolnshire	—
North Lincolnshire	—
North Somerset	1
North Tyneside	1
North Yorkshire	—
Northamptonshire	1

Number of schools designated as specialist sports colleges by LEA (as at 17 June 2001)

Local education authorities	*Number of sports colleges*
Northumberland	2
Nottingham, City of	1
Nottinghamshire	2
Oldham	1
Oxfordshire	2
Peterborough, City of	1
Plymouth, City of	1
Poole	1
Portsmouth	1
Reading	—
Redbridge	—
Redcar and Cleveland	1
Richmond-upon-Thames, London Borough of	1
Rochdale	1
Rotherham	1
Rutland	—
Salford,	—
Sandwell	1
Sefton	1
Sheffield	2
Shropshire	3
Slough	2
Solihull	—
Somerset	1
South Gloucestershire	—
South Tyneside	—
Southend-on-Sea	—
Southampton	—
Southwark, London Borough of	—
St. Helens	—
Staffordshire	1
Stockport	—
Stockton on Tees (from 2 October 1998)	1
Stoke on Trent (from 1 September 1998)	1
Suffolk	2
Sunderland	1
Surrey	1
Sutton, London Borough of	—
Swindon	—
Tameside	—
Telford and Wrekin	—
Thurrock	—
Torbay	—
Tower Hamlets, London Borough of	—
Trafford	1
Wakefield	1
Walsall	1
Waltham Forest, London Borough of	—
Wandsworth, London Borough of	2
Warrington	1
Warwickshire	2
West Berkshire (Newbury)	1
West Sussex	2
Westminster, London Borough	—
Wigan	1
Wiltshire	2
Windsor and Maidenhead, Royal Borough of	1
Wirral	2
Wokingham	—
Wolverhampton	1
Worcestershire	2
York, City of	—
England Total	142

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many schools hold annual sports days in the *(a)* Jarrow constituency, *(b)* North East and *(c)* UK; and how this figure has changed over the last 11 years; [61272]

(2) what the Department is doing to encourage schools to hold sports days; [61273]

(3) how many hours per week schools are *(a)* required and *(b)* encouraged to devote to physical education and sports for pupils. [61274]

Mr. Miliband: The Department for Education and Skills does not collect figures on the number of schools which hold sports days. School sports days have an important role to play as part of an overall package of PE and sport opportunities provided by schools for all children. Work being undertaken by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority suggests that the vast majority of schools do hold an annual sports day or a similar event.

Physical education is compulsory within the National Curriculum at all Key Stages for all pupils. Schools must provide PE in accordance with the subject's programme of study. Guidance on Key Stage 3, published by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority and the Department for Education and Skills, indicates that the programme of study could be delivered within 90 minutes. Our White Paper "Schools: achieving success" includes a commitment that all children will be entitled to two hours of high quality physical education and school sport a week, within and outside the curriculum.

The school sports co-ordinators programme brings together partnerships of schools. These are championing new PE and sport opportunities for young people. One of the key aims is to increase the amount of inter and intra-school sport which does, of course include schools sport days, both within school and with other partner schools.

Modern Apprenticeship Schemes

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what action she is taking to encourage young people to enter modern apprenticeship schemes. [63053]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Following the launch of new generation modern apprenticeships last November, a £16 million marketing campaign is under way, to be run over three years in England, to promote apprenticeships and boost participation. The first part of the campaign ran during March with a new television advertisement, aimed at young people. It generated over 100,000 phone and e-mail responses. A further round of TV advertising starts on 5 August.

In addition, a range of marketing measures is being introduced to reach not only young people, but also key influencers and employers. At the local level, learning and skills councils, connexions partnerships, careers services and other partners will work together to raise awareness of, and foster support for, modern apprenticeships; and to provide young people with essential information and advice on the opportunities available in their communities. It is a key role of the new sector skills councils in partnership with the LSC to ensure that employers continue to support MA and that they provide sufficient places to meet the demand from young people.

Construction Industry

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to improve the skills base of people entering the construction industry. [63054]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Construction Industry Training Board (CITB), which is sponsored by my Department, is responsible for ensuring that the construction industry has an adequate supply of properly trained people to meet its needs. It is working on two broad fronts to improve the quality and number of recruits to the industry:

1. With schools to improve the skills of potential recruits. This includes the development of student apprenticeships, GNVQs and vocational GCSEs, awareness-raising through a network of curriculum centres and a "Young Presenter" Scheme, where young graduates act as role models to young people.
2. With employers to deliver skills to recruits once they join the industry. This includes the provision of construction apprenticeships, foundation degrees and graduate apprenticeships and the development of models to address the need for basic skills in adults.

Children in Care

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what provision the Government have made to ensure children in care remain in the same educational institution until the age of 16 years. [63114]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Government recognise that changes in care arrangements can disrupt the education of children who are looked after, and are determined to promote stability.

This Department, jointly with the Department of Health, issued guidance to all authorities in May 2000 on the education of children and young people in public care. The guidance emphasizes the importance of a stable care and education placement in order to promote educational success for children in public care. The Department of Health also set targets within the quality protects programme to promote stability and reduce placement moves.

Under S22(3) of the Children Act, local authorities have a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children and young people who are looked after, education being a critical dimension of their welfare. It is for local authorities to decide on a case-by-case basis whether it is in the best interests of a child in public care to remain in the same educational establishment.

Criminal Records Checks

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many criminal records checks have been undertaken in respect of people applying to work in schools as *(a)* teachers, *(b)* governors and *(c)* volunteers in the current school year; and what has been the cost of checks in each category. [63159]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested is not available.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Rights of Way

Ross Cranston: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress she is making on implementation of the rights of way provisions in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. [63475]

Alun Michael: I am today publishing proposals to implement provisions in schedule 6 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act to enable the closure or diversion of rights of way where this is necessary for crime prevention or to promote pupil and teacher safety. These new powers will enable highway authorities to address the disruption caused by persistent criminal activity in back alleys, or gulleys, on housing estates.

As these important new powers are not regarded as a first response to tackling crime, we will designate areas where the new crime prevention powers will be available. Highway authorities will normally take the lead, working with local crime and disorder reduction partnerships, police authorities, local residents and user groups to formulate a submission to the Secretary of State advocating any area at ward level that may warrant inclusion in a designation order. In country areas, the district authority or the local crime and disorder reduction partnership may be able to make a submission if the county is unwilling to do so.

The new schools provisions will enable a highway authority to close or divert a right of way, where it crosses school land, for the purpose of protecting pupils or staff from violence or other risks to their health and safety. These provisions are not subject to the designation process and will be available throughout England.

I am also publishing proposals to implement section 63 of the Act. These new provisions will ensure that members of the public have a means to compel highway authorities to use their powers to remove certain types of obstruction.

Highway authorities already have specific powers to deal with obstructions and recover costs from the persons concerned. These new provisions will empower the public to directly influence the action taken by authorities in dealing with obstructions.

The public will be able to initiate action in relation to the majority of obstructions that cause difficulties for rights of way users, such as fences, overhanging vegetation and barbed wire. We are inviting views on any other forms of obstruction that should be covered by the provisions.

Copies of "Crime Prevention on Rights of Way: Public Consultation paper on the Designation of Areas and Other Procedural Matters", "Enforcement of highway authorities duty to prevent obstructions on rights of way: Consultation Paper on the implementation of section 63 of Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000" have been placed in the Library of the House. Views are invited by 20 September 2002.

Energy Efficiency

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress has been made by each energy conservation authority in improving the energy efficiency of the domestic housing stock in its area. [63660]

Margaret Beckett: Data reported by energy conservation authorities in England under the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 in the period 1 April 1996 to 31 March 2001 have been placed in the Libraries of the House. These data have also been published on the

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' website, at address http:www.defra.gov.uk/environment/energy/heca95/index.htm. Authorities have reported an overall improvement in domestic energy efficiency of 8.12 per cent., as measured against a 1996 baseline.

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent assessment she has made of whether the PSA target for 2001–02 for improvement in response time for all letters from hon. Members will be met. [47273]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The DEFRA service target is 15 working days. The Department suffered severe disruption last year due to allocating top priority to defeating the foot and mouth epidemic. Furthermore, the sheer volume of correspondence received following the creation of DEFRA had a major impact on the Department's performance, resulting in a large backlog of letters. We have devoted more resources to clearing the backlog and we are making progress in improving response times.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what has been the *(a)* cost and *(b)* saving from the pursuit of the Department's public service agreement targets in each year since they were introduced; [61041]

(2) what the *(a)* cost and *(b)* saving has been from the Department's pursuit of service delivery agreement targets in each year since they were introduced. [61644]

Mr. Morley: The Department's public service agreement sets out the key outcomes it is committed to deliver with the resources provided, and its service delivery agreement sets out the key steps towards delivery of those targets. Every year the Department publishes performance against its targets—including on value for money—and the resources it has used, in its departmental report.

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Advisory Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [61703]

Mr. Morley: I refer the hon. Member to my reply of 22 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 323W.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Joint Meetings of Management and/or Regulatory Committees dealing with trade mechanisms is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55662]

Mr. Morley: The mandate of the Management Committee on Horizontal Question Concerning Trade in Agricultural Products (usually know as the "Trade Mechanisms Group") is to oversee a number of CAP market support and control measures. The Committee's main role is in connection with the regulations pertaining to the import and export of agricultural products.

The Committee meets monthly, with the exception of August.

The UK's usual representation consists of two officials from the Rural Payments Agency (RPA). However, officials from other Departments such as HM Customs also attend occasionally, depending on the agenda for the meeting in question.

Travel expenses of approximately £11,000 for two delegates were reimbursed by the Commission. Other costs, consisting of subsistence allowances and travel expenses for additional officials, are met by the parent agency or Department of those in attendance and amounted to approximately £6,300 over the last 12 months.

Issues presently under consideration include a number of amendments and clarifications to the main external trade regulations in response to, for example, reports issued by the Court of Auditors.

Arrangements are in place to report on the Committee's activities through DEFRA, RPA's parent Department. RPA has a range of measures to communicate changes to the regulatory regime to its customers and other interested parties. The activities of RPA generally are subject to scrutiny by various audit bodies, including the National Audit Office.

The Committee may be regarded as a comitology committee. Consequently, the following points are relevant in regard to increasing its accountability and transparency:

> Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".
>
> As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com (2001) 783 Final).
>
> As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Standing Committee for Foodstuffs is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the United Kingdom representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [57490]

Ms Blears: I have been asked to reply.

The Standing Committee for Foodstuffs was replaced by the Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health from 21 February 2002. This was in accordance with EC Regulation 178/2002. In total, these committees have met eight times in the year ending 31 May 2002.

The Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health (sub-section food and toxicological safety) is a regulatory committee composed of representatives of the member states and chaired by a representative of the Commission. The UK is normally represented by officials of the Food Standards Agency. The annual cost of its work to public funds could be calculated only at disproportionate cost, although travel and subsistence costs totalled approximately £5,000, part of which was reimbursed by the Commission. The committee is currently considering a number of issues including food labelling, the authorisation of food additives, and contaminants in the food chain. Minutes and current agendas of the committee's meetings can be found on the European Commission's website.

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> "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

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As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the EU Committee for the adaptation to scientific and technical progress of the directive on the quality of fresh water is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; when it is next due to meet; what the United Kingdom representation on it is; whether experts nominated by the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [62918]

Mr. Morley: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) on 22 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 323W.

At present there are no plans for the Committee to meet. UK representation varies according to the agenda for each meeting and may include members of the Scottish Executive and other devolved Administrations where there are items of sufficient interest.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment has been made of the risk to public health from the long-term storage of meat and bonemeal. [58054]

Mr. Morley: In June 1996 the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee (SEAC) issued guidance on the handling, transportation and eventual disposal of waste material from cattle. This covered meat and bonemeal (MBM) and concluded that there was no epidemiological evidence to suggest that this material presented a risk to any of the trades exposed to it, subject to them taking similar precautions to the handling of any dusty material. No risk to public health was identified.

All MBM generated from cattle slaughtered under the over-30-month slaughter scheme (OTMS) is stored in waste management licensed sites. OTMS MBM is currently being incinerated (with energy recovery) at plants approved by the Environment Agency and it is anticipated that stocks will be significantly reduced within the next two years.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement about her Department's handling of claims for compensation, other than compensation for loss of livestock, arising out of foot and mouth disease. [61496]

Mr. Morley: The Department established a unit in May 2001 to handle all miscellaneous claims against the Department arising from the outbreaks of foot and mouth disease (FMD). Over 2,000 claims requiring investigation have been referred to the unit which has so far responded with a decision in over 1,800 cases.

Most of the claims have come from farmers and businesses that were affected in some way by the outbreaks. Their grounds for making a claim against the Department varied considerably. They have included issues raised by farmers who were directly affected by the disease and whose livestock were compulsorily slaughtered, to issues raised by farmers, businesses and other members of the public who said they had been affected by, for example, nuisance caused by carcase disposal operations, loss of business/income as a result of movement restrictions and other losses they attributed to the measures taken to control and eradicate the disease.

Statutory compensation is paid only in respect of animals which have been slaughtered as a result of the disease; and property, which has been seized or destroyed in order to prevent the spread of the disease. There is no statutory provision for payment of compensation for other losses caused by the outbreaks, and there are no plans to introduce such payments. No Government could commit themselves to insure farmers and businesses against the cost of all the losses resulting, directly or indirectly, from the outbreaks of the disease or the action taken to deal with them.

We respond to every claim on the facts but are clear that Government cannot be the insurer of last resort nor pay for all losses consequent of FMD.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs from how many farms culled during 2001's foot and mouth epidemic samples were taken and tested in a laboratory. [62257]

Mr. Morley: Of 10,509 affected premises, 2,370 had samples taken for testing in a laboratory.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs from how many of the farms culled as contiguous culls during 2001's foot and mouth epidemic samples were taken and tested in the laboratory. [62258]

Mr. Morley: Of the 3,364 contiguous premises and 206 infected premises which previously had a status of contiguous premises, 215 and 167 respectively had samples taken for testing in a laboratory.

Stationery

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much was spent by her Department on stationery in *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97, *(c)* 1997–98, *(d)* 1998–99, *(e)* 1999–2000, *(f)* 2000–01 and *(g)* 2001–02; what suppliers were used in each of those years, and how much was spent per supplier, what tender processes were undertaken, and what the frequency was of the processes; and if she will make a statement. [61379]

Mr. Morley: DEFRA came into being on 8 June 2001. The information requested can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Policy Commission on Food and Farming

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress has been made in implementing the recommendations of the Policy Commission on Food and Farming. [60683]

Mr. Morley: At the Prime Minister's seminar on 26 March, we announced a number of early actions being taken, by both industry and Government to deliver the Policy Commission's recommendations. We also launched a wide ranging programme to explore with stakeholders how best to give effect to the Commission's recommendations.

We have held the first meeting of the contact group of key organisations. The outcomes of regional and sectoral meetings, and the responses to the discussion document 'Sustainable food and farming: working together' are being analysed. All of these will help inform the development of a new strategy for sustainable food, which will include a response to all of the Commission's recommendations. We plan to launch this in the autumn, following the outcome of the spending review.

Ministerial Meetings

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which Ministers and officials had meetings with representatives of *(a)* the Confederation of British Industry, *(b)* the Engineering Employees Federation, and *(c)* the Engineering Marine Training Authority during the last year; who they met; and what the subjects and outcomes of their discussions were. [62205]

Mr. Morley: Ministers and civil servants have meetings with a wide range of organisations and individuals as part of the process of policy development and analysis.

As with previous administrations it is not this Government's practice to provide details of all such meetings. All such contacts are conducted in accordance with the Ministerial Code, the Civil Service Code and Guidance for Civil Servants: Contacts with Lobbyists.

Bovine TB

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent representations she has received from the Scottish Executive in respect of measures to control the spread of the bovine TB virus. [62413]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* I have received no representations from the Scottish Executive about bovine TB, but our officials are in regular contact. Officials and stakeholders will be meeting to discuss policy in the near future.

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent research her Department has undertaken into possible causes of tuberculosis in cattle other than through badgers. [62838]

Mr. Morley: The Government are funding a wide-ranging research programme following advice from the Independent Scientific Group on Cattle Tuberculosis (ISG). The programme extends well beyond the badger culling trial to encompass:

Pathogenesis of TB in cattle;

Improved diagnostic techniques;

Developing vaccine candidates;

The risk to cattle from wildlife other than badgers; and

A restocking study making the most of the unique research opportunities following foot and mouth disease and looking at TB in newly formed herds.

Further details of the research programme can be found in "An Epidemiological Investigation into Bovine Tuberculosis", the third report of the ISG which was published in July 2001. Copies are available in the House Library.

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will suspend the badger cull until it has been established that badgers are the cause of bovine tuberculosis. [62814]

Mr. Morley: Since 1997 there has been a moratorium on the use of badger culling as a bovine tuberculosis control mechanism in GB, except for the culling that takes place under the badger culling trial.

The Government have no plans to suspend the badger culling trial which is an essential element of the Government's wide ranging research and control strategy for dealing with bovine tuberculosis (TB). The role of the badger in the epidemiology of cattle TB is unresolved and emotive. The purpose of the trial is to evaluate, once and for all, the extent to which badgers contribute to bovine TB and the effects of badger culling on the disease. It will also provide epidemiological data on the occurrence and prevalence of TB in badgers, its relationship to population density and the spatial relationship between TB-infected badgers and TB breakdowns in cattle herds.

This work will help to ensure that future control policies are underpinned by sound scientific principles and seeks to find ways in which healthy cattle and badgers can live side by side.

Farm Business Tenancies

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects to receive the conclusions of the Government's review of farm business tenancies. [61540]

Mr. Morley: The review of farm business tenancies forms part of the review of the operation of the Agricultural Tenancies Act 1995 conducted for DEFRA by Plymouth university.

This work has been completed and the final report has been submitted to DEFRA. A copy is available on the DEFRA website www.DEFRA.gov.uk.

Meat Imports

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the countries from which meat may be legally imported into the United Kingdom which have endemic foot and mouth disease. [61538]

Mr. Morley: The importation of meat is permitted from a limited number of third countries where foot and mouth disease is present and where the veterinary authorities have contained the disease in specified regions. Community rules permit imports from those regions of the relevant countries that are not considered to pose a risk to human or animal health. Fully matured boneless beef, which does not pose an FMD risk may be imported from other regions subject to strict controls and veterinary certification. Countries to which these controls currently apply are Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Zimbabwe, Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay. UK domestic rules currently prohibit the import of meat from Zimbabwe where FMD outbreaks have been recently confirmed. The UK regulations governing the imports of these products are the Products of Animal Origin (Third Country Imports) (England) Regulation 2002.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs at which ports amnesty bins have been installed in line with the Government's action plan on illegal animal and plant imports. [61587]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* We are currently in discussion with HM Customs and Excise and the relevant ports and airports, on the issues surrounding the provision of amnesty bins or equivalent measures to encourage the surrender of unintended illegal personal imports. We hope to be able to pilot measures later this year.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what period she has set for the pilot use of detector dogs to trace illegal meat imports; at which ports the pilot is to take place; and if she will make a statement. [61585]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* There will be an initial six months pilot using detector dogs at Heathrow. This is scheduled to begin late summer subject to the successful completion of the training of both handlers and dogs.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she intends to publish a guide on the roles, responsibilities and powers of the agencies responsible for preventing and detecting illegal imports of animal products. [61581]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* The production of an information guide on roles, responsibilities and powers of relevant agencies for preventing and detecting illegal imports is currently under way. We are aiming to publish this in the next few weeks. A copy of the guide will be deposited in the House Libraries and will be sent to stakeholder groups and placed on the DEFRA website:http://defraweb/animalh/int-trde/default.htm.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many targeted sample checks on meat imports have been carried out since the publication of the Government's action plan 2002–03. [61553]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* DEFRA have been notified of three checks by enforcement authorities undertaken on illegal meat imports at airports since the implementation of the action plan, at Gatwick on 30 March and at Heathrow on 9 and 15 April. A programme of further targeted checks at airports and seaports designed to provide additional data in support of the risk assessment has been agreed with port health authorities and will be implemented over the summer.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what studies her Department has commissioned since February 2001 into technologies which might help to detect illegal imports. [61589]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* No specific studies have been commissioned. We are currently seeking to better understand the capability, operational and cost issues of using different technologies, and investigating measures taken by other countries and the rationale behind the choice. This will inform the timing and methodology of any future research.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the *(a)* titles, *(b)* membership and *(c)* terms of reference are of the external stakeholder groups that she has established or plans to establish to assist the Government in strengthening intelligence gathering and sharing of information concerning illegal meat imports. [61582]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* We have held a meeting with a number of stakeholder groups including local and port health authorities and HMCE.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on *(a)* the objectives and *(b)* progress so far achieved in her work with European authorities to clarify and tighten the enforcement of rules against illegal meat imports. [61584]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* Over the last 18 months, we have taken a number of opportunities to stress to the commission that EU rules on personal imports of animal products were inadequate and have been pressing for significant revision. Our objective has been to encourage the introduction of rules which are clear and enforceable and which provide effective protection against introduction of disease. The commission tabled a proposal for a new commission regulation on 5 June which will be discussed by all member states shortly. In its current form, the proposal would not meet the UK's objective and we shall be arguing for significant improvements in the discussion.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many enforcement officers are in post at each relevant port with powers to search baggage for illegal imports of meat. [61583]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* Searches on baggage are carried out by a number of enforcement authorities including HMCE, local and port health officers and DEFRA officials, and current total numbers are not held centrally.

Fallen Stock

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her estimate is of the percentage of fallen *(a)* calves, *(b)* adult bovines and *(c)* sheep that are buried on farms in (i) England and (ii) Wales. [61493]

Mr. Morley: The central burial or burning of fallen stock is not permitted except in emergency situations such as the outbreak of foot and mouth disease in 2001. We do not collect information on the routine disposal of fallen stock, but the state veterinary service carried out small-scale surveys in the years 1998–2000. The results, which may not be representative, suggest that the following proportions of fallen cattle and sheep were burned or buried on farm in Great Britain over those years; adult bovines ranged from 15–20 per cent.; calves 20–25 per cent. and sheep 65–75 per cent.

EC Animal By-Products Regulation 2000/0259

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her policy is towards the possible introduction of a national fallen stock service following the implementation of the EC Animal By-Products Regulation 2000/0259. [61492]

Mr. Morley: DEFRA officials are in discussion with the livestock and disposal industries over future arrangements for the disposal of fallen stock and methods of funding. We hope that a national collection service can be established which will enable all farm businesses to have access to facilities for the off-farm disposal of fallen stock, other than those in the proposed remote areas, where burial on farm will continue to be permitted.

Veterinary Laboratories Agency

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what additional data is being collected by her Department and its agencies to inform the risk assessment of meat imports being carried out by the Veterinary Laboratories Agency. [61546]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* The progress report on the DEFRA website at http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/int-trde describes the data being collected to support the risk assessment.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if she will place in the Library a report on the results so far of the risk assessment of meat imports being carried out by the Veterinary Laboratories Agency; [61548]

(2) if she will publish a list of the external stakeholder groups which she has established or plans to establish to help inform and guide the risk assessment of meat imports; and if she will state in the case of each group, the names and qualifications of its members and its terms of reference; [61545]

(3) when the risk assessment of meat imports being carried out by the Veterinary Laboratories Agency, will be completed; and if she will publish the Agency's report. [61547]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* The risk assessment currently being carried out by the Veterinary Laboratories Agency (VLA) is due to be completed in autumn 2002. A progress report was placed on the illegal imports page of the DEFRA website at http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/int-trde on 23 May. It is intended to post further progress reports on this site when appropriate and publish the final report.

A Steering Group has been established to guide the work of the risk assessment which includes representatives of external stakeholder groups. The terms of reference of the Risk Assessment Steering Group and its full membership is published on the risk assessment link on the Illegal Imports page of the DEFRA website—address as above. The VLA team is also consulting a wide range of stakeholders as the work progresses.

Landing Cards

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will conclude her review of possible changes to landing cards. [61588]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* Discussions continue with the Home Office and we hope to reach conclusions late summer.

England Rural Development Programme

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the total cost for the three years from 2003–04 of implementing the proposals of the Policy Commission on the future of farming and food for the England Rural Development Programme. [61563]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* The Policy Commission estimated that implementing its recommendations would cost approximately £500 million over three years. However, the cost of many of the recommendations, including those relating to the England Rural Development Programme, will depend upon the precise way in which they are implemented. The Government intend to produce a Strategy for Sustainable Food and Farming in England in the autumn, following a wide-ranging process of stakeholder engagement. This strategy will incorporate a definitive response to each of the Policy Commission's recommendations.

Rural Payments Agency

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the salary is of the chief executive of the Rural Payments Agency. [61572]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* The chief executive's salary will be published in October in the Rural Payments Agency's annual report and accounts. This will be consistent with the advertised remuneration package of circa £100,000.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the maximum time scale permitted between the laying of a statutory instrument and its publication *(a)* on her Department's website and *(b)* by HM Stationery Office. [61592]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* Departmental statutory instruments are published in accordance with guidelines laid out in the Cabinet Office publication "Statutory Instrument Practice" (second edition, 1987). Departments arrange physical publication of statutory instruments with Her Majesty's Stationery Office (HMSO) and The Stationery Office (TSO).

HMSO aim to publish statutory instruments on their website (which can be found at www.hmso.gov.uk) within 24 hours of the date of formal publication.

DEFRA continually aims to publish statutory instruments as early as possible, and publishes most statutory instruments to coincide with the date of laying before Parliament. On some occasions—for example, in implementing emergency measures—it is not always possible to achieve this, as HMSO needs time to typeset the instrument.

Although all published statutory instruments are published on the HMSO website, the Department also publishes many instruments on its own website at www.defra.gov.uk. In many cases this occurs at the stage of public consultation.

Vessel Monitoring By Satellite

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if it is her policy to support the European Commission's proposal to extend vessel monitoring by satellite to include all fishing vessels down to 10 metres; [61610]

(2) if she plans to offer financial support to the owners of fishing vessels to cover the costs of complying with the European Commission's proposal to extend vessel monitoring by satellite to all vessels over 10 metres. [61611]

Mr. Morley: As yet there are no firm proposals to extend satellite monitoring to all vessels over 10 metres although this is suggested in the Commission's road map to the reform of the CFP. Satellite monitoring has applied to vessels over 24 metres since 1 January 2000 and has made a significant contribution to the effectiveness of enforcement operations across the Community. There are obvious advantages in extending satellite monitoring and we shall need to consider carefully its impact on smaller vessels. It is too early to say whether funding will be available.

Common Fisheries Policy

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will publish a compliance cost assessment of the impact on the United Kingdom's fishing industries of the European Commission's proposals to reform the Common Fisheries Policy. [61612]

Mr. Morley: Regulatory impact assessments will be conducted for all legislative proposals that are likely to have an impact on the United Kingdom's fishing industries.

Serological Testing

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will publish a record of serological testing carried out by her Department since 1 January 2001, on a regional basis, indicating *(a)* what animals were tested on each farm, *(b)* the percentage sample which were taken, *(c)* the results of the tests taken and *(d)* what consequential actions were taken. [62538]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* It is not possible to provide this information as it would involve the disclosure of personal data which are protected by the Data Protection Act 1998. Over 3 million serological tests were carried out, the vast majority for serological surveillance in declaring the Protection Zones (0–3 km) and Surveillance Zones (3–10 km) around each infected premises free from foot and mouth disease. In response to the four specific questions raised:

(a) erological testing was primarily carried out on sheep and goats.

(b) The serological surveillance was designed to detect a 5 per cent. prevalence of seropositive sheep with 95 per cent. confidence in each management group on a holding.

(c) The results of tests are not readily available on a regional basis.

(d) The consequential action taken depended on the reasons for the serological sampling ie epidemiology, lifting Infected Areas, etc. and the epidemiological assessment of the results.

Funding (Luton, South)

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what moneys have been provided *(a)* directly and *(b)* via agencies for which the Department has responsibility to the Luton, South constituency since 1997. [58591]

Mr. Morley: DEFRA was created on 8 June 2001, and does not hold statistical information on a constituency basis relating to the Department's policies. As many of the Department's policies flow from measures agreed within the framework of the EU Common Agricultural Policy, statistical data are normally available on a UK or England basis.

Farmers in the UK receive approximately £2.5 billion per year in direct CAP payments. This does not include the significant additional costs to consumers as a result of CAP price supports, which keeps EU prices above prevailing world prices.

Consumers in Luton, South, will benefit from the Agenda 2000 reforms of the CAP in the form of reduced food bills, with the average saving for a typical family rising to £65 a year by 2010.

The Government are committed to securing a more economically rational CAP. This will benefit both consumers and taxpayers in Luton, South. We aim to redirect public money from agricultural price support mechanisms to rural development measures of benefit to the wider rural community and visitors to the countryside.

One of the most important outcomes of Agenda 2000 was the establishment of the Rural Development Regulation, which is being implemented in England through the England Rural Development Programme (ERDP), investing around £1.6 billion in rural areas over seven years. By supporting rural development, including diversification into tourist activities, and by conserving and enhancing the rural environment through support for 'public' goods such as biodiversity and landscape appearance, the ERDP offers benefits to all who visit the countryside.

Correspondence

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the letter of 11 October 2001 from the hon. Member for Torbay on behalf of Mrs. Cawood of Torquay. [58923]

Mr. Morley: I am sorry for the delay in replying. This correspondence was transferred to the Food Standard Agency, as they are responsible for the safety of Aspartame.

As the hon. Member knows, the Food Standards Agency report to Parliament through Health Ministers, and I understand that the Secretary of State for Health, my right hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) replied on 15 June 2002.

Timber

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which Departments are represented on the interdepartmental working group on timber. [63061]

Mr. Morley: The interdepartmental working group on timber procurement is open to participation by all central Government Departments and their agencies. Representation is not fixed as such but the regular attendees are from a core of the departments that volunteered to participate when the group was first set up.

The following Departments have attended at least one of the seven meetings held to date:

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; Ministry of Defence; Department of Health; The Forestry Commission; Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (as was); Department for Education and Employment; Inland Revenue; Office of Government Commerce; Department for International Development; Department of Trade and Industry; Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Cattle Powder

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the total costs have been of storing powder resulting from foot and mouth and BSE. [62798]

Mr. Morley: Since the commencement of the over-30-month slaughter scheme (OTMS) meat and bonemeal (MBM) storage costs are estimated at £60 million. These costs include those storage costs incurred for the storage of MBM produced as a result of various culls employed to combat foot and mouth disease.

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the anticipated schedule is for the final disposal of powder stored in Devon and Lincolnshire. [62799]

Mr. Morley: It is anticipated that meat and bonemeal (MBM) currently in store at the sites in Devon and Lincolnshire will be destroyed by incineration (with energy recovery) by the end of 2004.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the questions from the hon. Member for the Isle of Wight of 1 March, Refs. 39938 and 40044. [55463]

Mr. Morley: The answers to questions Ref. 39938 and Ref. 40044 were conveyed to the hon. Member on 10 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 889W. The delay that occurred was due to intense pressure of work in the section responsible for providing the necessary information. DEFRA Ministers and staff regret this delay. Revised procedures and additional resources have been introduced to ensure that a better service to hon. Members is provided in future.

Illegal Food and Plant Imports

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what quantity of illegal food and plant imports was seized at *(a)* (i) Heathrow, (ii) Gatwick and (iii) Manchester airports and *(b)* (A) Southampton, (B) Dover, (C) Felixstowe and (D) Liverpool seaports in each of the last three months; and what the nature was of the products seized. [54495]

Mr. Morley: We have no records logged for Southampton, Felixstowe and Liverpool seaports. However, enforcement agencies have notified us about the seizures of illegal food and plant imports made at Heathrow, Manchester and Gatwick airports and Dover seaport. These are as summarised.

Nature of product(s) seized	*Month 2002*	*Total weight in kilograms*
Airport		
Heathrow		
Beef, shrimp, animal fat, ghee, prawns and abalone, fish (salted and dried), poultry, milk, ready to eat meals, snails	February	671.23
Sausage meat, snails, honey, shrimps, dried fish, dairy products	March	796.00
Meat, camel, chicken stock cubes, Milo, Ovaltine, honey, fish, duck eggs, shrimp and fish, Milo, dairy products	April	203.00

Nature of product(s) seized	*Month 2002*	*Total weight in kilograms*
Gatwick		
Smoked and salted fish, snail meat, milk drink and sachets, cheese, foie gras	February	2,365.00
Milk powder, smoked fish, smoked chicken, hunting trophies, biltong, packet soups, chicken cubes	March	1,174.00
Meat, cooked poultry	April	135.00
Manchester		
Lobsters	February	4.50
Assorted fish products, milk powder	March	43.00
Dried meat	April	21.00
Port		
Dover		
Meat—sausages, whole pigs, dairy products, fish	February	50.50
Meat—sausage, ham, dried pork, salami, fish, dairy products	March	243.91
Meat—ham, bacon, sausage, fish, dairy—cheese	April	178.50

It should be noted that illegal meat consignments found arriving at any port will be seized.

Press Releases

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many press releases were issued by her Department in each month of 2001. [59675]

Mr. Morley: DEFRA was created in June of 2001, our records show a total of 319 press releases between June and December 2001.

Year/month	*Number*
2001	
June	26
July	53
August	39
September	41
October	44
November	68
December	48

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Third World

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she is having with EU Ministers about reforming the EU's policies towards importing goods from the third world; and if she will make a statement. [61935]

Clare Short: The UK Government have been working to reduce the tariffs that apply to developing country goods entering the EU. For example, the UK played a central role in establishing the Everything But Arms initiative that will provide the 49 least developed countries with duty and quota free access to the EU for all goods except arms. In addition, the UK is pushing the EU to be as generous as possible in current economic partnership negotiations with African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries under Cotonou agreement. However, high tariffs remain on many goods of export interest to developing countries. In order to tackle such barriers, a new trade round was launched at the fourth WTO ministerial meeting in Doha in November last year with a pro-development agenda. The meeting resulted in agreement on the need to reduce barriers to trade in all products including agricultural ones. The UK Government are fully committed to making these commitments become a reality.

Rwanda

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office regarding the conduct of the Government of Rwanda with regard to Rwandan troops based in the Democratic Republic of Congo. [61869]

Clare Short: DFID maintains regular contact with the FCO at both ministerial and official levels on the whole complex of issues surrounding the Great Lakes conflict, including the issue of Rwandan troops in the DRC.

Southern Africa

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the estimated amount of food aid required by the World Food Programme for the famine in Southern Africa is; and how much has been distributed. [62373]

Clare Short: The World Food Programme and the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation estimate that 1.36 million tonnes of food will be required as humanitarian aid for six countries in Southern Africa identified as facing severe food shortages. Existing appeals have enabled WFP to purchase 120,000 of food and to begin distribution in the three countries worst affected.

This estimate does not include Angola which is being dealt with through a separate UN programme.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much of the World Food Programme's appeal for the famine in Southern Africa has been met; and how much the total UK contribution has been. [62375]

Clare Short: The World Food Programme's regional appeal for Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique, Lesotho and Swaziland in respect of the 2002–03 harvest year is expected this week.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her assessment of the current food crisis in Southern Africa is, with particular reference to *(a)* the number of people at risk of famine and *(b)* the prospects of adequate harvests later in the year. [62374]

Clare Short: The Southern African countries identified by the World Food Programme as needing special assistance following reductions in agricultural production are Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique, Lesotho and Swaziland. The number of people in these countries requiring emergency food supplies is expected to grow by March 2003 to 12.8 million. Winter crops now in the ground will meet only a small proportion of the food shortfall. Planting of the main maize crop begins in November with the onset of the rains. Prospects for the 2003 crop will largely depend on the amount and distribution of this rain, and on agricultural and economic policy in Zimbabwe where much of this year's shortfall has occurred.

Trade Justice Movement

Mr. Lyons: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had with members of the Trade Justice Movement. [62308]

Clare Short: We hold regular meetings with members of the Trade Justice Movement and other NGOs to discuss trade and development issues. These include DFID NGO days, the DTI Trade Policy Consultative Forum and informal meetings. The last NGO day was attended by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development.

Asylum Seekers

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether UK funds disbursed via the European Union are to be tied to a country's policy towards asylum seekers. [62424]

Clare Short: The European Council at Seville will be discussing measures to encourage co-operation by third countries on returns and illegal migration. Her Majesty's Government believe that all inter-governmental relationships should be developed to encourage co-operation on these issues, but that nothing should be done which undermines the need to focus European Union aid on the reduction of poverty.

Environmental Know How Fund

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the projects by category and the amount spent on them under the Environmental Know How Fund in 2001–02. [61131]

Clare Short: In 2001–02, DFID spent approximately £6.675 million on environmental projects in Central and Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union. This total includes a £2 million contribution from DEFRA. A list of projects and their expenditure in 2001–02 has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

TREASURY

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the total real terms expenditure of his Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies on publicity in each of the years *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000, *(d)* 2000–01 and *(e)* 2001–02 (i) to date and (ii) as estimated for the whole of the present year; and if he will break these figures down to indicate expenditure on (A) advertising and (B) press and public relations. [36163]

Ruth Kelly: The available information is given in the following table. The figures relating to the Treasury are not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Information relating to the publicity is not available for the Valuation Office Agency. It would be inappropriate to give figures for advertising relating to the Royal Mint in accordance with Exemption 13 (Commercial Confidentiality) of the Code of Access to Government Information. Neither the Inland Revenue nor Customs and Excise hire public relations consultancy services, and each has its own press office financed through its normal operational costs.

Costs

£

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Inland Revenue					
Advertising	4,576,288	7,677,680	11,742,684	18,966,466	8,652,650
HM Customs and Excise					
Advertising	378,000	352,000	339,000	2,888,000	1,312,000
Office for National Statistics					
Advertising	3,000	3,000	3,000	1,100,000	1,800,000
Public relations	0	0	0	172,000	73,000
Debt Management Office[1]					
Advertising	n/a	162,714	261,828	224,396	202,996
Public relations	n/a	0	0	0	0
Government Actuary's Department					
Advertising	33,000	53,000	50,000	39,000	35,000
Public relations	5,000	6,000	12,000	10,000	12,000
Valuation Office Agency					
Advertising	0	0	81,217	39,227	0

Costs

£

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Royal Mint					
Public relations	84,000	102,553	103,787	104,038	102,000
Office of Government Commerce[2]					
Advertising	n/a	n/a	n/a	0	3,878

[1] Launched 1 April 1998
[2] Launched 1 April 2000

Inland Revenue advertising costs in 2000–01 reflect the concurrent running of several campaigns, such as working families tax credit, children's tax credit, payroll giving, income tax self assessment and pay as you earn online. Customs and Excise expenditure in the 2000–01 period includes the costs of campaigns following on from the Taylor report and Tackling Tobacco Strategy, as well as a centralisation of the communications budget. Expenditure by the Office for National Statistics in the periods 2000–01 and 2001–02 reflect the cost of publicising the Census.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much and what proportion of the departmental expenditure limit for 2002–03 will be accounted for by staff costs; what the figures were for 2001–02; and if he will make a statement. [61032]

Ruth Kelly: Reliable estimates for 2002–03 spending to 31 May are not available. Estimated outturn spending figures for 2001–02 can be found in Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses 2002–03, published in May 2002 as Command Paper 5401.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on how many occasions between 31 March 2001 and 31 March 2002 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity; what places were visited; and how much each visit cost. [58737]

Ruth Kelly: Special advisers' travel accompanying Ministers was set out in my answer to the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) of 1 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 879W. Advisers have also travelled abroad on seven other occasions, at an average cost of £1,490 per visit, to Madrid, Switzerland, Stockholm, Washington, Toronto and to Paris twice. All travel by special advisers is undertaken in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code and the Civil Service Management Code.

Estate Duty

Norman Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will introduce plans to change the rules relating to the payment of estate duty on royal assets; and if he will make a statement. [61320]

Mr. Gordon Brown *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* The inheritance tax arrangements are set out in paragraphs 20 to 23 of the 1993 Memorandum of Understanding in the Royal Trustees report (HC 464) and remain in existence.

Staff Training

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much the Department has spent on staff training and development in each of the last five years. [61055]

Ruth Kelly: Expenditure on staff training and development for the last five years was as follows:

	Amount
1997–98	1,099,168
1998–99	1,262,368
1999–2000	1,141,469
2000–01	1,517,759
2001–02	1,768,463

GDP

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the relative relevance and importance of *(a)* real and *(b)* nominal GDP figures. [61976]

Ruth Kelly: Real and nominal GDP growth are linked via the implicit price deflator—the GDP deflator measure of inflation. Low inflation is the essential foundation for securing sustainable improvements in real GDP growth. So it is not meaningful in general to distinguish between real and nominal GDP in terms of relevance and importance.

Credit Card Debt

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if, pursuant to his answer of 10 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 848W, to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Harris), he will state the equivalent figures for credit card *(a)* in total and *(b)* per head for each year since 1996. [62933]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Jim Cousins, dated 19 June 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your parliamentary question on credit card debt which follows on from the answer given to Mr. Harris on 10 June in the Official Report 848W. (62933)

The information requested is given in the table below.

Amounts outstanding on credit cards at the end of June each year, the resident adult population at the mid point of each year and the ratio of credit card debt divided by adult population rounded to the nearest £10

Mid year	*Amount outstanding on credit cards (£ billion)*	*Adult population (million)*	*Credit card debt divided by adult population (£)*
1996	14.2	45.2	310
1997	16.8	45.4	370
1998	20.5	45.7	450
1999	29.5	45.9	640
2000	34.7	46.2	750
2001	39.2	46.5	840

Royal Family (Taxation)

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer from which taxes members of the Royal Family are exempt. [62610]

Mr. Gordon Brown *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* The taxation arrangements for Her Majesty and the Prince of Wales are set out in full in the Memorandum of Understanding in the Royal Trustees report (HC 464) published on 11 February 1993. All other members of the Royal Family are subject to the normal tax rules.

Credit Unions

David Wright: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many credit unions are registered within the UK; and how many people are members. [62900]

Ruth Kelly: At 31 December 2000 there were 861 credit unions registered within the UK, with around 642,500 members.

David Wright: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the level of funds loaned in each of the last five years by credit unions in the UK. [62898]

Ruth Kelly: Credit unions reported loans outstanding for years ended in:

	£
2000	496,621,000
1999	441,410,000
1998	348,507,000
1997	326,919,000
1996	276,084,000

The collated data for 2001 were not yet available.

David Wright: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action is being taken by his Department to support credit union development in the UK. [62899]

Ruth Kelly: The Government believe that credit unions have an important role to play to encourage the accumulation of savings, provide affordable credit and, through their unique position, help tackle financial exclusion. That is why we have been involved in a number of measures designed to help the movement develop and grow. In October 2001 we published a consultation document containing seven deregulatory proposals, to which we received a significant number of positive responses. We have now made a consequential amendments order under the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (FSMA) that will bring four of the seven proposals into force on 2 July 2002. We are currently drafting an order under the Regulatory Reform Act 2000 that should bring the remaining three proposals into force later this year. These measures will help credit unions offer their members a greater range of services and compete more effectively for deposits.

We also used FSMA to bring credit unions under the Financial Services Authority's rule making powers. From 2 July 2002 depositors with credit unions will be given a similar level of protection to that enjoyed by depositors with banks and building societies.

National Statistics

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what statistics have been collected by the National Statistician to determine the rate of self-inflicted death and suicide among *(a)* members of HM armed forces, *(b)* police officers and staff, *(c)* prison officers and staff, *(d)* firefighting officers and staff and *(e)* ambulance service staff; [62672]

(2) what statistics have been collected by the National Statistician to determine the rate of self-inflicted death or suicide, broken down by *(a)* sex, *(b)* ethnic origin, *(c)* occupation, *(d)* age and *(e)* religion. [62652]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Kevin McNamara, dated 19 June 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your questions (62652 and 62672) on what statistics have been collected to determine the rate of self-inflicted death or suicide, (1) broken down by (a) sex, (b) ethnic origin, (c) occupation, (d) age, and (e) religion, and (2) among (a) members of HM Armed Forces, (b) police officers and staff, (c) prison officers and staff, (d) firefighting officers and staff, and (e) ambulance service staff. (62652, 62672)

Numbers of deaths from self-inflicted death or suicide are collected through the registration of deaths. Information recorded at registration includes the cause of death, sex, occupation and age of the deceased. Neither ethnic origin nor religion is recorded at registration. In reporting on these statistics, suicides are routinely defined as deaths from suicide and deaths from 'injury undetermined whether accidentally or purposely inflicted'. It is likely that most of these latter deaths are cases where the harm is self-inflicted but there was insufficient evidence to prove that the deceased deliberately intended to kill themselves.

To determine death rates, the number of persons at risk of dying in each relevant category is also required. Annual population estimates, calculated by the Office for National Statistics, are used to provide this information in respect of age and sex. Comparable information about the population in terms of ethnic origin and occupation is available from the Census. Information on religion was collected for the first time in the 2001 Census, the results of which are not yet available.

Using the information collected, statistics on death rates from suicide broken down by sex and age are published annually[1]. Statistics on death rates from suicide by occupation are routinely published every ten years in decennial supplements. The latest publication[2] includes separate figures for all the occupations listed in the question except for prison officers and staff, who are included within a broader category of 'security workers'. Statistics on death rates by ethnic origin and religion are not yet available.

[1] Office for National Statistics (2001) "Mortality statistics: cause. Review of the Register General on deaths by cause, sex and age, in England and Wales, 2000". Series DH2 no. 27. Office for National Statistics: London.

[2] Drever F (ed.) (1995) "Occupational Health Decennial Supplement". Series DS no. 10. HMSO: London.

Copies of the above named publications are available in the House of Commons Library.

Cross-border Payments

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to establish an infrastructure for cross-border payments in euros. [63056]

Ruth Kelly: Developing cross-border payments infrastructure is the responsibility of the banks. I am aware that UK banks are fully participating in the European banking industry's co-ordinated initiative to produce a single European market for payments, and welcome this action which should improve the current, sometimes poor, level of cross-border payments service which consumers receive.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the impact of not including sterling in the EU regulation on cross-border payments in euros. [63055]

Ruth Kelly: The UK believes a competition-based approach to the problem of market failure in cross-border payments is the right one. The EU regulation could result in banks having to charge less for a service than it costs them to provide and may well give rise to perverse (potentially counter-productive) effects that harm consumers. For example, some banks may withdraw from offering the service altogether, or alternatively attempt to off-set losses made on cross-border payment transactions by increasing the cost of domestic payment costs. Thus, by not including sterling denominated payments in the scope of the regulation, these counter-productive effects are minimised.

It is too early to quantify the full impact of not including sterling denominated payments in the scope of the regulation. The main aspect of the regulation, article 3, which requires institutions to charge the same for euro cross-border payments as for euro domestic payments, does not take effect until July 2002 and July 2003 for electronic payments and credit transfers respectively. However, we will keep the situation under review.

Curry Report

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will make available the funds to support the implementation of the Curry report proposals; and if he will make a statement. [63049]

Mr. Boateng: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has announced, the Government will be producing a new strategy for sustainable farming and food in England in the early autumn, which will incorporate a definitive response to the Policy Commission's recommendations.

Bank Notes

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the cost of the withdrawal of £5 notes announced by the Bank of England on 27 May; by what means he reached the figure; and if he will make a statement. [63208]

Ruth Kelly: Following reports that it is possible to remove the serial number from some of the new issue £5 notes, the Bank of England took the precautionary measure of asking the commercial banks and the Post Office to suspend issuance. The Bank is continuing to carry out tests and investigative work on the notes to establish the cause of the fault, how widespread it is and the best way to rectify it. At present it is too early to estimate the potential cost of the exercise.

Divorce

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of marriages have ended in divorce in each of the last 30 years in the UK. [62405]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. David Laws, dated 19 June 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your question on the proportion of marriages which have ended in divorce in each of the last 30 years. (62405)

Estimates have been made, from time to time, of the proportion of marriages solemnised in a given year in England and Wales which would end in divorce, were the divorce rates to continue unchanged into the future at the levels observed in that year.

The estimates are as follows:

1971–73: 22%

1979–80: 34%

1987: 37%

1993–94: 41%

Family Statistics

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the percentage of dependant children living in lone-parent families in the UK in each of the last 30 years; and if he will make a statement. [62404]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. David Laws, dated 19 June 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your question on the percentage of dependent children living in lone-parent families. (62404)

Historical estimates of the percentage of all dependent children who live in one-parent families are available from the General Household Survey which covers Great Britain. The proportions—based on three year averages—are as follows:

	Percentage
1971[1]	8
1981	11
1990	17
1991	18
1996	21
1998	23
2000[1]	25

[1] Based on a single GHS year's data only.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what proportion of children in the UK have been born outside marriage in each of the last 30 years; and if he will make a statement; [62403]

(2) what his estimate is of the proportion of babies born to teenage women in the UK in each of the last 25 years; and if he will make a statement. [62402]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. David Laws, dated 19 June 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent questions on the proportion of children born outside marriage in each of the last 30 years in the UK , and the proportion of babies born to teenage women in each of the last 25 years in the UK. A single reply has been used to answer your questions. (62403 and 62402)

The information for the first question is given in the attached table A, and for the second question in the attached table B.

Table A. Number of births outside marriage per 1,000 live births, United Kingdom, 1972–2001

Year	*Proportion of births outside marriage*
1972	84
1973	84
1974	87
1975	90
1976	90
1977	95
1978	100
1979	106
1980	115
1981	125
1982	141
1983	154
1984	170
1985	189
1986	210
1987	229
1988	251
1989	266
1990	279
1991	298
1992	308
1993	317
1994	320
1995	336
1996	355
1997	368
1998	376
1999	388
2000	395
2001	401

Table B. Number of births to mothers aged under 20 per 1,000 live births, United Kingdom, 1977–2001

Year	*Proportion of births to mothers aged under 20 years*
1977	97
1978	95
1979	93
1980	93
1981	89
1982	89
1983	86
1984	86
1985	87
1986	87
1987	85
1988	85
1989	81
1990	79
1991	75
1992	70
1993	68
1994	64
1995	65
1996	69
1997	73
1998	76
1999	78
2000	77
2001	75

Pension Annuities

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of the new pension annuities are on an *(a)* indexed and *(b)* flat basis, and based on a (i) single and (ii) joint life in the last three years; and what proportion of the stock of pension annuities was in those categories. [37033]

Mr. McCartney: I have been asked to reply.

The information is not available.

Tobacco and Alcohol Taxes

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much tax revenue has been collected from the sale of *(a)* tobacco and *(b)* alcohol in each of the last three financial years. [62370]

John Healey: Excise duty and estimated VAT receipts from tobacco and alcohol for the financial years 1999–2000 and 2000–01 can be found in HM Customs and Excise "Tobacco" and "Alcohol Factsheets", copies of which can be found in the House of Commons Library.

Provisional receipts of excise duty from tobacco and alcohol in the financial year 2001–02 are published in the national statistics publication "Financial Statistics" table 2.1D, a copy of which can be found in the House of Common Library.

An estimate of the VAT received in 2001–02 from the sale of tobacco and alcohol is not available.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Military Complaints Procedures Report

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he intends to lay before Parliament the ninth annual report of the Independent Assessor of Military Complaints Procedures in Northern Ireland. [63657]

Dr. John Reid: I have today arranged for copies of Jim McDonald's annual report for 2001 to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

The Report of the Independent Assessor continues to provide valuable reassurances to both the public and the Government that the Army's complaints procedures stand scrutiny. I welcome Mr. McDonald's report and I shall consider it further.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Electronic Case Management

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General if the new electronic case management application will be operational in 2003; and if this application is compatible with other systems in the criminal justice system. [59346]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 12 June 2002]:* The development of the Compass initial case management system is on track to be operational in 2003. Roll out of the initial system is scheduled to begin in April 2003 and be completed by December 2003. This will include replacing the four different systems currently used by the CPS. The full case management system is due for roll out by December 2005.

The Compass initial case management system will provide compatibility with other criminal justice systems with specific electronic interfaces to police force systems and via e-mail, to the courts, Prison Service, Probation Service, as well as printed forms to victims and witnesses.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council how much and what proportion of the departmental expenditure limit for 2002–03 will be accounted for by staff costs; what the figures were for 2001–02; and if he will make a statement. [61036]

Mr. Robin Cook: My Department anticipates that for 2002–03 £1.5 million will be accounted for by staff costs; this is approximately one third of the departmental expenditure limit. The equivalent figure for 2001–02 was £1.4 million: the proportion was again approximately one third of the departmental expenditure limit.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council how much and what proportion of the departmental expenditure limit for 2002–03 had been spent by 31 May; what the figures were for 2001–02; and if he will make a statement. [61008]

Mr. Robin Cook: I refer to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 17 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 130W.

Computers

Dr. Kumar: To ask the President of the Council how many computers were replaced in his Department in each of the past three years; how the replaced units were disposed of and by which companies; and at what cost. [60728]

Mr. Robin Cook: My Department is covered by a contract which is outsourced by the Cabinet Office. The equipment is leased from a service provider (Compaq) who are responsible for replacing all the computers every three years and for their disposal.

The total cost of this service is £135,000 for the year 2002–03. My Department has 54 computers covered by the contract, of which two are lap-tops.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Mr. Sheikh

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 30 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 649W, whether the Pakistan authorities have responded to the Government's request for information on Mr. Sheikh's detention; and if he will make a statement. [62019]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: As the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr. Bradshaw), explained on 20 May, we have not yet received a substantive response from the Pakistani authorities to our requests for information. Senior officials at our high commission are pursuing this with their Pakistani counterparts.

Kashmir

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with his counterpart in China concerning strategies for securing a resolution of the dispute over the future status of Kashmir. [62051]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary telephoned his Chinese opposite number on 11 May to discuss India/Pakistan.

Joint Entry Clearance Unit

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many of his Department's staff are employed in the joint entry clearance unit. [62190]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office currently have 42 staff working in UK visas (formerly JECU). In addition the Home Office currently have 32 staff members seconded to UK visas. These details include part-time staff and job sharers.

Entry Clearance

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many visitor visa applications were made on 11 June in *(a)* Mumbai, *(b)* New Delhi and *(c)* Islamabad. [62193]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The number of visitor applications received in Mumbai, New Delhi and Islamabad on 11 June were as follows:

Mumbai—238

New Delhi—243

Islamabad—13.

The figures for Islamabad reflect the fact that the visa section there currently only receives applications via a courier service. This service commenced on 7 June, following a period when the section was closed.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many immigration officers were on duty in *(a)* Mumbai, *(b)* New Delhi and *(c)* Islamabad on 11 June. [62192]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: On 11 June, Mumbai with four UK based entry clearance staff and New Delhi with five UK based entry clearance staff were operating a restricted service providing for settlement applications, urgent medical and compassionate cases and drop-box applications for limited categories of travellers (including previous visitors and returning residents).

Islamabad had four UK based entry clearance staff engaged on visa work. Two others were deployed elsewhere to assist with urgent consular and evacuation matters, and two were on leave. Islamabad were operating a very limited service, accepting applications through Fedex from returning residents and urgent medical and compassionate cases, including settlement and family visit applications in these categories.

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the mandate of the EC-United States of America Joint Committee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [61728]

Peter Hain: There is no single EU-US joint committee, but separate joint committees on science and technology, and on education. The joint committee on science and technology met once in 2001. The joint committee on education last met in 1999. In response to the rest of this question, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him to a series of questions on 10 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 834W.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the mandate of the EC-Canada Joint Committee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [61729]

Peter Hain: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 10 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 834–35W.

Turkmenistan

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the Turkmen authorities concerning the renewed persecution of Christians in Turkmenistan. [62787]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The UK, with the EU and the US uses every opportunity to raise cases of religious persecution with the Turkmen Government. Our ambassador, together with EU and US ambassadors called on the Foreign Minister in February, May, July and December 2001 to protest at the continued imprisonment of a senior Baptist and to call for his release on humanitarian grounds. The prisoner was released two weeks after the December meeting. Our ambassador has also recently requested a meeting with the Turkmen Foreign Minister to discuss religious persecution and other issues.

Asia

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what UK diplomatic representation there is in the five central Asian republics; what plans are in hand to improve this representation; and if he will make a statement. [62325]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Government have embassies in four of the five central Asian countries. We opened an embassy in Dushanbe in December 2001 and a drugs liaison officer will be posted there shortly. We also plan to open an embassy in Bishkek in 2003, and a diplomat will be posted to Bishkek to supervise the setting up of the mission. The embassy in Tashkent has been reinforced with a defence attache. We have recently reinforced the embassy in Ashgabat with a drugs liaison officer, and a regional defence attache has been posted to Almaty. These additional resources reflect the importance HMG attaches to relations with the five central Asian republics.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he plans to visit the five central Asian republics; and if he will make a statement. [62324]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary had planned a tour of the region in November 2001, but had to postpone his visit owing to essential operational requirements. The Foreign Secretary hopes to visit the region in due course.

Richard Ward

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) for what reason the Government have not petitioned for conditional bail in the case of Richard Ward; [62952]

(2) when he expects legal proceedings against Richard Ward in Dubai to be completed; [62949]

(3) on how many occasions since his arrest consular officials in Abu Dhabi and Dubai have visited Richard Ward; [62950]

(4) what representations his Department has made to the Government of Dubai about the length of time that Richard Ward has been held in custody without the completion of legal proceedings against him; [62955]

(5) when his Department will release Richard Ward's file to his representatives in the UK; [62956]

(6) if he will make a statement on the legal position of Richard Ward in Dubai; and if he remains liable for retransfer from prison in Dubai to Abu Dhabi; [62951]

(7) for what reason his Department informed Dr. Paul Meconi that Richard Ward's case had been attached to another case and did not give him access to the file of Mr. Ward's case on 13 June; [62953]

(8) what steps his Department has taken to secure full legal representation for Richard Ward. [62954]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: As agreed with the hon. Member, a detailed letter addressing his concerns will be sent to him, and be made available in the Commons Library, by 27 June 2002.

Surjit Kaur Athwal

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the support provided to the family of Surjit Kaur Athwal in the search for her as a missing person in India. [62616]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We continue to offer Surjit Athwal's family consular assistance. The family of Mrs. Athwal met with Baroness Scotland, then Foreign Office Minister responsible for consular matters, on 5 February 2001 to discuss the case. We have expressed our concerns about Mrs. Athwal's disappearance to the Indian authorities on numerous occasions and at high level. Sadly, even with the help of a British police team the Indian authorities' investigation has yet to reach a satisfactory conclusion.

We will continue to remind the authorities about this case at every appropriate opportunity.

EU Enlargement

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consideration is given to resolutions from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in shaping Government policy on enlargement of the EU. [62691]

Peter Hain: The key consideration for EU accession is the fulfilment of the Copenhagen political and economic criteria, and the adoption of requisite EU legislation (acquis communautaires). In assessing candidates' readiness for accession, HMG takes into account the candidates' alignment with the acquis and the Copenhagen criteria as well as other relevant sources of information. Some of the Copenhagen criteria cover similar ground to key COE principles: human rights, rule of law and pluralist democracy. All Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) resolutions are brought to the attention of the Governments of all the Council of Europe member states. The resolutions play an important role in ensuring COE member states meet core COE Standards.

Nepal

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Government of Nepal concerning the Maoist rebellion; what advice his Department has offered; if he has offered to mediate between the two sides; and if he will make a statement. [62891]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We are very concerned about the situation in Nepal. This brutal insurgency by the Maoists is undermining Nepal's young democracy and fragile economy.

During his visit to the United Kingdom last month, the Nepalese Prime Minister held meetings with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for International Development and my predecessor my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr. Bradshaw), at which these matters were discussed. We reassured the Nepalese Prime Minister of our full support, while making clear the need for effective action by them on reform and development. We reiterated our commitment to continuing our developmental, political and military assistance to Nepal.

We are hosting an international conference in London on 19/20 June with the Nepalese Government and representatives from other countries who share our concerns, to discuss how the international community can best co-ordinate its efforts in supporting the people of Nepal.

We would support the resumption of peaceful negotiations between the two parties and are prepared to lend assistance should the opportunity arise.

Pakistan

Andrew Selous: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs for what purpose money was allocated to Luton borough council by the European Union, which is now to be spent in Pakistan; and what criteria his Department will use to authorise the spending of this money in this way. [62892]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The EC-funded 'Asia Urbs' programme is available for local borough councils to spend on urban development projects in Asia. We understand that Luton borough council is currently considering bidding for £300,000 to spend in 2002–03 on a water treatment engineering project in Peshawar, Pakistan, and that it proposes to fund £50,000 of technical assistance from its own resources. If Luton borough council decides to proceed with its bid and is successful, it will be for the European Commission and Luton borough council to agree upon the detail of the project.

Correspondence

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs for what reason he has not yet replied to the letter from the hon. Member for Yeovil dated 27 May, regarding visa arrangements for constituents in relation to travel from Pakistan; and if he will make a statement. [62670]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: My officials at UK visas wrote to the hon. Member for Yeovil on 11 June, within their published target of responding to correspondence from Members within 15 working days. I will ensure that a further copy of the letter is forwarded to him urgently.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Land Sales

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the land that his Department is *(a)* offering for sale and *(b)* plans to offer in the next 12 months, giving its (i) location and (ii) size. [59057]

Beverley Hughes: The Home Department is currently offering the following land for sale:

Ashwell, Oakham, Rutland—approximately 0.03 hectares

Bullwood Hall, Hockley, Essex—approximately 0.25 hectares

Guysmarsh, Shaftesbury, Dorset—approximately 1 hectare

Shepton Mallet, Somerset—approximately 2 hectares

Leyhill, Wotton-under-Edge, Gloucestershire—approximately 6 hectares

Lincoln—approximately 0.10 hectares

Long Lartin, Evesham, Worcestershire—approximately 0.4 hectares

Erlestoke, Devizes, Wiltshire—approximately 0.6 hectares

Swinfen Hall, Lichfield, Staffordshire—approximately 40 hectares

Blundeston, Lowestoft, Suffolk—approximately 30 hectares.

The Department has plans to dispose of the following sites over the next 12 months:

Wandsworth, London SW18—approximately 1 hectare

Branston, Burton-on-Trent—approximately 30 hectares

Feltham, Middlesex—approximately 1.5 hectares

Northallerton, North Yorkshire—approximately 2.5 hectares

Onley, Willoughby, Warwickshire—approximately 40 hectares

Littlehey, Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire—approximately 30 hectares

Gartree, Market Harborough, Leicestershire—approximately 2.5 hectares

Grendon, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire—approximately 0.4 hectares

Channings Wood, Newton Abbott, Devon—approximately 5 hectares.

The Department is currently offering for sale the following freehold properties which comprise both land and buildings:

8 Derby Street, Prescot, Merseyside

Carlisle Workshop, Stanley Way, off Botchergate, Cumbria

Coalpit Lane, Atherton, Greater Manchester—building floor area 449 sq metres

Kennedy Way, Yate, Gloucestershire—building floor area 226 sq metres

Winckley Square, Lancaster—building floor area 300 sq metres.

The Department plans to dispose of the following freehold land and buildings over the next 12 months:

Gringley on the Hill, Nottinghamshire—approximately 2.36 hectares

2a Blake Street, Bridgewater, Somerset—building floor area 820 sq metres

11a Church Street, Highbridge, Somerset—building floor area 155 sq metres

31–45 Lower Ashley Rd, St. Pauls, Bridewell, Somerset—building floor area 259 sq metres

Devon House, 123 Whitehall Road, Easton, Somerset—building floor area 259 sq metres

1 Stanley Place, Chester, Cheshire—building floor area 650 sq metres

Lime House, Penrith, Wetheral, Cumbria

18 Brunswood Road, Matlock Bath, Derbyshire—building floor area 456 sq metres

2 Siddals Road, Derby, Derbyshire—building floor area 312 sq metres

Heather House, 11 and 14 Gibbon Lane, Plymouth, Devon—building floor area 1,140 sq metres

3 Kings Avenue, St. Austell, Bodmin, Cornwall—building floor area 331 sq metres

57–59 Commercial Road, Parkstone, Poole, Dorset—building floor area 525 sq metres

23 Grays Inn Road, Aberystwyth, Ceredigion—building floor area 227 sq metres

Francis Thompson Drive, Ashton-Under-Lyne, Greater Manchester—building floor area 412 sq metres

12 Minshull Street, Manchester—building floor area 1,334 sq metres

19–20 Gold Tops, Newport, Gwent—building floor area 606 sq metres

76 Oswald Road, Scunthorpe, Lincolnshire—building floor area 230 sq metres

12–14 Raymond Street, Thetford, Norfolk—building floor area 286 sq metres

Warwick Street, Gateshead, Tyne and Wear—building floor area 726 sq metres

11 Appleton, Newark, Nottingham—building floor area 262 sq metres

46 Nottingham Road, Mansfield, Nottingham—building floor area 491 sq metres

11 Newcastle Street and Watson Road, Nottingham—building floor area 172 sq metres

10–12 Salisbury Street, Shotton, Flintshire—building floor area 221 sq metres

Abeerhondda Road, Rhonda, Cynon Taff, South Wales—building floor area 756 sq metres

1–3 Ock Street, Abingdon, Oxfordshire—building floor area 370 sq metres

Langholme, 50 Albert Road North, Malvern, Worcestershire—building floor area 523 sq metres

Abbeydale House, Abbey Forgate, Shrewsbury, Shropshire—building floor area 469 sq metres

16 Church Square, Oldbury, West Bromwich, West Midlands—building floor area 284 sq metres

High Street, West Bromwich, West Midlands—building floor area 250 sq metres

1–2 Commercial Road, Swindon, Wiltshire—building floor area 593 sq metres

15 Milton Road, Swindon, Wiltshire—building floor area 570 sq metres.

Charging

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to transfer the charging process for offences from the police to the Crown Prosecution Service; and if he will make a statement. [61326]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* The recommendation to this effect in the Review of Criminal Courts is under consideration and the Government's response will be announced in a White Paper before the summer recess.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* deportees and *(b)* asylum seekers are in prison; and how many were in prison in each of the past five years. [62346]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* The latest available information on the number of persons detained in prison solely under Immigration Act powers relates to 30 March 2002 and is as follows:

Immigration Act detainees as at 30 March 2002

Total detainees: 145

Of whom asylum seekers: 100.

Statistics showing the number of persons detained in prison solely under Immigration Act powers over the last five years is not available.

The Government are committed to pursuing a strategy of detaining both immigration offenders and asylum seekers in dedicated removal centres. Prisons are used for a small number of detainees who cannot be managed within the immigration removal estate.

Information on Immigration Act detainees as at 29 June 2002 will be published on 30 August 2002 on the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Dungavel Detention Centre

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 10 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 384W, on Premier Services, when a copy of the service aspect of the contract with Premier Services in connection with the operation of Dungavel detention centre will be placed in the Library. [62974]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 18 June 2002]:* I have made arrangements for copies of the service aspect of the contract to be placed in the Library this week.

Sexual Offences Review

Ann Keen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to publish a response to the consultation on the review of sexual offences, "Setting the Boundaries: Reforming the Law on Sex Offences"; and if he will make a statement. [63425]

Mr. Blunkett: I intend to publish a response to the consultation and the recommendations in "Setting the Boundaries", setting out proposals for legislation in the autumn. At the same time, I shall publish proposals for reform of the Sex Offenders Act 1997 following the review of its provisions and subsequent consultation. I will introduce modernised and strengthened legislation on sex offences and sex offenders as soon as parliamentary time allows.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he will reply to the questions from the hon. Member for the Isle of Wight of 1 March, Refs 39922, 39933 and 40040. [55462]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Replies were given to the hon. Member's questions on 14 May, 21 May and 17 June.

Regional Organisations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what regional organisation his Department has; and if he will list the counties and unitary authorities in each region in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2002. [58952]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Department for Work and Pensions does not have a regional organisation as such. It is a national organisation covering Great Britain, and operates out of a number of locations around the country. However, the work of three of its executive agencies is organised on a regional basis. The regional structures of Jobcentre Plus, The Pension Service and the Child Support Agency are shown in their Business Plans which are available in the Library of the House, or on the Department's web site (www.dwp.gov.uk).

Jobcentre Plus and The Pension Service were launched as agencies in April 2002 so comparisons cannot be made with 1997. The Child Support Agency organisation remains the same as in 1997.

Other departmental businesses operate through centres spread across the country, but without a formal regional organisation. Non Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs) sponsored by the Department do not have formal regional organisations. The Independent Living Funds in particular work closely with local authorities.

Truancy

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when she expects to consult on the withdrawal of child benefit in respect of truancy. [59281]

Malcolm Wicks: The Government is considering a number of measures to combat truancy. We are therefore looking at ways of ensuring parents meet their responsibilities in bringing up their children.

Demographic Statistics

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the number of *(a)* women reaching 60 and *(b)* men reaching 65 in each of the next five years. [61257]

Mr. McCartney: The available information, which is based on mid-year estimates, is set out in the table:

UK population estimates

	2003	*2004*	*2005*	*2006*	*2007*
Women aged 60	332,000	348,000	346,000	350,000	447,000
Men aged 65	273,000	274,000	271,000	256,000	277,000

Source:

GAD 2000 Based Mid-Year Population Projections

Special Heating Allowance

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the estimated costs are of the special heating allowance paid to all pensioners in 2002–03. [61258]

Mr. McCartney: The estimated cost of winter fuel payments in winter 2002–03 is around £1.7 billion. These payments are made to most people aged 60 or over, not just those in receipt of a state retirement pension.

Basic State Pension

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the cost would be of increasing the basic state pension *(a)* for the single pensioner to £120 per week for the over 75s and *(b)* for married couples to £150 a week for the over 75s in 2002–03. [61260]

Mr. McCartney: The information is not available in the format requested. However, such information as is available shows that the additional cost of increasing the maximum rate payable of a category A, AB or B basic state pension to £120 per week for those aged 75 and over would be £8.4 billion in 2002–03.

Note:

The cost is gross and is in cash terms, rounded to the nearest £100 million, based on September 2001 GB administrative data.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 20 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 42W, why the practice of up-rating basic state pension increments in line with the percentage increase in the rest of the basic pension was not followed in April 2001; and why the practice was resumed in April 2002. [62608]

Mr. McCartney: Once retirement pension is in payment, social security legislation requires that the value of all the components of RP must be uprated each year by at least the level of price inflation, which was 3.3 per cent. for the April 2001 uprating. In accordance with that requirement, all increments, including basic pension increments were uprated by 3.3 per cent., while basic state pension was increased by substantially more than the rate of price inflation.

For the April 2002 uprating we decided that the more generous uprating should also apply to increments.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 10 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 880W, on the cost of the basic state pension if increased in line with prices, what assumptions he made regarding *(a)* fluctuations in the rate of inflation and *(b)* the incidence of inflation rates below 2.5 per cent. [62626]

Mr. McCartney: We assumed that fluctuations in the rate of inflation are consistent with predicted inflation from the Treasury Economic Assumptions (of January 2002) until the year 2008, after which we assume long-run inflation is constant each year at 2.5 per cent. Thus inflation rates after 2008 are assumed to never be below 2.5 per cent.

In addition, the costs take account of our guarantee to increase the basic state pension by at least £100 a year for single pensioners and £160 for couples in the 2003–04 and in future years by 2.5 per cent. or the increase in the September retail prices index, whichever is the higher.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the cost would be of increasing the basic state pension *(a)* for the single pensioner to £120 a week and *(b)* for married couples for £150 a week in 2002–03. [61263]

Mr. McCartney: The information is not available in the format requested. However, such information as is available shows that the additional cost of increasing the maximum rate payable of a category A, AB or B basic state pension to £120 per week would be £17.7 billion in 2002–03.

Note:

The cost is gross and is in cash terms, rounded to the nearest £100 million, based on September 2001 GB administrative data.

Pension Funds

Mr. Pollard: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether regulations on stakeholder pensions to require pension funds to spread charges evenly throughout the year will increase the cost of auditing such pension charges; what plans he has to amend these regulations to allow charges to be deducted on an annual or monthly basis; and if he will make a statement. [61788]

Mr. McCartney: One of the key features of stakeholder pensions is the 1 per cent. charge. The calculation of the charge by reference to a daily amount is the best way of taking an average 1 per cent. of the member's fund over a year.

Although charges have to be calculated as a daily amount, the valuation of the fund, on which the charge is based, can be made on a daily, weekly or monthly basis.

We have no plans to change the rules on the way that the stakeholder charge is calculated. However we are looking at the audit requirements for stakeholder pension schemes, and any changes will be announced in due course.

Means-tested Benefits

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the costs of means-tested benefits, including housing benefit, were for *(a)* men over 65 and *(b)* women over 60 in 2001–02. [61261]

Mr. McCartney: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available shows that cost of means tested benefits to people aged 60 and over for 2001–02 was £10.214 million.

Source:

Departmental Report 2002

European Year of Disabled People

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions who will sit on his Department's Co-ordinating Committee for the European Year of Disabled People. [62607]

Maria Eagle: The following organisations sit on the UK National Co-ordinating Committee for the European Year of Disabled People 2003.

UK Disability Forum for European Affairs,
British Council of Disabled People,
Inclusion Scotland,
Disability Wales,
Disability Action Northern Ireland,
RADAR (representing the Disability Charities Consortium),
Disability Rights Commission,
Northern Ireland Equality Commission,
National Council of Voluntary Organisations,
Broadcasters' Disability Network,
Trades Union Congress,
Confederation of British Industry,
Federation of Small Businesses,
Local Government Association,
The Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister Northern Ireland,
Department for Work and Pensions.

National Pensions Systems Plan

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the organisations that he plans to consult in drawing up the national pension plan; and if he will make a statement. [61364]

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what discussions he has had with Ministers from other EU countries about the National Pensions Systems Plan; and if he will make a statement; [61951]

(2) what representations he has received from and discussions he has had with UK organisations representing pensioners regarding the National Pensions Systems Plan; and if he will make a statement. [61952]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* The Department for Work and Pensions has a range of regular contacts with organisations with an interest in pension provision and plans to use these contacts to ensure appropriate input to the preparation of the UK's national strategy report on the future of pension systems. EU member states have agreed to produce reports by September 2002, as part of an exercise to exchange information and best practice.

The report will set out measures currently in place and others that are currently planned or under consideration. A draft Joint Commission/Council Report based on the information in the reports from member states will be considered by EU Heads of State and Government at the spring European Council in 2003.

Representations have been received from organisations representing pensioners about the national strategy report process. They will have an opportunity to contribute to the process through the contacts we are arranging.

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the mandate of the Committee of Senior Labour Inspectors is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [61725]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

The Committee of Senior Labour Inspectors (SLIC) was formally established by the European Commission in 1995 (Decision 95/319/EC) and mandated to give its opinion on all problems relating to the enforcement by member states of Community law on health and safety at work. In the last 12 months SLIC has met once in Belgium and once in Spain during their respective presidencies of the EU.

Each member state has two representatives. The UK is represented by Mr. Justin McCracken, Deputy Director General (Operations) and Dr. Adrian Ellis, Director of Field Operations both of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

Travel and subsistence for their attendance of the last two meetings cost £2,320 of which the European Commission reimburses the cost of travel (£940).

The latest meeting discussed progress with the SLIC work programme including the assessment of health and safety systems in EU and candidate countries, asbestos, the European campaign on health and safety in construction, future co-operation with candidate countries, health and safety aspects related to working time, and SLIC's role in the European Commission's future health and safety strategy.

SLIC is accountable to the European Commission and submits an annual report on its activities to the Commission with particular reference to any problem relating to the enforcement or monitoring of Community legislation on health and safety at work. The Commission forwards that report to the Council of Ministers, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Advisory Committee on Safety, Hygiene and Health Protection at Work.

The Advisory Committee produces an annual report which is sent to the Cabinet Office which is then passed to the House of Lords and Commons European Scrutiny Committee; HSE submits an explanatory memorandum to the Scrutiny Committee on the Advisory Committee's report.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Criminal Offences

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many criminal offences have been *(a)* created and *(b)* abolished by his Department since 1997. [55425]

Mr. Leslie: I have been asked to reply.

A comprehensive and exhaustive list of new and abolished offences could be provided only at disproportionate cost. We can however provide information about the following measures which have been enacted since 1997 by the former DETR and DTLR.

The Regional Development Agencies Act 1998 created two offences.

The Private Hire Vehicles (London) Act 1998 created 14 offences.

The Water Industry Act 1999 created one offence. The Local Government Act 1999 created one offence. The Greater London Authority Act 1999 created four offences.

The Transport Act 2000 created 18 offences. The Local Government Act 2000 created three offences. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 created three offences.

Pensions

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much was spent by his Department on paying pensions to retired employees of his Department in 2001–02; if he will estimate the corresponding amounts to be spent in *(a)* five years' time, *(b)* 10 years' time, *(c)* 20 years' time and *(d)* 30 years' time; if he will estimate in each case the proportion of such liabilities which will arise from (i) unfunded pension schemes and (ii) pre-funded pension schemes; and in the case of pre-funded schemes, if he will estimate the value of the corresponding pre-funded funds in each of these years. [57367]

Mr. Leslie: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave when I was Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 23 May 2002, *Official Report*, columns 561–62W.

Press Releases

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) how many press releases have been issued by his Department in each month of 2002; [59491]

(2) how many press releases were issued by his Department in each month between May and December 1997. [59490]

Mr. Leslie: I have been asked to reply.

The DTLR was created in June 2001. Figures for the former DETR(c) are as follows:

1997	*Number*
May	37
June	85
July	98
August	41
September	2
October	81
November	86
December	87

DTLR (c) has issued 197 press releases in the period from 1 January to 23 May 2002 as follows:

	Number
January	25
February	46
March	57
April	28
To 23 May	41

Correspondence

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many letters were received by each Minister in his Department in each month since June 1997. [59307]

Mr. Leslie: I have been asked to reply.

The Cabinet Office, on an annual basis, publishes a report to Parliament on the volume of Members' correspondence received by Departments. For information for 2001 I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, South (Mr. Clarke) on Friday 24 May 2002 *Official Report*, columns 674–76W when I was Parliamentary Secretary for the Cabinet Office.

On other correspondence received by Ministers, this information is not held centrally and can be obtained only at a disproportionate cost.

External Consultants

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much expenditure his Department has incurred in each year since 1997 on employing external consultants to deal with the press or public relations of his Department. [59489]

Mr. Leslie: I have been asked to reply.

Details on expenditure incurred by the former DTLR in the period 1998–99 to 2001–01 on employing external PR consultants are as follows:

£

	Department	*Agencies*
1998–99	0	5,000
1999–2000	683,600	4,300
2000–01	748,900	84,500
2001–02	621,386	13,500

Following departmental changes, DTLR expenditure for the period 1997–98 and expenditure by non-departmental public bodies over the period could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proportion of ordinary written questions for his Department were answered within a week of tabling in each month since June 2001; and what proportion of questions for named day received a substantive answer on that day in each month since June 2001. [58982]

Mr. Leslie: I have been asked to reply.

The information in respect of the former Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions is as follows.

	Ordinary written questions			Named day questions		
Month	Total	Answered within a week	Percentage of total	Total	Answered on the named day	Percentage of total
2001						
June	172	142	83	38	28	74
July	284	270	95	161	126	78
October	419	347	83	241	154	64
November	721	607	84	394	282	72
December	634	519	82	185	128	69
2002						
January	707	499	71	289	199	69
February	653	454	70	241	129	54
March	682	548	80	300	158	53
April	458	400	87	181	105	58
May	323	286	89	152	122	80

Departmental Sponsors

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what the duties are of hon. Members appointed as sponsors to his Department; and what assistance is given by officials in his Department to them in carrying out these duties; [59986]

(2) which hon. Members have been appointed as sponsors to his Department since 7 June 2001; and when each of them were appointed. [59973]

Mr. Leslie: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member the answer given by my hon. Friend the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Dr. Whitehead) to the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) on 22 May 2002, *Official Report,* column 345W.

Millennium Dome

Chris Grayling: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will place in the Library a copy of the agreement to dispose of the Dome site. [61995]

Mr. McNulty: The agreement is commercially confidential. Release of commercial details could affect ongoing discussions with third parties, both before and after planning permission is obtained; and the ability of English Partnerships to secure maximum value for money for the public purse.

Full details of the agreement are being made available to the National Audit Office.

Parish Councils (Audit)

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will estimate the cost to parish councils of the internal audit work which will be required to be carried out in addition to the main audit; and if she will make a statement. [62066]

Mr. Raynsford: All local authorities have been required to maintain an adequate and effective system of internal audit for many years. We plan to consult later this year on revised Accounting and Audit Regulations which will include proposals to make explicit the need for authorities to follow existing relevant best practice when carrying out their internal audit role.

Social Housing

Andrew George: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many new accommodation units have been created by *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* registered housing associations and *(c)* other Government registered housing providers in the form of (i) council houses, (ii) housing association units for rent, (iii) shared-equity properties, (iv) social housing as a conditional proportion of new private sector development and (v) other forms of affordable social housing in each of the past five years for which records are available. [62596]

Mr. McNulty: Information is collected from local authorities and Registered Social Landlords (housing associations) about the provision of new affordable social housing, which in the case of RSLs includes the acquisition of existing property from the private sector for refurbishment. Completions of rented social housing and shared or outright social ownership schemes as reported by local authorities and RSLs was as follows:

New affordable housing units: England

	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01	2001–02[1]
Local authorities					
New-build units for rent	323	194	102	717	n/a
Registered Social Landlords					
Units for rent	34,825	33,426	28,825	26,138	25,627
Units for shared ownership/sale	6,958	6,196	4,562	4,635	4,219

[1] Forecast

Note:

RSL schemes include 'off-the-shelf' purchases of properties built by private developers. Schemes for rent include additions to RSL stock holdings through acquisition and refurbishment, and as well as temporary social housing schemes such as Mini-Hag and short-life housing. Shared ownership and other sale schemes include DIYSO and HomeBuy.

Sources:

LA new build from DTLR Housing Activity return P2 (monthly)

RSL provision from Housing Corporation Stewardship reports

Other Government registered housing providers are housing action trusts (HATs) and the arms length management companies (ALMOS). All new units created by HATs have arisen from the major refurbishment of existing, or replacement of demolished, social housing. The small number of recently created ALMOS have not yet created any new units.

Reliable data about the number of private sector properties directly provided for affordable rent or discounted sale without any form of public funding are not available centrally. Local authorities have been asked to provide summary information on all affordable housing activity as part of this year's housing investment programme (HIP) returns, although on the basis of data first provided last year we believe that they may have under-reported RSL provision.

Available information reported through the HIP process about planning permissions for affordable housing units, including both low cost market and subsidised housing is as follows:

	Granted
1998–99	14,333
1999–2000	15,543
2000–01	14,768

Information for earlier years was not collected centrally, and is not yet available for 2001–02.

Asylum Accommodation Centres

Mr. Luff: To ask the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, pursuant to the answer of 10 June 2002 [Ref 59084] from the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what the format and procedures will be of non-statutory public inquiries into the proposed asylum accommodation centres; and if he will make a statement. [61275]

Mr. McNulty: Pursuant to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Beverley Hughes), no planning notifications in respect of the proposed developments have yet been referred to the Secretary of State for determination under the procedures set out in DoE circular 18–84. The circular sets out the various ways in which a dispute between the local planning authority and the developing Department may be determined. These are by means of written representations, a meeting chaired by an official of my Office, or a non-statutory public inquiry. The circular acknowledges that where there is evidence of interest of other parties it may be desirable to hold a non-statutory public inquiry.

Where the Secretary of State holds a non-statutory public inquiry under the circular, his practice is to follow the procedure in the Inquiries Procedure Rules which apply to local inquiries held into planning applications and appeals under the Town and Country Planning Act. The current rules are the Town and Country Planning (Inquiries Procedure) (England) Rules 2000. He would, of course, abide by the principles of natural justice and human rights at all times. After any public inquiry, the inspector would submit a report to the Secretary of State who would then determine the dispute.

Mobile Phone Masts

Mr. Norman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when the revised Code of Best Practice for mobile phone operators on the development of mobile phone masts will be completed. [62915]

Mr. McNulty: The Department is currently drawing up, in partnership with representatives of the mobile phone operators and local government, a revised Code of Best Practice on Telecommunications, which will include further advice and best practice on the delivery of telecommunications development.

We expect the code to be published during the summer.

Housing Debt (Newcastle-upon-Tyne)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the housing capital debt attributable to the housing revenue account of the City of Newcastle-upon-Tyne is *(a)* in total and *(b)* per dwelling chargeable to the housing revenue account. [62973]

Mr. Raynsford: In financial year 2000–01, the latest year for which audited accounts are available, Newcastle-upon-Tyne city council recorded a capital housing debt attributable to the housing revenue account of *(a)* £290,242,342 in total and *(b)* £7,927 per dwelling.

Fire Service

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what the average years of service with the Fire Service were for firefighters leaving the service in each year since 1997; [62926]

(2) how many people left the employment of the Fire Service in each year since 1997, broken down by *(a)* gender, *(b)* ethnic origin, *(c)* natural retirement, *(d)* early retirement, *(e)* retirement due to ill health and *(f)* dismissals; [62927]

(3) how many people were accepted for employment with the Fire Service since 1997, broken down by *(a)* gender and *(b)* ethnic origin. [62928]

Mr. Raynsford: Tables showing the number of people accepted for, and leaving, employment within the Fire Service for 1998–99 to 2000–01 follow. Information for 1996–97 and 1997–98 is not available. Information on the average years of service for those leaving the service since 1997 is not held centrally.

Number of successful male and female applicants for the Fire Service in England and Wales

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Wholetime			
Men	980	1,044	1,453
Women	29	59	97
Total	1,009	1,103	1,550
Retained			
Men	1,486	1,406	1,352
Women	57	85	87
Total	1,543	1,491	1,439

Note:

For 2000–01, wholetime date are not available for three brigades and retained data for one brigade.

Number of successful white and ethnic minority applicants for the Fire Service in England and Wales

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Wholetime			
White	993	1,057	1,483
Ethnic Min.	16	46	65
Total	1,009	1,103	1,548
Retained			
White	1,528	1,467	1,427
Ethnic Min.	15	24	8
Total	1,543	1,491	1,435

Note:

For 2000–01 wholetime data are not available for three brigades and retained data for one brigade. In the same year, six applicants were of undetermined ethnic origin, two wholetime and four retained.

Number of men and women leaving the Fire Service in England and Wales

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Wholetime			
Men	1,346	1,298	1,351
Women	7	15	15
Total	1,353	1,313	1,366
Retained			
Men	1,375	1,357	1,376
Women	35	35	52
Total	1,410	1,392	1,428

Note:

For 2000–01 wholetime data are not available for two brigades and retained data for one brigade.

Number of white and ethnic minority firefighters leaving the Fire Service in England and Wales

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Wholetime			
Men	1,327	1,305	1,356
Women	26	8	9
Total	1,353	1,313	1,365
Retained			
Men	1,385	1,383	1,423
Women	25	9	5
Total	1,410	1,392	1,428

Note:

For 2000–01 wholetime data are not available for two brigades and retained data for one brigade. One wholetime leaver was of undetermined ethnic origin.

Number of firefighters leaving the service in England and Wales by reason for leaving

	Wholetime			*Retained*		
	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Compulsory/voluntary age retirement	449	530	497	195	178	190
Medical discharge	650	590	593	87	81	80
Dismissal on disciplinary grounds	17	10	5	7	3	7
Other reasons	237	183	271	1,121	1,130	1,151
Total	1,353	1,313	1,366	1,410	1,392	1,428

Note:

For 2000–01 wholetime date are not available for two brigades and retained for one brigade.

e-Government (Local Authorities)

Ian Stewart: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what steps he is taking to encourage local authorities to work together in partnership to meet the Government's target for all services to be electronically enabled by 2005. [63770]

Mr. Raynsford: We are keen to promote and support local authorities in developing local partnerships with each other, and across the public sector. Such partnerships will be crucial in building services around the needs of citizens and customers, and in realising the economies of scale in terms of the investment requirement to see the objectives of e-government realised.

As part of our commitment to spend £350 million over three years to support local government online, we have made provision for £75 million over the next two years to support the development of e-government partnerships. From this amount we intend to provide some £47 million over the next two years to 64 local partnerships that submitted proposals to my Department. Details of the individual allocations will be placed in the Library.

We will also provide a £2 million programme of practical support over the next two years, to ensure that these partnerships are successful in achieving their aims and that the lesson learned from them are disseminated.

It is our intention to make available the remaining funds (£26 million) for further partnership proposals later in the year.

We will accordingly lay a Special Grant report before the House setting out this intention, in the near future.

Sustainable Development

Mr. Drew: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the role sustainable development will play in regional devolution. [62988]

Mr. Raynsford: The Government's proposals for the sustainable development role of elected assemblies in the English regions are set out in chapter 4 of the White Paper "Your Region, Your Choice" (Cm 5511), which was published on 9 May. An assembly's overarching strategy will act as the sustainable development framework for the region.

Population Estimate (South Kesteven)

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will state the assumptions on which his estimate of the population of South Kesteven for RSG and standard spending assessment purposes is based. [62582]

Mr. Raynsford: The current RSG and SSA calculations for 2002–03 use the 2000 mid-year estimates of population of the Registrar General as published by ONS in August 2001.

The ONS mid-year population estimates are based on the Census of Population allowing for the subsequent births, deaths, net migration and aging of the population that has occurred since Census day.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Belfast Agreement (Broadcasting Obligations)

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) pursuant to her statement of 7 May, *Official Report*, column 44, if she will make a statement on the discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland about the broadcasting obligations in the Belfast Agreement; [55719]

(2) what plans there are for the implementation of the broadcasting obligations in the Belfast Agreement. [55718]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 13 May 2002]:* The Belfast Agreement commits the British Government to explore the scope for achieving more widespread availability of Teilifis na Gaelige in Northern Ireland. Discussions with the broadcasting authorities and with the Northern Ireland Office continue, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and I will make an announcement in due course, when those discussions are completed.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the pay grades are for officials in her Department. [60033]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* The pay grades within DCMS are:

Senior Civil Service (nine pay bands)

Grade A (U)

Grade A

Grade B

Grade C

Grade D.

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much and what proportion of the departmental expenditure limit for 2002–03 had been spent by 31 May; what the figures were for 2001–02; and if she will make a statement. [61001]

Dr. Howells: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 17 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 130W.

Millennium Dome

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport whether revenues from the sale of the Dome will be given to lottery charities; and if she will make a statement. [61472]

Dr. Howells: The latest position on the Dome sale and the future of the Greenwich peninsula is set out in the written answer of 10 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 1033W by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Housing, Planning and Regeneration. The division of proceeds between the New Millennium Experience Company and English Partnerships has not been finally agreed, but a fair split will be established. Once NMEC's liquidation is complete, the company's share of proceeds will revert to the Millennium Commission.

Entertainments Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the cost was of the Department's 2001 staff Christmas party; and how many people attended. [61665]

Dr. Howells: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport's 2001 staff Christmas party was held at no cost to the public purse.

Disabled People

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what steps her Department has taken to ensure libraries are equipped to help visually impaired people access information; and if she will make a statement; [61982]

(2) what measures her Department has taken to encourage the production of accessible books for blind and partially sighted people; and if she will make a statement. [61981]

Dr. Howells: Although my Department does not have a direct remit in terms of the production of books, we are responsible for policy on libraries and are encouraging them to make books accessible to the widest possible audience.

In 1998 my Department introduced Annual Library Plans (ALPs), a planning framework for the English library authorities. These require library authorities to assess provision needs, and to include discretionary local targets for people with disabilities.

The Department's Public Library Standards include further targets, which are being developed, for materials of use to people with disabilities. The standards also remind library authorities of their obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

Since 2000 my Department's Public Libraries Challenge Fund has awarded over £234,000 towards the National Library for the Blind's "A Touch of" and "A Touch more" projects to improve services in libraries and Resource, the council for museums, archives and libraries, have published a best practice manual. We are also ensuring that the new People's Network and other government ICT initiatives take full account of opportunities to improve such services.

Prize Competitions

Miss Begg: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) whether the investigation into prize competitions will include *(a)* Women Empowering Women and *(b)* other gifting schemes; [62436]

(2) what the remit will be of the investigation into prize competitions under the gambling review; when it will begin; and when it will report. [62432]

Mr. Caborn: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Mr. Vernon Coaker) on 23 May 2002, *Official Report,* column 521W-522W.

We issued a consultation paper on prize competitions and similar quasi-gambling products, including gifting schemes, on 23 May. It is available in the House Libraries and on our website at www.culture.gov.uk. We intend to reach a view based on this consultation as to whether there is any need for further regulation in this area and, if so, what form it should take.

We are asking for responses to our consultation by 31 August and will announce our conclusions in due course after that.

School Sports

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what proportion of the £1.1 billion recently announced for sport in schools has been previously *(a)* allocated or *(b)* announced; [62984]

(2) which organisations will be responsible for distributing the £1.1 billion for sport in schools announced on 9 June; and what procedures will be in place to administer its distribution; [62981]

(3) if she will provide a breakdown of how the £1.1 billion for sport in schools will be distributed and the estimated timescale of the distribution of the money; [62980]

(4) from which budget heads the £1.1 billion to be made available for sport in schools will be provided. [62979]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 18 June 2002]:* New investment in school sport announced over the past two years amounts to £1.1 billion. £750 million is being invested by the New Opportunities Fund (NOF) across the UK as part of its PE and sport programme, with a view to bringing about a step change in the provision of sporting facilities for young people and for the community generally. This includes a £25 million contribution to the Space for Sport and Arts and £30 million to the Football Foundation. The deadline for stage one applications from LEAs—who will be responsible for allocating the funds to deserving projects—has passed, and applications are currently being reviewed by NOF. Decisions on these are expected by the end of the year, at which point work on stage two applications can begin. All programme funds will be committed by the end of 2005.

£110 million is being invested in England on the current phase of the school sport co-ordination programme to meet our target of 1,000 co-ordinators by 2004. These co-ordinators will improve the quality and quantity of sport in schools by creating opportunities for children to participate in more sport, linking secondary and primary schools to improve sport at the latter, developing links between school and sports clubs and increasing out of school hours activities. Funding is made up of £30 million from the Sport England Lottery Fund (SELF), £60 million of grant in aid from DCMS through Sport England and £20 million in England (with another £5 million in the regions) from the NOF Phase 2 Out of Schools Hours Study Support funding. The programme is being administered by Sport England and there will be 742 co-ordinators in place by September. In addition to this, the DfES has so far designated 142 specialist sports colleges, and has set a target of 250 colleges by 2005. With an average investment of £592,000 per college, this amounts to an investment of £148 million by that time.

The Government [illegible] investing £75 million from the capital modernisation fund in the space for sports and arts (SSA) scheme, with a view to providing greater opportunities for pupils and the wider community in deprived areas to participate in arts based and sporting activities by providing new, or modernising existing, facilities in primary schools. Funding is being made available through a partnership between central Government and lottery distributors, including £25 million from the SELF, £25 million from NOF PE and sport programme, and £5 million from the Arts Council of England, to create a £130 million programme overall. The SSA programme aims to fund around 300 projects. Grant offers were made between October 2001 and March 2002. Completion of the first project is expected shortly, with most of the building work getting under way during the current financial year.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will place in the Library a copy of the guidance for officials in her Department on answering parliamentary questions. [62977]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 18 June 2002]:* Guidance to officials on answering House of Commons written parliamentary questions was placed in the Libraries of both Houses on 12 April 2002 in response to a request from the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell).

I am arranging for copies of "Guidance to officials on answering House of Commons oral parliamentary questions" and "House of Lords written and oral parliamentary questions" to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Museums

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what progress has been made on the review of the National Museum of Science and Industry. [63658]

Tessa Jowell: My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for the Arts has today published the first stage report of the review of the National Museum of Science and Industry.

The report examines the roles and functions of the NMSI, and how these functions contribute to the delivery of wider DCMS and Governmental objectives. It identifies a number of ways in which NMSI can make a bigger contribution to DfES, DTI and DEFRA objectives.

The publication of the report marks the end of the first stage of the review. There will be no formal Stage Two process. However, my Department is embarking upon a major study of the collections storage of the DCMS-sponsored museums and galleries which should have implications for NMSI.

A copy of the report has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Mr. Pound: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what progress has been made on the joint review of the Museum of London, the Horniman Museum and the Geffrye Museum. [63659]

Tessa Jowell: My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for the Arts has today published the first stage report of the joint quinquennial review of the Museum of London, the Horniman Museum and the Geffrye Museum.

The report examines the roles and functions of the museums, and how these functions contribute to the delivery of wider DCMS and Governmental objectives. It confirms that the three museums are contributing strongly to the delivery of the Government's educational and social policy objectives. All three museums have potential to perform a regional or sub-regional role.

The publication of the report marks the end of the first stage of the review. The second stage will take forward the recommendations of the first stage and consider how the museums' services and functions could be provided more efficiently and effectively in the future.

A copy of the report has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

TRANSPORT

UK Airports

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimates he has made of the number of people using UK airports over the next 20 years. [60431]

Mr. Darling: I have been asked to reply.

In the Department's last set of air traffic forecasts published in 2000, it is estimated that on central assumptions 401 million terminal passengers will be using UK airports in 2020. This corresponds to an average annual increase of 4.2 per cent. between 2000 and 2020. To reflect the uncertainties inherent in producing such long term forecasts, high and low scenarios were also produced showing projected passenger numbers in 2020 of 461 million and 349 million respectively.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will estimate the average carbon dioxide emissions per passenger for a flight to *(a)* Miami, *(b)* Paris, *(c)* Tokyo, *(d)* Manchester, *(e)* New York and *(f)* Majorca, from a London airport, in each of the last six years. [60426]

Mr. Darling: I have been asked to reply.

Detailed estimates of the kind envisaged are not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost and would depend on the aircraft used.

Street Works

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what incentives are *(a)* in place and *(b)* planned to ensure that local authorities and highway agencies are incentivised to complete street works as efficiently as possible. [62630]

Mr. Spellar: A Best Value performance indicator, BV 100, measures delays due to highway maintenance works on traffic sensitive streets. All highway authorities are required to produce this indicator, and it is published annually. The public can readily compare the performances of the various authorities.

No further incentives are planned at present.

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy that the powers contained in section 74A of the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991 will not be made available to all local authorities until a full assessment has been made of the pilot schemes when they are completed in May 2004. [62631]

Mr. Spellar: Pilot schemes to test the powers under section 74A of the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991 began in Camden and Middlesbrough on 4 March 2002. Under these schemes the authorities can charge utility companies "lane rental" whenever the latter dig up highways to install or maintain their apparatus.

We appointed consultants (Halcrow) to study the effect of these schemes upon disruption caused by utility works and the costs which it imposes on those utilities. Any decision to extend the use of these powers to all local authorities will be based on a proper consideration of Halcrow's findings. We will also want to consult widely with highway authorities, utilities, regulators and other relevant parties before reaching a final decision.

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many fines have been levied on telecommunication companies under section 74 of the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991 in each year since the introduction of the scheme. [62629]

Mr. Spellar: Powers under section 74 of the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991 were activated in April 2001. These allow highway authorities to charge utilities up to £2,000 a day for each of the latter's works which overrun an agreed deadline. We have appointed consultants (Halcrow) to monitor the effectiveness of the new powers and they will be reporting to us later in the summer on the first year of operation of the powers, including details of the charges paid by utilities.

Ministerial Visits (Wales)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the *(a)* date, *(b)* location and *(c)* purpose was of visits by Ministers in his Department to Wales since 1997; and when he next intends to visit Wales. [62077]

Mr. Darling *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* My Department was formed on 29 May 2002.

Since 1999 the Government have published an annual list of all visits undertaken by Cabinet Ministers costing £500 or more during each financial year. This Government have also published on an annual basis the cost of all Ministers' visits overseas. Information in respect of UK travel is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

All travel is undertaken fully in accordance with the guidelines set out in the Ministerial Code and Travel by Ministers, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

Railway Track

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what the lifetime is of the different types of track used on the rail network; [62282]

(2) what types of track are used on the Railtrack network, including their technical specifications, with the associated manufacturer; and if he will make a statement; [62280]

(3) what technical standards the types of track used on the rail network have to adhere to; and who enforces these standards. [62281]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* These are operational matters for Railtrack.

Traffic Lights

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will publish the *(a)* guidance and *(b)* regulations he has given on the construction/erection of new traffic lights (i) at junctions and (ii) for pedestrian crossings; and if he will make a statement; [62875]

(2) if he will publish *(a)* the guidance and *(b)* regulations he has given to the bodies responsible for the (i) maintenance and (ii) control of traffic lights; and if he will make a statement. [62874]

Mr. Spellar: There is a wide range of guidance on the construction (including assessment, design and installation), maintenance and control of traffic lights contained in the Highways Agency's Design Manual for Roads and Bridges and in Local Transport Notes and Traffic Advisory Leaflets issued directly from my Department. This covers traffic signals at both junctions and pedestrian crossings. In addition, there is much material on this subject contained in primary and secondary legislation, and also in equipment specifications issued by the Highways Agency. A list of the relevant documents has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

The regulations covering traffic signals junctions and pedestrian crossings are "The Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 1994" and "The Zebra, Pelican and Puffin Pedestrian Crossings Regulations and General Directions 1997", respectively.

Pedestrian Crossings

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will estimate the average cost of constructing *(a)* pelican, *(b)* puffin and *(c)* zebra crossings. [62877]

Mr. Spellar: Site circumstances can affect the cost of constructing crossings by a substantial amount. However, for the simplest pelican, puffin or zebra crossing the costs would be in the region of £24,000, £27,000 and £7,500 respectively. This would include necessary design, equipment and civil engineering costs for a crossing on a typical 30 mph urban road. It would also include high skid resistance surfacing. For higher speed roads the zebra crossing would not be suitable and an additional cost of £10,000, for additional equipment and works, should be added to the pelican and puffin costs.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will estimate the average cost of upgrading a pelican crossing to a puffin crossing. [62876]

Mr. Spellar: The cost of upgrading a pelican to a puffin crossing will vary from site to site, depending on the number of pedestrian signals to be changed and the number of special pedestrian detectors required. Depending on the age of the installation there may also be a need to change the controller, cabling, posts, etc. However, the simplest conversion would be in the region of £4,000 to £5,000.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent assessment he has made of the average reduction in traffic speeds resulting from the construction of *(a)* pelican, *(b)* puffin and *(c)* zebra crossings; and if he will make a statement. [62879]

Mr. Spellar: The impact of pedestrian crossings on traffic speeds will depend on where the crossings are in the network. It is for local highway authorities to assess effects on the local road network.

Because many crossings will be located at sites which do not lead to significant interruptions to traffic flow, the impact on overall journey times from such crossings will be minimal.

Rail Track Access Charges

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the increase was in access charges granted to Railtrack as part of the last periodic review carried out by the ORR. [62295]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* Paragraph 8.22 of the Regulator's Periodic Review outlines that the base level of track access charges paid by franchised train operators in 2001–02 would fall by 11.2 per cent. in real terms in comparison to the 2000–01 level, then increase in real terms by an average of 4.7 per cent. per annum from 2002–03 to 2005–06.

End of Life Vehicles

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the Government will comply with the EU directive on end of life vehicles. [62036]

Mr. Wilson: I have been asked to reply.

The Government will transpose the directive once it has decided upon the method of implementation that best suits the UK. Consultations with industry and other interested parties continue, to ensure that all the implications of this complex measure are properly understood. No other member state has yet transposed the directive into national law.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Child Contact Orders

Margaret Moran: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will list the targets for each year since 1997 set for the Lord Chancellor's Department to increase the number of contact orders in family proceedings. [62437]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Lord Chancellor's Department first adopted a target 'to increase continued contact between children and the non-resident parent after a family breakdown, where this is in the best interest of the child', following the 2000 Spending Review. This target has not changed since then. The Department has set up a programme for the delivery of this target, including establishing a baseline for contact and setting up stakeholder groups to look at all aspects of contact, including the safety of both children and their parents.

Margaret Moran: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what recent advice the Lord Chancellor has received regarding *(a)* Articles 12, 3 and 19 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and *(b)* the Human Rights Act 1998 in respect of private law cases involving child contact orders. [62427]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Advice to Ministers routinely covers the compliance of legislation and policy both with the Human Rights Act 1998 and with international Conventions that the UK has signed or ratified. This includes the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Public Guardianship Office

Mr. Key: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the target time is for completing cases in the Public Guardianship Office; and in the last year how many cases have been completed *(a)* on target, *(b)* in one month, *(c)* in three months, *(d)* in six months, *(e)* in one year and *(f)* in over one year. [62011]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Public Guardianship Office supervises the finances of the mentally incapacitated. Its involvement in a case is ongoing while the client is mentally incapacitated. Therefore there are no target times for completing cases. The Public Guardianship Office publishes charter standards outlining commitments to service delivery for various aspects of case management including: responding to correspondence, making payments and appointing a receiver.

Child Witnesses

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the policy is of the Court Service on the treatment of children as witnesses in criminal cases. [60857]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I understand the hon. Member is concerned about the position in Northern Ireland. The Court Service there gives special consideration to child witnesses in accordance with the Courts' Charter for Northern Ireland. A range of facilities are provided at main court venues including separate child-friendly waiting rooms and live television links that enable children to give their evidence without having to enter courtrooms. The Court Service has also facilitated the work of the Young Witness Service pilot scheme provided by the NSPCC, and will participate in the roll-out of that scheme to additional court venues in due course.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Soames: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the cost was in the financial year 2000–01 of judicial and quasi-judicial proceedings involving asylum seekers. [52765]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I apologise for the delay in replying. The cost to public funds of running the Immigration Appellate Authority for the year 2000–01 was £35.4 million. This does not, however, take account of accommodation costs and costs for court service provided services such as personnel and training. It should also be noted that these costs also cover the immigration work undertaken by the IAA as well as asylum cases.

Figures are not available for the running costs of asylum cases taken to the higher courts. The High Court, Court of Appeal and House of Lords do not break down their costs by case type.

In addition to this, the Legal Services Commission paid out £81.3 million in public funding (formerly known as legal aid) for Immigration and Asylum during 2000–01. Of this, £4.9 million was paid out for bills relating to representation at the High Court. The remainder (£76.4 million) was paid out for Legal Help and Controlled Legal Representation in immigration and asylum matters. The figures on Legal Help and Controlled Legal Representation include cases before the Immigration Adjudicator and Appeals Tribunal, but also include work carried out on cases that completed prior to a hearing (for example a successful initial application).

Magistrates (Warrington)

Helen Jones: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) how many people from Warrington, North constituency were serving as magistrates in Warrington *(a)* in 1997 and *(b)* at the latest date for which figures are available; [32254]

(2) what progress has been made in appointing more people from the Warrington, North constituency to the magistracy in Warrington. [32370]

Yvette Cooper: Pursuant to the replies of 12 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 66 and 155W, I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising her concerns about the accuracy of those answers. As a result my hon. Friend the Member for North Swindon (Mr. Wills) commissioned further checks to be made and I regret to say that the figures given in original answers were not accurate. I apologise to my hon. Friend for the incorrect information she was given. There was no intention to mislead her or the House in so doing. In the preparation of the reply assumptions were made about the course of the constituency boundary which have turned out to be wrong. In the light of the further investigations, 41 per cent. of the magistrates currently serving on the Warrington bench live in the Warrington, North constituency and not 57 per cent.

As my hon. Friend has stated, the Cheshire Advisory Committee does find it harder to find people in Warrington generally who are prepared to put themselves forward for appointment. The advisory sub-committee for Warrington is working closely with the local council and the press to do all it can to encourage people to put themselves forward. I know that the advisory committee would happily discuss with her any initiatives that she feels might assist, and the secretary of the committee has been asked to contact her to arrange a discussion. I agree with her entirely that it is important that people from all sections of the community throughout an area covered by a particular court feel able and are encouraged to put themselves forward for appointment as magistrates.

HEALTH

Medical Students

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many medical students have dropped out before the completion of their course in each of the last five years. [61434]

Margaret Hodge: I have been asked to reply.

Information on non-completion rates for higher education students broken down by subject is not held centrally. For full-time first degree students who began their studies in 1998–99, the overall non-completion rate for the UK was estimated by the Higher Education Funding Council for England to be 17 per cent. England's completion rate is the second best in the OECD comparative league table.

Medical Schools

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on staffing levels at medical schools in London. [61468]

Margaret Hodge: I have been asked to reply.

The staffing levels at medical schools in London and elsewhere are for each institution to determine in the light of its operational needs and circumstances.

Coronary Heart Disease

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) whether he expects his Department to meet milestone 3 of the milestones for hospitals admitting patients for the management of heart failure in the national service framework for coronary heart disease; what additional milestones he plans to set to promote quality of care; and if he will make a statement; [44695]

(2) whether he expects his Department to meet the primary care milestone 3 in the heart failure standard in the national service framework for coronary heart disease; and if he will make a statement; [44694]

(3) whether his Department has met milestones 1 and 2 in the milestones for hospitals admitting patients for the management of heart failure in the heart failure secton of the national service framework for coronary heart disease; and if he will make a statement; [44697]

(4) whether his Department has met the primary care milestones 1 and 2 on the standard of heart failure in the national service framework; and if he will make a statement on coronary heart disease. [44696]

Ms Blears: Evidence from the primary care and coronary heart disease (CHD) collaboratives suggest that the primary care milestones 1 and 2 of the national service framework (NSF) for CHD are largely being met although we realise that the heart failure element is lagging behind the development of CHD registers more generally. Reports from the former regional offices indicate that hospital milestone 1 has also been met.

Progress towards the milestones is being monitored locally by strategic health authorities. The national focus has been on monitoring the immediate priorities. These were:

developing smoking cessation services

improving ambulance response times to category "A" calls

increasing access to thrombolysis in accident and emergency departments for patients admitted following heart attack

reducing time taken to deliver thrombolysis (reducing "door to needle" time)

improving the use of effective medicines after heart attack

establishing Rapid Access Chest Pain clinics across the country

increasing the total number of revascularisation procedures.

We are aware from individual contacts that protocols in both primary care and hospital settings are being developed. However, progress could be patchy as implementation of the NSF for CHD to date has focused on the immediate priorities. In due course, the commission of health improvement will provide an independent assessment of progress, including a specific review of the NSF for CHD..

With the focus on the immediate priorities, progress in the management of heart failure has not been as rapid as that in other areas. However, heart failure will be one of our key priorities during the middle phase of the overall 10-year NSF implementation programme. We are currently developing more detailed plans for improving services. We will consider whether there is a need for any additional milestones as part of this process.

Osteoporosis

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the number of *(a)* emergency readmissions and *(b)* delayed discharges as the result of osteoporotic hip fractures in the last 12 months. [56137]

Jacqui Smith: Information on emergency re-admissions is available in "NHS Performance Indicators: Acute NHS Hospital Trusts" and "NHS Performance Indicators: Health Authorities" which has been placed in the Library. The re-admissions data includes that for patients who received treatment in hospital for a fractured hip, but not specifically relating to osteoporosis.

Alzheimer's Disease (Memory Test)

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will visit Cambridge Cognition Ltd. in order to see a demonstration of the Cantab Paired Associates memory test for Alzheimer's disease. [56579]

Ms Blears: There are currently no plans to visit Cambridge Cognition Ltd. to see the Cantab Paired Associates memory test for Alzheimer's disease. Consideration is being given to the inclusion of a clinical guideline on the management of dementia within the programme of work of the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, and such a guideline would cover diagnosis of dementia, including memory tests such as this one.

GPs

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many GPs were registered as working within *(a)* the Weston area health trust and *(b)* the Avon health authority in each of the past three years. [58824]

Ms Blears: Information on general practitioners (GPs) is collected and held by primary care trusts (or their predecessor primary care groups and health authorities) rather than by national health service trusts. The number of GPs registered as working within primary care groups and trusts in the Weston area and within Avon health authority in each of the past three years are shown in the table.

General medical practitioners in Avon health authority and its primary care groups 1999–2000

	1999	*2000*
Avon health authority	705	702
Primary care groups		
Bath	72	73
Bristol East	43	41
Bristol Inner City	37	37
Bristol North West	88	90
Bristol South	67	62
Bristol South East	42	44
Bristol West	35	36
Greater Wansdyke	60	61
Severnvale	42	37
South East Gloucestershire	91	98
Weston Super Mare	45	44
Woodspring	83	79

Notes:

1. All practitioners include UPEs, restricted principals, assistants, GP registrars, salaried doctors (Para 52 SFA), PMS other and GP retainers.

2. In 2001, existing primary care groups within Avon health authority merged to become a different set of primary care groups and trusts. It is not possible to 'map' one set with the other.

3. Data as at 1 October 1999, and 30 September 2000 and 2001.

Source:

General and personal medical service statistics.

General medical practitioners in Avon health authority and its primary care groups/trusts 2001

	2001
Avon health authority	740
Primary care groups and trusts	
Bath and North East Somerset	145
Bristol North Cluster	84
Bristol South and West Cluster	74
North Somerset	178
South Gloucestershire	129

Notes:

1. All practitioners include UPEs, restricted principals, assistants, GP registrars, salaried doctors (Para 52 SFA), PMS other and GP retainers.

2. In 2001, existing primary care groups within Avon health authority merged to become a different set of primary care groups and trusts. It is not possible to 'map' one set with the other.

3. Data as at 1 October 1999, and 30 September 2000 and 2001.

Source:

General and personal medical service statistics.

Sexual Health

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent estimate he has made of the percentage of people below the age of 24 using a condom when engaging in sexual intercourse; what the average age is at which young people in the UK have their first sexual experience; and what percentage of new HIV infections in the UK since 1997 were among people under the age of 24 years. [58786]

Ms Blears: The second national survey of sexual attitudes and lifestyles (Natsal 2000) provides the best available evidence about current sexual behaviour. It was based on a survey of over 11,000 males and females aged 16 to 44 across Britain.

Key findings were that 83 per cent. of males and 80 per cent. of females aged between 16 and 19 and 77 per cent. of males and 76 per cent. of females aged between 20 and 24, at the time of interview, reported using a condom at first intercourse.

The median age of first intercourse among those aged between 16 and 19 at the time of interview was 16, for both males and females. Less than one-third of young people reported having sex before age 16.

The latest available information from the public health laboratory service shows that the percentage of new diagnoses of HIV in people under 24 years of age was 9.8 per cent. in 1997; 9.3 per cent. in 1998, 9.3 per cent. in 1999; 10.8 per cent in 2000 and 9.6 per cent. in 2001.

ME

Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent research his Department has sponsored into the causes of ME. [58739]

Ms Blears: The Medical Research Council (MRC) is the main Government agency for research into the causes of and treatments for disease and receives its funding via the Department for Trade and Industry. The Department has asked the MRC to develop a broad strategy for advancing biomedical and health services research on chronic fatigue syndrome/myalgic encephalomyelitis (CFS/ME). The MRC will be appointing an independent scientific advisory group which will include scientists with expertise in areas such as epidemiology, physiology, immunology, infections, clinical trials and psychological medicine. The MRC will be consulting with its consumer liaison group members as to the best means by which patient and charity perspectives can be taken into account.

The Department has not recently funded any research specifically into the causes of CFS/ME. The Department funds research to support policy and the delivery of effective practice in the national health service. However, the Department is supporting research on cognitive behavioural therapy in CFS and on family focused cognitive behavioural therapy for adolescents with chronic fatigue syndrome. Recently completed departmental-funded research projects on ME include a systematic review to determine the effectiveness of treatments and interventions for patients with CFS/ME.

Details of research projects supported through the national health service research and development levy can be found on the National Research Register (NRR) at:

www.doh.gov.uk/research.nrr.htm The NRR contains many details of projects/trials funded by the research councils and other funders.

Patient Data

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will amend the Health and Social Care Act 2001 so that its powers cannot apply to the wider use and disclosure of genetic data without the consent of the patient; and if he will make a statement. [59221]

Ms Blears: Section 60 of the Health and Social Care Act 2001 already provides safeguards to prevent confidential patient data being disclosed unnecessarily and the flexibility to introduce others where appropriate. The patient information advisory group will advise me, following discussion with the Human Genetics Commission, where additional safeguards are necessary.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to regulate the use and disclosure of genetic data; and if he will make a statement. [59222]

Ms Blears: Activity in this area is already regulated by the provisions of the Data Protection Act, the Human Rights Act and common law requirements. Where common law requirements are replaced by the regulatory code introduced through section 60 of the Health and Social Care Act 2001, there is flexibility to introduce a wide range of restrictions if appropriate. The Government are studying the Human Genetics Commission's report, "Inside Information—Balancing Interests in the Use of Personal Genetic Data", and notes that it makes no specific recommendations in relation to the disclosure of medical genetic data.

Regional Organisations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what regional organisation his Department has; and if he will list the counties and unitary authorities in each region in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2002. [58942]

Mr. Lammy: The Department's eight national health service regional offices and the counties and unitary authorities they served in 1997 are shown in table 1, a copy of which has been placed in the Library.

In 1997, there was no easily definable relationship between the Department's four social care regions and the administrative geography. Details of the relationship are not available centrally and could be compiled at only disproportionate cost.

From April 2002, the Department has nine public health groups (each led by a Director of Public Health) co-located with the Government offices for the regions and nine offices of the Social Services Inspectorate which are coterminous with the boundaries for the Government offices. The details are shown in table 2, a copy of which has been placed in the Library.

Heroin

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average waiting time has been for a heroin addict in Plymouth to obtain *(a)* detoxification and *(b)* rehabilitation treatment in the last 12 months. [59744]

Ms Blears: The average waiting time in Plymouth for a heroin addict to obtain in-patient opiate detoxification is currently four to six weeks, and to obtain an assessment for residential rehabilitation treatment is eight weeks. Waiting times post assessment vary, according to a number of factors, between four and twelve weeks.

CPHPC

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the drug CPHPC in the treatment of Alzheimer's disease and adult onset diabetes; and if he will commission further research into the effectiveness of the drug CPHPC in the treatment of Alzheimer's disease and adult onset diabetes. [60684]

Ms Blears: There are at present no plans to carry out, through the National Institute for Clinical Excellence or the health technology assessment programmes, an assessment of or research into the effectiveness of the drug CPHPC for the treatment of Alzheimer's disease and type 2 diabetes. We are aware of the development work currently being undertaken and will be very interested in its conclusions.

Alcohol Treatment Services

Ross Cranston: To ask the Secretary of State for Health further to his answer of 7 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 100W, on alcohol abuse, what advice his Department gives to primary care trusts on assessing local needs for alcohol treatment services and on ensuring that those needs are met through commissioning services. [60389]

Ms Blears: Primary care trusts are responsible for securing health services for their local population and are accountable to strategic health authorities for discharging their functions effectively, including their commissioning responsibilities. In addition, the national primary and care trust development programme was established last year to support the organisational development of primary care trusts.

Primary care trusts will be expected to honour existing agreements (financial and otherwise) previously negotiated by regional specialised commissioning groups and other specialised service commissioners. In 2002–03 regional specialised commissioning groups will also have a specific role in developing primary care trust capacity to commission specialised services as part of a planned transition to successor arrangements.

It is important to ensure that primary care trusts provide high quality public health services. Each primary care trust will have a director of public health and a multi-disciplinary health team whose focus will be on improving health and tackling inequalities. This will help to ensure that primary care trusts are well placed to assess and meet local need for alcohol treatment services.

Natural Health Products

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health upon what basis the Medicines Control Agency included in its Regulatory Impact Assessment of the European Traditional Herbal Medicines and Products Directive the statement that for many retailer, herbal remedies currently constitute a relatively limited proportion of shelf space;

with whom they consulted before presenting this statement; and what calculations they have made of the percentage of turnover such products represent for a typical specialist health food retailer. [60200]

Ms Blears: During preparation of the partial regulatory impact assessment (RIA), the Medicines Control Agency (MCA) visited a number of retail outlets, including health food shops, pharmacies and supermarkets. The Agency's broad assessment was that, typically, herbal remedies often form part of a wider range of products including for example, vitamins, minerals, other nutrients, organic food and a varied range of other herbal products that would not be classified as medicines. Clearly the proportion of shelf space allocated to herbal remedies varies significantly as between different retailers.

The partial RIA is currently under consultation and the Agency would welcome quantified information from retailing interests about the proportion of overall sales which relates to over the counter herbal remedies, that is remedies where the active ingredients are herbal only.

The MCA continues to receive feedback from key organisations in the herbal sector, such as UK manufacturers of traditional herbal remedies, that the introduction of the standards proposed in the directive is necessary if the long-term prosperity of the sector is to be maintained.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consultations the Medicines Control Agency has had with *(a)* the National Association of Health Stores, *(b)* Consumers for Health Choice, *(c)* Holland & Barratt Retail Ltd., *(d)* General Nutrition Centres and *(e)* other representatives of the specialist health food sector and its consumers, prior to producing its Regulatory Impact Assessment of the European Traditional Herbal Products Directive. [60199]

Ms Blears: The Medicines Control Agency (MCA) has had a wide range of discussions with a large number of interest groups from the herbal sector during development work on the proposed directive on traditional herbal medicinal products. Among those involved have been representatives of manufacturers, retailers, consumers, herbal and other complementary medicine practitioners, pharmacists and a range of individuals with relevant expertise. Interest groups from the health food sector taking part have included the National Association of Health Stores, Consumers for Health Choice, the Health Food Manufacturers's Association (HFMA) and the Institute of Health Food Retailing. In addition to meetings instigated by the MCA, the agency has participated in various conferences and meetings organised by external parties, such as the HFMA and the herbal registration forum, to discuss the implications of the emerging proposals. These discussions continue.

Computers

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many computers were replaced in his Department in each of the past three years; how the replaced units were disposed of and by which companies; and at what cost. [60758]

Mr. Lammy: In the last three financial years the Department has replaced the following numbers of personal computers:

700 personal computers in 1999–2000.

1,543 personal computers in 2000–01.

654 personal computers in 2001–02.

Figures for individual offices are not available for financial year 1999–2000. For the following two financial years, figures for the Department's regional offices are as follows:

	Number of PCs replaced
2000–01 site	
South East and London regional offices	190
Eastern regional office	64
North West regional office	106
Northern and Yorkshire regional office	138
South West regional office	94
Trent regional office	80
West Midlands regional office	62
2001–02 regional office	
South East and London regional offices	67
Eastern regional office	18
North West regional office	7
Northern and Yorkshire regional office	11
South West regional office	20
Trent regional office	29
West Midlands regional office	21

Note:

These figures exclude any replacement of equipment not funded from central departmental budgets.

Disposal

The Department normally disposes of personal computers to commercial companies who formally bid for, refurbish and resell the equipment, or break it down for spare parts. Successful companies have included OCM Business Systems Ltd., Metro Systems Ltd., and Computer Disposal and Recycling Ltd. The Department obtains a small income from this process.

Whenever practicable and bearing in mind the condition of the equipment, the Department also gives a small number of redundant personal computers to schools and charitable organisations.

Diabetes

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much Government funding has been allocated to research into the causes of diabetes in each of the last five years. [61376]

Mr. Lammy: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Baillieston (Mr. Wray) on 25 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 783W.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what extra resources he is making available to fund the National Service Framework for Diabetes; how those resources will be allocated; and if he will make a statement. [61938]

Mr. Lammy: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to him on 12 June 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1340–41W.

Gonorrhoea

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department is carrying out into treatments for gonorrhoea; and if he will make a statement. [61072]

Ms Blears: Appropriate antibiotic treatment should cure all uncomplicated gonococcal infections. However, increasing antimicrobial resistance undermines the effectiveness of treatment and means that the range of drugs available to treat the disease is reduced. We are funding a three-year project, the gonococcal resistance to antimicrobials surveillance programme (GRASP), to develop a national network to systematically monitor levels of antimicrobial resistance in England and Wales.

This enhanced surveillance programme provides a range of data that cannot be obtained from current surveillance systems and a means for more detailed monitoring of disease epidemiology. In addition, the clinical data and outcomes provide a mechanism for monitoring quality of clinical care, adherence to antibiotic prescribing policies and treatment guidelines.

Chlamydia Screening

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when the national chlamydia screening programme will be operational across the country; [61074]

(2) if he will publish the results of the pilot chlamydia-screening programmes in Portsmouth and the Wirral; and if he will make a statement. [61075]

Ms Blears: A report on the chlamydia screening pilots in Portsmouth and the Wirral will be published this summer. The pilots showed that this form of screening was acceptable to the target group and the professionals with 75 per cent. uptake among those offered screening and 95 per cent. of those diagnosed returning for treatment.

The national strategy for sexual health and HIV commits to beginning a programme of screening for chlamydia for targeted groups in 2002. The first 10 screening sites are currently being selected, and will be approved shortly. The pace of the roll-out of the programme across the country will depend on the availability of resources, trained staff and equipment, and cannot be precisely predicted at this stage.

Coronary Care

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether primary care trusts are obliged to wait for NICE guidance on drug eluting stents before allowing their use in patients. [61628]

Ms Blears: The absence of guidelines from the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) does not prevent the national health service using new drugs or technologies. Standing guidance to the NHS says specifically that they should not wait for NICE guidance, but should in the interim, make a local decision about whether to fund particular interventions on the basis of the available published information.

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether his Department has made an assessment of how the use of drug eluting stents will contribute to revascularisation targets set out in the national service framework on coronary heart disease. [61627]

Ms Blears: The Department referred drug eluting stents to the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) on 20 May 2002. NICE will provide evidence-based advice on their appropriate use, and at that time an assessment can be made of how drug eluting stents will contribute to revascularisation targets set out in the national service framework on coronary heart disease.

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what restenosis rate is associated with the use of bare stents in the UK. [61626]

Ms Blears: The Department does not collect data relating to the restenosis rate associated with the use of bare stents in England.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment his Department has made of the relative cost effectiveness of the *(a)* coronary artery bypass graft for coronary heart disease and *(b)* percutaneous coronary intervention; and if he will make a statement. [61363]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* The Department has made no assessment of the relative cost-effectiveness of coronary artery bypass graft and percutaneous coronary intervention (PCI). In general, PCI is a less expensive procedure. It is a less invasive procedure for the patient allowing for a quicker recovery and requiring a shorter hospital stay. The decision as to which procedure is appropriate is a clinical one based on an assessment of the individual patient, and for patients who are not suitable for PCI, coronary artery bypass graft may be the only appropriate intervention.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the average number of bed days for recovery from percutaneous coronary interventions in the last year for which figures are available. [61366]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* The average post-operative duration of stay for percutaneous transluminal coronary angioplasty in 2000–01 was two days. This figure is based on finished consultant episodes. There will be a small number of patients who may be transferred to another consultant following the operation, which is not reflected in this average.

Residential and Nursing Care

Mr. MacDonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the total income to local authorities that resulted in the last 12 months from including war widows' pensions when calculating charges for the cost of residential and nursing care under the National Assistance Regulations; and how many people paying charges under the regulations are affected. [61846]

Jacqui Smith: The requested information is not collected centrally.

Stents

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients per million population benefited from the use of stents in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* each other EU country; and if he will make a statement. [61955]

Ms Blears: The Department does not collect data on the number of patients who received stents. In 2000–01, the number of percutaneous transluminal artery angioplasties carried out in national health service hospitals in England was 25,698. It is estimated that about 80 per cent. of these procedures would have included the use of stents.

Figures from other European Union countries are not available on a directly comparable basis. Information about operations undertaken in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales are the responsibility of their own Administrations.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects NICE will complete its assessment on drug eluting stents; and if he will make a statement. [61957]

Ms Blears: The National Institute for Clinical Excellence is responsible for determining the detailed timetable for the appraisal topics referred to it. We have not yet been informed when its guidance on drug eluting stents will be available.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received regarding the provision of drug eluting stents; and if he will make a statement. [61956]

Ms Blears: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State has received no representations regarding the provision of drug eluting stents.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of how many patients would benefit from the use of drug eluting stents; and if he will make a statement. [61954]

Ms Blears: The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) issued guidance on the use of stents in May 2000. This guidance is due for review in April 2003. The Department referred drug eluting stents to NICE on 20 May 2002.

NICE will provide evidence-based advice to the national health service in England and Wales on the clinical and cost effectiveness of drug eluting stents compared to 'bare' stents, and on their appropriate use.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what cost benefit analysis his Department has undertaken of bare stents compared to drug eluting stents. [61362]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) issued guidance on the use of stents in May 2000. This guidance is due for review in April 2003. The Department referred drug eluting stents to NICE on 20 May 2002.

NICE will provide evidence-based advice to the national health service in England and Wales on the clinical and cost effectiveness of drug eluting stents compared to 'bare', stents, and on their appropriate use.

National Endometriosis Society

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to restore relief and research funding to the National Endometriosis Society; [62801]

(2) on what date relief and research funding for the National Endometriosis Society was withdrawn. [62800]

Jacqui Smith: The National Endometriosis Society will receive £10,000 from the Department in 2002–03 as a contribution towards the cost of its core activities. This is the final year of a three-year grant. In the autumn the society will be given the opportunity to apply to have the grant renewed from April 2003.

Drug Users (Treatment and Rehabilitation)

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what action the Government are taking to increase investment in drug rehabilitation services in Somerset; and if he will make a statement; [62396]

(2) how many units there are in Somerset providing residential rehabilitation for drug users; and if he will make a statement; [62398]

(3) if he will make a statement on waiting times from GP referral to initial consultation for users of illegal drugs in Somerset. [62397]

Ms Blears: The Government are committed to the improvement of drug rehabilitation services. In Somerset the overall budget for treatment rose from £2.383 million in 2001–02 to £2.71 million this year. Nearly £400,000 of new money is being spent on treatment this year alone.

Information on waiting times from general practitioner (GP) referrals to initial consultation is not collected centrally. I am, however, advised by Dorset and Somerset health authority that Somerset GPs generally refer patients to Somerset drugs services, which is managed by Somerset Partnership national health service and social care trust. Waiting times vary across the county but action has been taken to improve access to services, including funding this year for two nursing posts, one each side of the county, to focus particularly on improving waiting times.

There is one residential drug rehabilitation unit in Somerset. However, Somerset social services department contracts to use services in neighbouring counties as and when needed.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of drug and addiction consultancy posts are vacant in England at the latest date for which information is available; and if he will make a statement. [62401]

Mr. Hutton: The Department's "Vacancy Survey" (March 2001), lists figures for general psychiatry. There were 130 vacancies, with a 7.8 per cent. vacancy rate. This survey does not have a more specific breakdown of vacancies (for example figures for consultants with an interest in substance misuse).

Nursing Homes

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the deadline of 8 April for the reassessment of preserved rights of residents in nursing homes was met. [55320]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 10 May 2002]:* The social services inspectorate is monitoring the progress local authorities are making in assessing the care needs of people who were subject to the preserved rights arrangements. Information on the number of residents who have been reassessed is unlikely to be available centrally until July this year.

There may be cases in which local authorities were unable to complete care assessments by 8 April. In these circumstances, authorities are liable to pay for the resident's existing private arrangements with the care home until they are in a position to provide community care services formally. Subject to means, they can recover all or part of such a payment from the resident.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the *(a)* date, *(b)* location and *(c)* purpose was of visits by Ministers in his Department to Wales since 1997; and when he next intends to visit Wales. [62076]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* My right hon. Friend, the then Secretary of State (Mr. Frank Dobson), attended the Festival of Science conference at Cardiff on 7 September 1998.

Antipsychotic Medication

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research has been undertaken on the trend in prescribing of antipsychotic medication; what the key findings are; and if he will set out prescription numbers for such medication for each region and health authority for 2001 for age groups *(a)* 0 to 15 years, *(b)* 16 to 59 years and *(c)* 60 years and over. [56593]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* Prescription numbers for antipsychotic medication for each region and health authority for 2001 for age groups *(a)* 0 to 15 years, *(b)* 16 to 59 years and *(c)* 60 years and over are shown in the table.

Preliminary proposals for research to support the development of the national service framework for older people and older people's treatment and care including research proposals on the prescribing of antipsychotic medication were received in March 2002. These are currently being peer reviewed and short-listed, and decisions will be taken later this year about which research to commission.

Estimate number of prescription items dispensed in the community in England for all antipsychotics by broad age group by health authorities and regions, 2001

Thousands

Health auihority	*Children age 0–15 years*	*Elderly people age 60 and over*	*Aged 16 to 59 years*		*Items personally administered*	*Total*
			Exempt		*Charged*[1]	
Eastern Region						
Bedfordshire	0.3	20.5	16.6	4.6	0.1	42.0
East and North Hertfordshire	0.5	29.5	23.5	7.6	0.2	61.3
Hertfordshire	0.5	37.8	28.2	10.4	0.1	77.0
Norfolk	0.4	38.9	47.4	9.9	0.4	97.1
North Essex	0.5	36.5	30.3	7.7	0.1	75.2
South Essex	0.5	24.1	22.3	5.1	0.0	52.0
Suffolk	0.4	32.6	20.9	6.3	0.3	60.4
Total for Eastern Region	3.0	219.9	189.2	51.5	1.3	464.9
London Region						
Barking and Havering	0.2	14.3	11.5	3.5	0.0	29.5
Barnet, Enfield and Haringey	0.2	32.4	34.5	6.6	0.0	73.6
Bexley, Bromley and Greenwich	0.2	25.1	19.2	5.3	0.0	49.8
Brent and Harrow	0.0	13.3	19.5	3.8	0.0	36.6
Camden and Islington	0.1	8.9	25.1	2.7	0.0	36.8
Croydon	0.0	13.1	15.8	2.8	0.0	31.7
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	0.2	21.0	30.6	5.6	0.0	57.3
East London and the City	0.2	14.7	36.2	3.4	0.0	54.6
Hillingdon	0.1	6.2	6.8	2.0	0.0	15.1
Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster	0.0	8.9	15.8	2.7	0.0	27.5
Kingston and Richmond	0.1	12.9	9.1	3.4	0.0	25.5
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	0.3	26.4	34.0	4.0	0.0	64.6
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	0.2	23.5	23.3	5.3	0.0	52.3
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	0.3	14.9	17.1	3.0	0.0	35.3
Total for London Region	2.1	235.6	298.4	54.1	0.0	590.3
North West Region						
Bury and Rochdale	0.1	21.2	24.6	4.9	0.0	50.7
East Lancashire	0.3	25.1	30.3	5.4	0.0	61.1
Liverpool	0.2	24.0	36.6	3.4	0.0	64.2
Manchester	0.2	24.1	43.6	3.2	0.0	71.1
Morecambe Bay	0.1	21.1	15.3	3.8	0.1	40.3
North Cheshire	0.1	14.4	18.0	3.6	0.0	36.2

Estimate number of prescription items dispensed in the community in England for all antipsychotics by broad age group by health authorities and regions, 2001

Thousands

Health authority	*Children age 0–15 years*	*Elderly people age 60 and over*	*Aged 16 to 59 years*		*Items personally administered*	*Total*
			Exempt		*Charged*¹	
North West Lancashire	0.0	27.2	27.3	6.0	0.0	60.7
Salford and Trafford	0.2	31.7	31.0	4.5	0.0	67.5
Sefton	0.0	17.7	21.6	3.2	0.0	42.5
South Cheshire	0.2	32.0	26.7	6.7	0.0	65.6
South Lancashire	0.2	12.3	10.5	3.5	0.0	26.5
St. Helens and Knowsley	0.1	18.3	24.9	3.8	0.0	47.1
Stockport	0.1	23.8	19.9	4.6	0.0	48.5
West Pennine	0.1	20.1	22.9	3.6	0.0	46.7
Wigan and Bolton	0.1	30.7	25.3	5.1	0.0	61.3
Wirral	0.1	16.8	25.6	3.9	0.0	46.5
Total for North West Region	2.2	360.7	404.1	69.4	0.2	836.6
Northern and Yorkshire Region						
Bradford	0.1	22.5	24.7	4.1	0.0	51.4
Calderdale and Kirklees	0.3	28.1	24.0	5.3	0.0	57.8
County Durham and Darlington	0.3	31.3	29.1	5.4	0.1	66.2
East Riding and Hull	0.1	26.9	25.6	5.3	0.1	57.9
Gateshead and South Tyneside	0.3	17.9	16.3	2.9	0.0	37.4
Leeds	0.3	35.6	41.0	8.0	0.0	84.8
Newcastle and North Tyneside	0.3	28.8	31.0	4.2	0.0	64.4
North Cumbria	0.2	14.6	14.2	3.8	0.1	33.0
North Yorkshire	0.5	32.0	21.5	6.9	0.2	61.2
Northumberland	0.2	12.9	12.9	2.7	0.1	28.8
Sunderland	0.1	11.0	11.0	1.8	0.0	24.0
Tees	0.3	26.0	27.8	3.8	0.0	57.8
Wakefield	0.1	17.2	15.7	3.4	0.0	36.3
Total for Northern and Yorkshire Region	3.2	304.8	294.8	57.5	0.6	660.9
South East Region						
Berkshire	0.2	26.1	23.8	7.8	0.1	58.0
Buckinghamshire	0.3	22.7	19.4	6.2	0.1	48.7
East Kent	0.7	25.7	27.0	5.1	0.1	58.5
East Surrey	0.0	16.3	10.5	3.7	0.0	30.4
East Susex, Brighton and Hove	0.4	37.9	37.7	7.2	0.1	83.2
Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	0.1	35.3	26.2	6.7	0.1	68.4
North and Mid Hampshire	0.6	22.2	15.7	6.5	0.1	45.1
Northamptonshire	0.5	20.5	21.6	6.4	0.0	49.0
Oxfordshire	0.3	22.0	15.8	6.5	0.2	44.8
Southampton and South West Hampshire	0.4	27.0	22.8	7.0	0.1	57.3
West Kent	0.5	34.0	33.4	9.5	0.1	77.6
West Surrey	0.4	22.0	16.4	6.6	0.0	45.5
West Sussex	0.3	40.0	24.5	7.8	0.1	72.6
Total for South East Region	4.8	351.8	294.8	86.9	0.9	739.2
South West Region						
Avon	0.3	42.5	41.4	8.4	0.1	92.7
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	0.5	20.8	23.7	4.1	0.2	49.4
Dorset	0.3	33.1	24.5	6.4	0.1	64.5
Gloucestershire	0.4	20.1	20.4	6.8	0.1	47.8
North and East Devon	0.6	22.7	21.4	4.9	0.2	49.8
Somerset	0.4	19.4	15.2	3.3	0.1	38.3
South and West Devon	0.7	30.8	36.2	5.2	0.2	73.0
Wiltshire	0.3	26.6	20.3	6.4	0.1	53.7
Total for South West Region	3.5	215.9	203.1	45.6	1.1	469.2
Trent Region						
Barnsley	0.1	10.3	8.2	2.6	0.0	21.1
Doncaster	0.2	12.2	12.5	2.7	0.0	27.6
Leicestershire	0.2	32.1	35.2	7.3	0.1	74.8
Lincolnshire	0.7	32.4	23.4	7.8	0.2	64.5
North Derbyshire	0.1	17.7	15.2	3.1	0.0	36.2
North Nottinghamshire	0.1	18.3	11.5	3.0	0.1	32.9
Nottingham	0.1	22.1	17.3	5.0	0.1	44.6
Rotherham	0.1	23.3	11.5	1.8	0.0	36.7

Estimate number of prescription items dispensed in the community in England for all antipsychotics by broad age group by health authorities and regions, 2001

Thousands

Health authority	Children age 0–15 years	Elderly people age 60 and over	Aged 16 to 59 years		Items personally administered	Total
			Exempt		Charged¹	
Sheffield	0.3	20.6	21.5	4.2	0.0	46.6
South Humber	0.3	14.2	14.2	3.2	0.0	32.0
Southern Derbyshire	0.3	24.1	18.2	4.9	0.0	47.5
Total for Trent Region	2.4	227.2	188.8	45.5	0.5	464.5
West Midlands Region						
Birmingham	1.4	40.8	55.3	6.7	0.0	104.3
Coventry	0.2	14.3	16.7	3.2	0.0	34.4
Dudley	0.2	13.2	12.5	3.5	0.0	29.4
Herefordshire	0.2	6.2	6.4	1.4	0.1	14.2
North Staffordshire	0.2	22.4	16.9	5.0	0.0	44.6
Sandwell	0.2	11.7	11.8	2.4	0.0	26.1
Shropshire	0.3	18.4	15.0	3.9	0.1	37.6
Solihull	0.2	6.3	6.1	1.8	0.0	14.3
South Staffordshire	0.4	25.6	16.0	4.8	0.1	46.9
Walsall	0.1	14.6	11.6	2.2	0.0	28.4
Warwickshire	0.3	22.2	16.8	5.4	0.1	44.7
Wolverhampton	0.1	11.6	10.8	1.6	0.0	24.0
Worcestershire	0.6	23.8	14.9	3.7	0.1	43.2
Total for West Midlands Region	4.3	231.2	210.8	45.6	0.4	492.3
England	25.6	2,147.2	2,083.9	456.2	5.1	4,717.9

[1] Charged prescription items include those where a charge was made at the point of dispensing and where a patient has a pre-payment certificate.

Notes:

1. The analysis of the data for non-charged categories is based on a one in 20 sample of all exempt prescriptions submitted to the Prescription Pricing Authority by community pharmacists, appliance contractors, and dispensing doctors. Personally administered items are free of charge.
2. Antipsychotics are defined in the British National Formulary (BNF) paragraph 4.2.1, antipsychotic drugs.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 20 June 2002

TREASURY

Child Care

11. **Caroline Flint:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps have been taken to reduce the tax contribution for private child care providers. [60348]

Dawn Primarolo: Introducing the National Childcare Strategy shows that the Government recognise the importance of good quality affordable child care. We have encouraged and supported private child care provision.

Public Service Agreements

12. **Peter Bottomley:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish an assessment of the progress made in improving public services through public service agreements. [60349]

Mr. Boateng: Departments publish performance against their public service agreement targets in departmental reports.

Financial Regulation

14. **Paul Flynn:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what new proposals he has to improve the regulation of financial services. [60351]

Ruth Kelly: Since the FSA assumed its statutory powers on 1 December last year, it has been the single authority with responsibility for the regulation of the UK financial services industry, with rule-making powers. By 2004, the FSA will also assume responsibility for the regulation of mortgages and general insurance. The FSA has proposed changes to the polarisation rules that should enhance the benefits of competition and improve access to financial advice for many consumers and is working to ensure that information and disclosure to consumers of endowment mortgages and other financial products is improved.

Bingo

15. **Gillian Merron:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how he will ensure that bingo players benefit from the proposed extension of the betting and pools tax regime. [60352]

John Healey: We will do so precisely in the way we did when reforming the betting and pools tax regimes, by working with the bingo companies to produce a new system of taxation which boosts growth, secures duty revenues, and benefits bingo players.

European Union

16. **Michael Fabricant:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if his Department has analysed the annual fund flows into the United Kingdom deriving from membership of the European Union; and if he will make a statement. [60353]

Ruth Kelly: HM Treasury officials continually monitor UK public sector receipts from the EC Budget, and an analysis is published in the annual White Paper on European Community Finances.

Venture Capital

17. **Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the Treasury is doing to ensure the availability of venture capital in all parts of the UK. [60354]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government are committed to increasing the supply of risk capital for businesses throughout the UK. Backed by up to £80 million of Government support, regional venture capital funds will provide up to £270 million of investment in small businesses with growth potential across England. The devolved Administrations have similar public/private equity schemes. The Government have also invested £20 million in a £40 million community development venture fund focused on the most deprived wards in England.

Small Businesses

18. **Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received from small business representatives about taxation. [60356]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government have received a number of representations from a variety of organisations.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what bilateral discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry regarding new taxes and regulations imposed on small businesses. [63083]

Dawn Primarolo: The Chancellor meets regularly with Cabinet colleagues, including the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

Since 1997 the Government have introduced numerous measures to help small business, including:

making 40 per cent. first year capital allowances permanent;

implementing the recommendations of the Carter Review of Payroll Services;

cutting the small companies' rate of corporation tax from 23 per cent. to just 19 per cent. and reducing the 10 per cent. starting rate to zero;

introducing a 10p starting rate of income tax; and

introducing measures to ease the impact of VAT on small business.

The Government are committed to ensuring that regulations are fair and effective, so that they protect the vulnerable but do not stifle enterprise or productivity. Policy is to regulate only when necessary. Where appropriate the Government have exempted small business from certain regulations. Two examples are, exempting small shops from the new EU unit pricing requirements and exempting employers with 20 or fewer employees from the trade union recognition procedures in the Employment Relations Act.

Debt Cancellation

19. **Vera Baird:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about his policy towards the cancellation of the poorest countries' debts. [60357]

20. **Mr. Luke:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a further statement on his policy towards the cancellation of debt in the world's poorest countries. [60358]

John Healey: The Chancellor argued strongly for the further progress on debt that was made at the G7 meeting in Halifax, Canada, this weekend. The decision to complete the financing of the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) trust fund will allow a further $1 billion (£677 million) of debt to be written off from the poorest countries' balance sheets.

That will help them adjust to the impact of the world economic slow down following the tragic events of September 11 and the collapse in commodity prices.

Under its 100 per cent. policy, the UK is already providing total debt relief to all eligible countries under the HIPC initiative and continues to use every opportunity to press other countries to do likewise.

Manufacturing

21. **Mr. Jack:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by what rate UK manufacturing industry productivity has changed since 1997. [60359]

John Healey: UK manufacturing productivity growth has averaged 2.6 per cent. a year since 1997. The Government are aiming to deliver conditions for improved productivity performance over the long term, and to that end have introduced a range of policies to promote competition, and raise investment, innovation and skills.

35. **Brian Cotter:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received on the impact of the recent slow down in the eurozone economy on manufacturing industry in the south-west of England. [60374]

Ruth Kelly: The Chancellor and other Treasury Ministers regularly meet with manufacturing representatives from all regions and countries of the UK, including the south-west. These discussions cover a wide range of issues and the Government value the insights gained.

Customs and Excise

22. **Mr. Carmichael:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the deployment of HM Customs and Excise resources in remote coastal communities. [60360]

John Healey: Customs' resources, including its modern cutter fleet, are deployed flexibly around the UK coast on an intelligence-led basis to address smuggling threats. 16 people were sentenced to over 200 years in jail recently for trying to bring cocaine into the UK in yachts.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many customs officers are under suspension; in which regions of the country they are employed; what reasons led to their suspension; and if he will make a statement. [61337]

John Healey *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* The total number of Customs and Excise officers suspended as at 16 June 2002 is 12. Seven are employed in the north of England, three in London, and two in the south of England. All involve allegations of potential gross misconduct, which if proved may result in dismissal.

It is Customs and Excise policy that suspension is normally only imposed in the most serious cases, when it is necessary and in the public interest. Suspension is always without prejudice, and does not anticipate any decision about the allegations made.

Further Education

23. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with the Department for Education and Skills on his plans to give financial support to 16 to 18-year-olds in further education. [60361]

Mr. Boateng: The Chancellor and other Treasury Ministers have regular discussions with the Department for Education and Skills.

Climate Change Levy

24. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of the climate change levy on those industries unable to qualify for rebates. [60362]

John Healey: All of the revenue from the climate change levy is recycled back to business through NICs cuts and support for energy efficiency. While the levy package is broadly revenue neutral to business as a whole, the effects on any specific sector will depend on a number of factors, including:

The future energy consumption of firms in the sector and the use they make of levy funded energy efficiency support.

Employment levels in those sectors and the benefits received from the levy funded national insurance contribution cuts.

What use firms in that sector make of electricity generated from levy-exempt renewable sources of energy and combined heat and power.

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has recently received from business organisations about the climate change levy. [60373]

John Healey: As part of the normal process of contact with business, the Chancellor and the Treasury ministerial team have met a variety of business organisations and individual companies, and have heard a variety of representations on climate change levy, and on other matters.

Pharmaceutical and Biotechnology Industries

25. **Dr. Ladyman:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent assessment he has made of the contribution of the pharmaceutical and biotechnology industries to the national economy. [60363]

Ruth Kelly: The pharmaceutical and biotechnology industries make a valuable contribution to the UK economy in terms of output, exports, employment and innovation. For example, the UK leads the rest of Europe in the industrial exploitation of biotechnology, and is the world's third largest direct exporter of pharmaceuticals.

Annuities

26. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the document "Modernising Annuities", with special reference to his policy on the upper age limit for turning savings into retirement income. [60364]

Ruth Kelly: As the consultation document "Modernising Annuities" sets out, there are sound financial reasons for people to annuitise their retirement savings by age 75. So the Government do not propose to abolish the age 75 rule.

The consultation, which ran until 5 April, was intended to stimulate discussion on annuity issues. The Government are now evaluating the outcome of the consultation before deciding how to proceed.

29. **Mr. Swire:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received from interested organisations on annuities. [60368]

Ruth Kelly: There were 601 responses to the Government's recent consultation document "Modernising Annuities". The Government are evaluating the outcome of the consultation before deciding how to proceed.

Working Families Tax Credit

27. **Charlotte Atkins:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the take-up of the working families tax credit within Staffordshire, Moorlands. [60365]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer my hon. Friend to my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Hepburn) on 16 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 293W.

World Poverty

28. **Mrs. Betty Williams:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the role of international trade in the reduction of poverty in the poorest countries. [60367]

John Healey: I refer the hon. Lady to the answer given today by the Chancellor of the Exchequer to the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Ms Mallaber), *Official Report*, column 395.

Road Fuels

30. **Paddy Tipping:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on rates of duty for *(a)* biodiesel/bioethanol and *(b)* fossil gas fuels, LPG and CNG. [60369]

John Healey: We shall be introducing a new, lower rate of duty on biodiesel on Royal Assent to the Finance Bill, 20 pence per litre less than the rate for ultra-low sulphur mineral diesel. We have also introduced duty incentives to encourage the production and use of road fuel gases, such as compressed natural gas (CNG) and liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) and have given a commitment that duty on these fuels will be frozen in real terms until at least 2004.

John Barrett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what consideration has been given to the *(a)* chemical marking of and *(b)* addition of yellow dye to UK petrol and diesel to deter the sale and use of illegal fuel. [62942]

John Healey: The Government set out their strategy for tackling the misuse of marked rebated oils as road fuels in "Tackling Indirect Tax Fraud", published alongside the 2001 pre-Budget report. Following consultations, action is being taken to tighten fiscal control over the distribution of rebated oils and to introduce an additional European marker for rebated gas oil and rebated kerosene. The Government have seen no evidence that marking legitimate duty paid fuel would constitute a more effective or pragmatic response to the problem.

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of cross-border fuel smuggling on the Northern Ireland economy. [62644]

John Healey: The Government are committed to tackling fuel duty evasion and its associated problems in Northern Ireland. Further details about road fuels fraud in Northern Ireland and the Government's activities to counter it have been published in the documents "Tackling Indirect Tax Fraud" (November 2001) and the Northern Ireland Organised Crime Task Force's "Threat Assessment and Strategy" documents (May 2002). Copies of these documents have been placed in the House of Commons Library.

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make an assessment of the amount of duty lost because of smuggling between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland over the last 12 months. [62936]

John Healey: Customs' most recent estimate of the total revenue loss from the use of non-UK duty paid fuels, including legitimate cross-border shopping as well as all types of fraud, is for the calendar year 2000 and is contained in "Tackling Indirect Tax Fraud", published in November 2001 as part of the PBR. The Government have undertaken to update those figures annually.

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the average cost is of a litre of *(a)* unleaded petrol and *(b)* diesel fuel in (i) Northern Ireland and (ii) the rest of the United Kingdom; and what proportion of the cost is made up of fuel duty in each case. [62639]

John Healey: The Department of Trade and Industry collect information on the average pump prices of unleaded petrol and diesel on a weekly basis across the UK. However, this information is not broken down by geographical region and so it is not possible to provide average costs for Northern Ireland specifically.

DTI data suggests that, as at 10 June 2002, the UK average pump price of a litre of diesel was 76.1 pence and the UK average pump price of a litre of unleaded petrol was 74.6 pence.

At those prices, 60.2 per cent. of the price of a litre of diesel and 61.4 per cent. of the price of a litre of petrol is made up from fuel duty.

John Barrett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many motor vehicles were seized in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the United Kingdom as a result of fuel fraud, in each year since 1995. [62943]

John Healey: Customs records of the number of vehicles seized do not disaggregate between the nature of the offences involved in each case. I regret, therefore, that this information is not available.

John Barrett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the estimated annual cost to the Treasury is from illegal use of red diesel. [62938]

John Healey: Customs latest estimates of the overall revenue loss from all forms of oils fraud were set out in the document "Tackling Indirect Tax Fraud" published in November 2001.

Customs believe the great majority of fraud on the British mainland involves the misuse of rebated or low tax fuels supplied for non-road use, but a specific estimate of loss from red diesel alone is not available.

John Barrett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment has been made of the use of illegally produced fuel in the financing of paramilitary organisations. [62945]

John Healey: Customs have made no such assessment. However, the Northern Ireland Organised Crime Task Force's Year Two "Threat Assessment", which was published in May 2002, contains further information on the role of serious and organised crime in oils fraud. Copies of this document have been placed in the House of Commons Library.

House Prices

31. **Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his assessment is of the impact of house prices on the performance of the UK economy. [60370]

Ruth Kelly: The impact of house prices on the UK economy was taken into account in the Government's latest assessment of UK economic developments and prospects, published in Chapter B of the Financial Statement and Budget Report, April 2002.

Welsh Assembly

32. **Adam Price:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will extend the borrowing powers of the National Assembly for Wales. [60371]

Mr. Boateng: There are no plans to extend the borrowing powers of the National Assembly for Wales.

Unemployment

33. **Simon Hughes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the recent 12-month rise in the claimant measure of unemployment in London. [60372]

Ruth Kelly: Despite rising over the past 12 months, claimant count unemployment in London has fallen by nearly 120,000 (42 per cent.) since spring 1997 and, as for the UK as a whole, remains close to the lowest levels since the 1970s. Moreover, with employment continuing to rise, increasing by 12,000 over the past year, the London labour market is stable and performing well by historical standards.

The Government's new deal programmes have eased the transition from welfare to work for over 124,000 people in London and the south-east who have moved into sustainable jobs.

UK Poverty

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress is being made by the Government in meeting their poverty reduction targets for the UK. [60339]

Mr. Gordon Brown: This Government are committed to reducing child poverty by one quarter by 2004, halving it by 2010 on the road to eradicating child poverty in a generation.

Central to this is the new child tax credit, which together with child benefit, will ensure that benefits for the poorest families—worth £28 a week for the first child in 1997—will be £54.25 from next April.

A meeting of the Joint Ministerial Group on Poverty with the Welsh, Scottish and Northern Ireland Administrations will take place next month to examine not just benefits but services to children.

Financial Services Authority

Barbara Follett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects the annual report of the Financial Services Authority to be published. [63946]

Ruth Kelly: The FSA annual report is being published today. Copies are available in the Libraries of both Houses. The report forms a key part of the accountability mechanism for the FSA under Financial Services and Markets Act 2000, and this report is the first to assess the performance of the FSA against its statutory objectives.

Timber

Ms Walley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the refurbishment projects that *(a)* are in progress and *(b)* will start within the next six months; and what action is being taken to ensure that these will procure certified timber. [59763]

Ruth Kelly: We are awaiting full details of the procurement of timber for the refurbishment of the Treasury building from the contractors concerned, and I will write to the hon. Member as soon as it is made available.

Self-assessment Tax Returns

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what penalties have been paid under the strategic partnership contract with EDS as a result of recent problems with the facilities for submitting self-assessment tax returns over the internet; and if he will make a statement. [63207]

Dawn Primarolo: No penalties have been paid under the strategic partnership with EDS as a result of recent problems with the facilities for submitting self-assessment tax returns over the internet.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update his answer of 27 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1330W, on self-assessment tax returns; and if he will make a statement. [63209]

Dawn Primarolo: The statistical data requested are as detailed in the table.

Tax Year	*Date*	*SA ITRs issued*	*SA ITRs received*	*SA ITRs processed*	*SA ITRs waiting to be processed*
2000–01	3 March 2002	9,607,600	8,729,200	6,889,791	1,839,409
	31 March 2002	9,641,240	8,803,111	8,006,918	796,193
2001–02	14 April 2002	6,354,061	26,919	0	26,919
	5 May 2002	8,879,206	283,553	73,251	210,302
	2 June 2002	9,079,836	751,446	323,245	428,201

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update his answer of 19 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 382W, on the cost of internet tax returns; and if he will make a statement. [63206]

Dawn Primarolo: The cost of providing self-assessment tax returns on the internet is:

Fixed Cost

The estimated cost of implementing the internet service for self-assessment for years one to three is about £17 million.

Marginal Cost

The on-going support costs, including maintenance, help desk support and on-going improvements to the system is between £3 to £4 million per annum.

Family Statistics

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is for the latest year for which information is available of *(a)* the percentage of children living in one parent families, *(b)* the number of live births per 1,000 teenage women and *(c)* the percentage of children born outside marriage, broken down by (i) social class, (ii) income, (iii) race and (iv) geographic location; and if he will make a statement. [62406]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 19 June 2002]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Laws, dated 20 June 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your request for estimates for the latest year for which information is available of (a) the percentage of children living in one parent families, (b) the number of live births per 1,000 teenage women and (c) the percentage of children born outside marriage, broken down by (i) social class, (ii) income, (iii) race and (iv) geographic location. (62406)

There is only limited information available for some of these topics. No information is available for lone parents by the divisions requested and no information is available for births by income. The information I am able to provide is found in the attached annexes. Annex A contains information by social class. Annex B contains information by ethnic group and Annex C contains information by geographic location. All data relate to the year 2000, the latest year for which data are available, unless otherwise stated.

Annex A—Data by Social Class

(i) The number of live births to teenage women

It is not possible to present the number of live births per 1,000 teenage women by social class as population estimates by social class are not available. Also social class is only available in England and Wales and Northern Ireland by father's social class, so it is not possible to derive social class for registrations where only the mother's name is recorded. In England and Wales a 10 per cent. sample of the fathers' occupation and employment status is used to determine social class. For Scotland births within marriage are categorised to social class of the father; social class of the mother is used to categorise births outside marriage.

The number of live births to teenage women are given in the following tables for 2000, the latest year for which information is available for the United Kingdom. Data for England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are presented separately because of differences between the constituent countries in the way social class is allocated (see above). The key for the social classifications is at the end of this annex.

The number of live births to women aged under 20 by social class of father, England and Wales, 2000

thousands

Social class	*Within marriage*	*Jointly registered outside marriage*	*Sole registrations*
I and II	0.7	2.4	Not available
IIIN	0.5	2.1	Not available
IIIM	1.4	9.6	Not available
IV and V	1.3	10.7	Not available
Non-manual	1.3	4.5	Not available
Manual	2.7	20.3	Not available
Other	0.8	3.8	Not available
Total	4.7	28.6	12.5

Source:

Birth Statistics 2000 FMI No. 29, England and Wales

The number of live births to women aged under 20, by social class of father if inside marriage and mother if outside marriage, Scotland, 2000

thousands

Social class	*Births*
I and II	0.1
IIIN	0.9
IIIM	0.4
IV and V	0.8
Non-manual	1.0
Manual	1.2
Other	2.4
Total	4.6

Source:

General Register Office for Scotland

The number of live births to women aged under 20, by social class of father, Northern Ireland, 2000

thousands

Social class	*Births*
I and II	0.1
IIIN	0.2
IIIM	0.6
IV and V	0.4
Non-manual	0.2
Manual	0.9
Armed forces, inadequately described and sole registrations	0.5
Total	1.6

Source:

Registrar General Northern Ireland Annual Report 2000

(ii) The percentage of children born outside marriage

The numbers and percentages of children born inside and outside marriage by social class are given in the following tables for England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland separately. The key for the social classifications is at the end of this annex.

The number of live births to women inside and outside marriage by social class of father, England and Wales, 2000

Social class	*Within marriage (thousands)*	*Jointly registered outside marriage (thousands)*	*Sole registrations (thousands)*	*Percentage outside marriage, where information on father is available*
I and II	161.5	44.3	[1]—	22
IIIN	37.8	15.0	[1]—	28
IIIM	91.6	68.3	[1]—	43
IV and V	56.7	53.8	[1]—	49
Non-manual	199.3	59.3	[1]—	23
Manual	148.3	122.1	[1]—	45
Other	18.2	11.4	[1]—	39
Total	365.8	192.8	45.8	[2]39

[1] Not available

[2] Percentage outside marriage includes sole registrations

Source:

Birth Statistics 2000 FMI No. 29, England and Wales

The number of live births to women inside and outside marriage, by social class of father if inside marriage and mother if outside marriage, Scotland, 2000

Social class	*Within marriage (thousands)*	*Outside marriage (thousands)*	*Percentage outside marriage*
I and II	13.1	3.3	20
IIIN	3.3	5.3	62
IIIM	8.1	1.9	19
IV and V	5.4	4.4	4.5
Non-manual	16.4	8.6	34
Manual	13.6	6.3	32
Other	0.5	7.7	94
Total	30.5	22.6	43

Source:

General Register Office for Scotland

The number of live births inside and outside marriage, by social class of father, Northern Ireland, 2000

Social class	*Within marriage (thousands)*	*Outside marriage (thousands)*	*Percentage outside marriage*
I and II	5.1	0.7	12
IIIN	2.0	0.7	28
IIIM	4.9	2.2	31
IV and V	2.5	1.8	42
Non-manual	7.0	1.4	17
Manual	7.4	4.0	35
Armed forces, inadequately described and sole registrations	0.2	1.4	87
Total	14.7	6.8	32

Source:

Registrar General Northern Ireland Annual Report 2000

The key for social classification codes is as follows:

Non-manual

I Professional

II Managerial and technical

IIIN Skilled occupations (non-manual)

Manual

IIIM Skilled occupations (manual)

IV Partly skilled occupations

V Unskilled occupations

Other—Residential groups including the unemployed, armed forces and students and those whose occupation was inadequately described.

Annex B—Data by Ethnicity

Information is not collected at registration on ethnicity, only on country of birth of parents. In a recent article in Population Trends[1] data from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) were used to estimate average fertility rates for births to teenage mothers by ethnic group in Great Britain. Part of Table 3 of that article is presented below, giving data for the period 1990–96. It should be noted that the results are based on very small sample numbers. No information is available from the LFS on marital status at the time of birth so it is not possible to look at ethnic fertility rates inside and outside marriage.

[1] Berthoud R. Teenage births to ethnic minority women Population Trends No. 104 TSO(2001) pp 12–17

Teenage birth rates per 1,000 for the years 1990–96 derived from the Labour Force Survey, Great Britain

Ethnic group	*Births per 1,000*
White	31
Caribbean	47
Indian	7
Pakistani	30
Bangladeshi	53
Other	23

Annex C—Data by Geography

(i) The number of live births per 1,000 teenage women

Teenage birth rates by geographic location are shown in the following table.

Teenage birth rates by country and region, United Kingdom, 2000

Country	*Rate per 1,000*
England	28.8
Wales	35.2
Scotland	29.1
Northern Ireland	26.1
Government office regions	
North East	37.2
North West	33.4
Yorkshire and the Humber	34.5
East Midlands	29.4
West Midlands	32.6
East	23.9
London	27.8
South East	22.2
South West	23.7

Sources:

Birth Statistics 2000 FMI No. 29 England and Wales

Registrar General for Scotland Annual Report 2000,

Registrar General Northern Ireland Report 2000

(ii) The percentage of children born outside marriage

The percentages of children born outside marriage by geographic location are given in the following table.

Percentage of births outside marriage by country and region, United Kingdom, 2000

Country	*Percentage*
England	39.1
Wales	47.2
Scotland	42.6
Northern Ireland	31.8
Government office regions	
North East	50.5
North West	46.3
Yorkshire and the Humber	42.9
East Midlands	41.2
West Midlands	39.9
East	35.3
London	34.5
South East	34.1
South West	37.8

Sources:

Birth Statistics 2000 FMI No. 29, England and Wales

Registrar General for Scotland Annual Report 2000

Registrar General Northern Ireland Annual Report 2000

Euro

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to assist Bank of England officials in making an analysis of whether the five economic tests for euro membership have been met; and if he will make a statement. [63120]

Ruth Kelly: The Government have said that they will complete an assessment of the five tests within two years of the start of this Parliament. It is clear that the assessment will be a Government assessment and that the work will be undertaken by the Treasury. Once the assessment is complete, the Government will publish the conclusions and the report.

Consultation Exercises

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many consultation exercises the Treasury has launched in each year since 1997. [59403]

John Healey: Details of HM Treasury consultation papers released since 2000, including their opening and closing dates, are available on the Treasury's website (www.hm-treasury.gov.uk).

Since 1997, the Treasury has issued 79 consultations on its website. The totals by year were:

2002: 7

2001: 32

2000: 15

1999: 15

1998: 6

1997: 4.

Public Appointments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what public appointments he has made since 7 June 2001. [62188]

Ruth Kelly: The Chancellor announced on 1 June 2002 that Laurel Powers-Freeling had been appointed to the Court of the Bank of England and that Bridget Blow, Sir Howard Davies, Sir Ian Gibson and Kathleen O'Donovan had been reappointed.

Earnings

Mr. Moore: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what percentage of full-time workers in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* each of the unitary local authority areas in Scotland and *(c)* Great Britain earned gross pay (i) including and (ii) excluding overtime less than (A) £302.12 per week, (B) £277.24 per week, (C) £203.85 per week and (D) £155.39 per week who were (1) male manual (2) male non-manual, (3) male, (4) female manual, (5) female non-manual, (6) female, (7) manual and (8) non-manual workers; [62914]

(2) what the average weekly earnings based on gross pay *(a)* including and *(b)* excluding overtime were for full-time workers in (1) Scotland, (2) each of the unitary local authority areas in Scotland and (3) Great Britain for (A) all manual, (B) all non-manual and (C) all workers in the last 12 months. [62913]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Michael Moore, dated 20 June 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent questions on weekly earnings for workers in Great Britain, Scotland the unitary authorities in Scotland. (62913 and 62914).

I am placing in the House of Commons Library, tables showing average weekly earnings, both including and excluding overtime, (Table 1) and the proportion of people earning below the different thresholds you listed, both including overtime (Table 2) and excluding overtime (Table 3).

The New Earnings Survey (NES) can provide earnings data for small geographical areas. The release of NES data is restricted to figures that are derived from a sufficiently large sample of employees, and have an acceptable level of accuracy and I have provided the available data for Scotland, the unitary authorities in Scotland and Great Britain only for those areas where the samples are large enough. These are based on the 2001 NES, the latest survey for which data are available.

Road Taxes

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much money was collected in taxation from motorists in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available. [62674]

John Healey: Details of revenues collected from excise duties on road fuels, and from vehicle excise duty, are published annually in the Financial Statement and Budget Report (FSBR). A collated series of annual duty receipts from road fuels is included in HM Customs "Hydrocarbon Oils Factsheet", a copy of which is available from the House of Commons Library.

Details of income tax on benefits in kind relating to company cars and free fuel are given on the Inland Revenue's website.

Data are not available on the total VAT from the purchase of road fuels, nor on the VAT raised on the purchase of all motor vehicles.

Information regarding insurance premium tax on motor insurance premiums is not available, as Customs and Excise do not require insurers to identify the specific types of insurance policies on which insurance premium tax is paid.

VAT

Mr. Todd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he has asked that products which offer an alternative to natural resources be considered in the 2003 EU review of products qualifying for reduced VAT; and if he will make a statement. [62905]

John Healey: The UK intends to play a full and active part in the forthcoming review of the EU's VAT reduced rate provisions. The Government are considering carefully the merits of changes to the existing list of products to which a reduced rate may be applied, and will be making representations, as appropriate, in due course.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to reduce VAT on domestic repair and maintenance. [63051]

John Healey: A reduced rate of VAT on domestic repair and maintenance would be a major change to the VAT base. Such a change would require careful consideration of all social, environmental and economic effects.

Unpaid Advisers

Mr. Willis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 246W, on unpaid advisers, if he will list the steps that were taken to ensure that no conflicts of interest arose as a result of this appointment. [62969]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by the Prime Minister on 19 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 332W.

Tax Credits

John Barrett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people are in receipt of *(a)* the working families tax credit and *(b)* the disabled persons tax credit in (i) the Edinburgh, West constituency, (ii) the City of Edinburgh local authority area, (iii) Scotland and (iv) the UK; and what percentage these figures represent of the estimated numbers of the people who are eligible for the credits in these respective areas. [63193]

Dawn Primarolo: For the numbers in receipt of the tax credits, I refer the hon. Member to my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Hepburn) on 16 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 293W.

No reliable estimate of the take-up rate of the working families' tax credit can be attempted until the Family Resources Survey for 2000–01 is analysed; and no reliable estimates can be made below the national level, or for the disabled person's tax credit.

Interest Rates

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the annual savings to the Exchequer which would result from lower debt interest costs if United Kingdom interest rates were *(a)* 0.5 per cent., *(b)* 0.75 per cent., *(c)* 1 per cent., *(d)* 2 per cent. and *(e)* 3 per cent. lower across the yield curve for (i) 2001–02, (ii) 2002–03, (iii) 2003–4, (iv) 2004–05, (v) 2005–06 and (vi) 2006–07. [63210]

Ruth Kelly: Each percentage point reduction, across all years, in short and long term interest rates, would lead to savings in debt interest payments of approximately £0.6 billion in 2002–03 and £0.8 billion in 2003–04. No projections have been published for years beyond 2003–04.

Children's Tax Credit

Mr. Cox: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many families are receiving children's tax credit in the London borough of Wandsworth. [63589]

Dawn Primarolo: Information about the children's tax credit (CTC) is not available by local authority. However, the number of families who are eligible for the CTC in London is estimated to be 475,000.

Margaret Moran: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of the children's tax credit on Luton. [60336]

Dawn Primarolo: In this tax year families with children in Luton are up to £529 better off, and if they have a new baby, up to £1,049 better off as a result of the children's tax credit.

PRIME MINISTER

Official Visits

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Prime Minister (1) on how many occasions his *(a)* Chief of Staff, *(b)* Director of Communications and Strategy and *(c)* other members of his office travelled abroad on official business between 31 March 2001 and 31 March 2002; what places were visited; and how much each visit cost; [58732]

(2) on how many occasions members of the No. 10 Policy Unit travelled abroad on official business between 31 March 2001 and 31 March 2002; what places were visited; and how much each visit cost. [58714]

The Prime Minister: In the period 31 March 2001 to 31 March 2002, my Chief of Staff, my Director of Communications and Strategy and other members of my office have travelled overseas on official business, including accompanying me on official visits, on 93 occasions.

The costs of all officials who accompanied me on overseas visits are included in the detailed list of Cabinet Ministers' visits overseas and information on expenditure by all Ministers on travel overseas. The list for the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 will be published as soon as possible.

The average cost of all other official travel was approximately £1,516 per visit.

All visits have been made in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code and Civil Service Management Code. These arrangements follow the practice of successive Administrations.

Electronic Databases

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to the answer to the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), of 22 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 319W, on electronic databases, if he will list the categories under which information is held in the electronic databases, including the general information database. [61565]

The Prime Minister: The parliamentary section database contains the text of oral and written parliamentary questions tabled to the Prime Minister, the answers given, and the name of the MP, their party and constituency taken from the list of Members on the House of Commons website.

The general information database contains policy briefing, public material which includes the Prime Minister's answers to parliamentary questions, speeches, articles and No. 10 press notices and a virtual Library with links to publicly available electronic reference sources.

Members of Parliament (Personal Data)

Mr. Forth: To ask the Prime Minister what information is held by his Office on each hon. Member in relation to *(a)* personal relationships, both current and past, *(b)* financial status and dealings, *(c)* connections with companies and interest groups, *(d)* connections with Governments and *(e)* published works; and what information was held in January. [61817]

The Prime Minister: My Office has access to published reference sources, as well as to the information about hon. Members made publicly available by the House authorities, for the purpose of parliamentary business.

Delegations

Tony Cunningham: To ask the Prime Minister what changes have been made in the composition of the United Kingdom Delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the Assembly of the Western European Union. [63957]

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend the Member for Reading, East (Jane Griffiths) has been appointed as a substitute Member in place of my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Janet Anderson).

Resignation

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Prime Minister on what day the hon. Member for Swindon, North offered his resignation as Parliamentary Secretary in the Lord Chancellor's Department; and on what day the hon. Member for Swindon, North was appointed Parliamentary Under-Secretary at the Home Office. [62421]

The Prime Minister: The hon. Member for Swindon, North offered his resignation as Parliamentary Secretary in the Lord Chancellor's Department on 29 May. He was appointed as an unpaid Parliamentary Under-Secretary at the Home Office on 31 May.

He will be responsible for driving forward progress on delivering efficient and effective IT across the civil and criminal justice systems and identifying and driving forward the reform to business processes and working practices required, alongside IT investment, to deliver a modern and joined-up criminal justice system.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Trading Schemes Act

Miss Begg: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many prosecutions have been brought under the Trading Schemes Act 1996; and how many have been successful. [62431]

Miss Melanie Johnson: No prosecutions have been brought by the Department under the Trading Schemes Act 1996.

European Structural Funds

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent assessment she has made of the estimate of the draw down of European structural funds. [60341]

Alan Johnson: The latest assessment for the core 2000–06 structural funds programmes is set out in the table.

The objective 1 regions are on course to avoid decommitment. As the first decommitment date for objective 2 regions is 31 December 2003, it is too early to say whether the n+2 targets will be met. However we have instigated a regular monitoring procedure to ensure that there is ample warning of any potential problem.

Objectives 1 and 2 in Scotland and Wales are matters respectively for the Scottish Executive and the National Assembly for Wales. However, I understand that the relevant figures have been provided by these Administrations.

£ million

Area	*Committed grant*	*Committed grant as percentage of total allocation*	*Grant paid*	*Grant paid as percentage of total allocation*
Objective 1				
South Yorkshire	226.35	31.92	59.05	8.33
Merseyside	184.5	21.86	93.8	11.11
Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly	96.3	30.95	26.09	8.39
West Wales and the Valleys	320.2	28.1	89.0	7.8
Objective 2				
North-east	8.02	1.8	0.22	0.05
North-west	212.82	42.1	0.55	0.11
Yorkshire and Humberside	63.24	19.5	2.66	0.82
East England	3.29	3.4	0	0
East Midlands	20.69	8.8	0.54	0.23
West Midlands	30.82	5.8	0.04	0.01
London	33.24	20.5	1.90	1.17
South-east	7.33	32.8	0	0
South-west	19.22	16.2	2.24	1.89
East Wales[1, 2]	1.70	3.4	0.19	0.38
East of Scotland	50.31	32.9	5.67	3.71
South of Scotland	[2]18.83	42.0	[3]2.54	5.66
Western Scotland	42.13	14.3	1.95	0.66

[1] The East Wales figures apply solely to the objective 2 programme and do not include figures from the associated transitional objective 2 and 5b programme.

[2] As at 31 March 2002

[3] To 31 December 2001

Minimum Wage

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many people aged *(a)* between 18 and 21 and *(b)* over 21 years are receiving the national minimum wage; and if she will make a statement. [63369]

Alan Johnson: Around 1.5 million low paid workers were entitled to higher minimum rates of pay when the rates were increased to £4.10 an hour for workers aged 22 and over and £3.50 for those aged 18 to 21 on 1 October 2001. Around one in 15 of the beneficiaries are people aged 18 to 21.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many families are in receipt of the national minimum wage in the Portsmouth, South constituency; and if she will make a statement. [63372]

Alan Johnson: Estimates for beneficiaries of the national minimum wage by parliamentary constituency are not available.

Around 100,000 people in the south-east stood to benefit from the October 2001 increase in the national minimum wage.

Arms Exports

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent discussions her Department has had with the Department for International Development about reviewing criterion 8 of the consolidated criteria against which the Government assesses licence applications to export arms and dual-use equipment. [62669]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 19 June 2002]:* As announced by my noble Friend the Lord Sainsbury of Turville on 4 March 2002 in another place, *Official Report*, column 73, the Cabinet Office is currently leading a discussion on how criterion 8 of the consolidated criteria—the sustainable development criterion—can most effectively be applied in assessing relevant export licence applications.

This discussion involves all Government Departments with an interest, not just the Department of Trade and Industry and the Department for International Development, and addresses the need for clearer procedures for reaching decisions where sustainable development is an issue, rather than any change in policy with regard to criterion 8 of the consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria.

Privatised Utilities

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what responsibility she has for setting Government policy with regard to the independence of the economic regulators of the privatised utilities. [62303]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* The composition, role, duties and responsibilities of the sectoral regulators are set out in the relevant primary legislation. The legislation typically ascribes certain duties and functions to the Secretary of State including, for example, the making of appointments to the regulatory bodies. The Department deals with the regulators for the gas, electricity, telecommunications, and postal services sectors.

UK Online (Disabled People)

Mr. Lyons: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what checks are made to ensure organisations funded through UK online give access to people with a disability. [62307]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: I have been asked to reply.

People with disabilities were identified as one of main target groups for UK online centres and disabled access in centres was an important measure in the assessment process. This was carried through in the monitoring checks that the regional Government Offices (GOs) administer to ensure centres comply with contractual and legal obligations. The number of monitoring checks by the GOs will vary in relation to the individual centre.

National Insurance

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment has been made of the need to review the tax system in regard to national insurance contributions lost owing to false self-employment claims on CIS4 tax certificates; and if she will make a statement. [63098]

Dawn Primarolo: I have been asked to reply.

I would like to clarify the relationship between the CIS and employment status. The CIS sets out how payments to self-employed sub-contractors should be treated.

As in all industries, whether a worker is categorised as employed or self-employed depends entirely on the terms and conditions under which they are engaged. The fact that a worker is registered under the CIS and is in possession of a certificate or registration card does not of itself confer self-employed status on that individual. It is entirely possible for workers to be employed on one contract, and self-employed on another.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures are being taken to address organised avoidance of national insurance payments through false claims on CIS4 tax certificates; and if she will make a statement. [63103]

Dawn Primarolo: I have been asked to reply.

The Construction Industry Scheme (CIS) sets out how payments to self-employed sub-contractors should be treated. It is anti-tax evasion legislation and it has successfully identified workers who had previously not declared their earnings to the Inland Revenue.

Where a person works as a sub-contractor on a contract to which the CIS applies, they must register with the Inland Revenue. Where a sub-contractor does not qualify for a certificate allowing him/her to be paid gross, they will receive a CIS4 registration card. They will then be paid for work done after a deduction on account of tax and national insurance.

The tax and national insurance rules, which distinguish the employed from the self-employed, are intended to apply to all workers. As part of its compliance strategy the Inland Revenue's local employer compliance review teams consider employment status issues when undertaking reviews to ensure employers and contractors comply with their tax and national insurance obligations.

Haulage Industry

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what impact the use of illegally produced fuel is having on competitiveness within the UK haulage industry. [62948]

John Healey: I have been asked to reply.

As part of Customs' consultation on proposals for tackling oils fraud, the industry was invited to comment upon, and quantify, the impact on competitiveness resulting from the unfair advantage gained by those misusing rebated fuel. Although the responses clearly indicated an impact, no quantification was provided. Copies of the consultation document "Tackling the misuse of rebated fuels: Proposals for an approval scheme for distributors" and the response "Oils Fraud Strategy: Summary of Consultation Responses and Regulatory Impact Assessment" have been placed in the House Libraries.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Advisory Committee on Specialist Products is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [61716]

Mr. Morley: The Advisory Committee on Specialist Products is a consultative committee of the European Commission. Its purpose is to facilitate consultation with social and occupational groups with an interest in the EU regimes for wine-growing, spirit drinks, olives and derived products; beekeeping, hops and tobacco. It is not attended by officials of Her Majesty's Government and does not give rise to costs to the UK public funds.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Advisory Committee on Arable Crops is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [61720]

Mr. Morley: The Advisory Committee on Arable Crops is a consultative committee of the European Commission. Its purpose is to facilitate consultation with social and occupational groups with an interest in the EU regimes for arable crops. It is not attended by officials of Her Majesty's Government and does not give rise to costs to UK public funds.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Scientific Committee on Plants is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [61694]

Mr. Morley: The mandate for the Scientific Committee on Plants is as follows:

> "Scientific and technical questions relating to plants intended for human or animal consumption, production or processing of non-food products as regards characteristics liable to affect human or animal health or the environment, including the use of pesticides".

The SCP is particularly concerned with scientific evaluation relating to genetically modified organisms and pesticides.

The committee has met seven times since the beginning of June 2001.

Experts from the UK are currently Prof. Anthony R. Hardy (chairman), Central Science Laboratory; Prof. Howard V. Davies, Scottish Crop Research Institute; and Dr. Tom Sherratt (University of Durham). There are also a number of expert working groups under the SCP to which ad hoc experts are invited to contribute as appropriate.

The UK does not contribute directly to the costs of the SCP. I have no information on the annual cost of the committee to the European Commission.

The items currently under the SCP's consideration can be viewed on its website at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/sc/scp/index—en.html.

The committee is currently accountable through the European Commission (administered by the Health and Consumer Protection Directorate-General) through to the European Council and Parliament. Regulation 178/2002 establishes the European Food Safety Authority and later this year this committee's responsibilities will be transferred to two new panels (the Panel on Plant Health, Plant Production Products and their Residues, and the Panel on Genetically Modified Organisms) operating within the authority. Members of the new panels will remain to be appointed in an independent role and for their individual expertise.

The SCP's agendas and outcome of its discussions (opinions and minutes) are available on its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Advisory Committee on Fruit, Vegetables and Flowers is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [61717]

Mr. Morley: The Advisory Committee on Fruit, Vegetables and Flowers is a consultative committee of the European Commission. Its purpose is to facilitate consultation with social and occupational groups with an interest in the EU regimes for fruit, vegetables and flowers. It is not attended by officials of Her Majesty's Government and does not give rise to costs to UK public funds.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Scientific Committee on Designations of Origin, Geographical Indications and Certificates of Specific Character is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [61723]

Mr. Morley: The mandate of the Scientific Committee Designations of Origin, Geographical Indications and Certificates of Specific Character is set out in Commission Decision 95/53/EEC. The committee exists to provide expert advice to assist the European Commission in its consideration of applications concerning the registration of designations of origin, geographical indications and certificates of specific character.

There is no UK representation on the Scientific Committee. While one member of the current committee is British, he does not sit as a UK national, but is, like all the members, a qualified expert with a legal or agricultural background. The commission pays the travel and lodging costs of members. The Scientific Committee has met four times over the last 12-month period although in some previous years it has met more frequently than this. Items currently under its consideration are 'Galician mussels', 'traditional grass-fed red poll beef' and an Italian milk product from the Apennines.

Regarding transparency and accountability, the commission, together with member states, is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to

> "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the commission".

As an obligation to this decision, the commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees, including the Scientific Committee. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February (Com (2001) 783 Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be available through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Advisory Committee on the Protection of Animals used for Experimental and other Scientific Purposes is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [61706]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: I have been asked to reply.

Article 22 (3) of European Directive 86/609/EEC (on the approximation of laws, regulations and administrative provisions of the member states regarding the protection of animals used for experimental and other scientific purposes) provides for the commission to establish

> "a permanent consultative committee within which the member states would be represented, which will assist the Commission in organising the exchange of appropriate information, while respecting the requirements of confidentiality, and which will also assist the Commission in the other questions raised by the application of this directive."

The Commission made a decision on 9 February 1990 (90/67/EEC) for setting up the Advisory Committee on the Protection of Animals for Experimental and Other Scientific Purposes under article 22 of the directive, including provision for representation and working methods. However, the committee has never been established. The Commission has recently made a recommendation for the directive to be revised. In its initial comments on what amendments might be considered, the United Kingdom has suggested that the Commission should consider either dispensing with or establishing the Advisory Committee.

World Food Summit

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for what reasons she did not attend the World Food Summit in Rome; and if she will make a statement. [62085]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* My right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael) represented this Department at the World Food Summit. Although the summit was primarily concerned with international development issues which go beyond DEFRA's responsibilities, my right hon. Friend's attendance reflects the importance we attach to the role of trade and rural development in alleviating poverty and hunger.

Farming Research (Developing World)

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much has been spent by her Department on research into *(a)* all forms of farming and *(b)* local-based farming initiatives in the developing world in each of the last 10 years. [62084]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 17 June 2002]: (a)* The Department's total research and development expenditure spent in this area for each of the last 10 years is as follows:

£ million

	Expenditure
1991–92	87.7
1992–93	95.0
1993–94	97.0
1994–95	99.2
1995–96	102.6
1996–97	99.9
1997–98	98.8
1998–99	101.7
1999–2000	97.3
2000–01	107.0
2001–02[1]	—

[1] Figures for 2001–02 are not yet available.

(b) Expenditure on farming in the developing world is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development, whose Department (DFID) has provided the following information.

DFID funds agricultural research aimed at the needs of the poor in developing countries who depend for their livelihoods on natural resources. Separate data are not maintained of the sums spent on research for locally based farming initiatives though much of this work is undertaken directly with resource-poor farming communities. Bilateral spending on research in agriculture, forestry and fishing in the last 10 years was:

£ million

	Expenditure
1991–92	29.3
1992–93	33.7
1993–94	32.8
1994–95	39.1
1995–96	31.0
1996–97	26.2
1997–98	24.8
1998–99	28.3
1999–2000	30.8
2000–01	32.2

DFID also made the following multilateral contributions to international agricultural research organisations which contribute to the elimination of hunger and poverty in developing countries:

£ million

	Expenditure
1991–92	8.7
1992–93	8.7
1993–94	7.8
1994–95	8.4
1995–96	8.5
1996–97	7.7
1997–98	5.8
1998–99	7.8
1999–2000	10.1
2000–01	10.9

Countryside Stewardship Scheme

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will place in the Library a record of the priority scores given to each countryside stewardship scheme approved in the past five years. [62323]

Mr. Morley: Details of the scores for each of the approximately 8,500 Countryside Stewardship Scheme applications approved over the last five years could not be provided without disproportionate cost.

Bali Conference

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the outcome of the recent ministerial conference in Bali. [61772]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* The fourth Preparatory Committee meeting for the World Summit on Sustainable Development gives us a basis for the final run up to Johannesburg. Progress was made on a programme of action, which includes the importance of sanitation in eradicating poverty and meeting the Millennium Development Goal on safe drinking water. Broad agreement was also reached on key issues such as the urgent need to restore fish stocks and address illegal fishing, and on the important role non-governmental actors can play in achieving sustainable development. The meeting also recognised the need for a strong focus on Africa.

Other difficult issues remain outstanding, such as how the summit can address trade and finance issues to complement the Monterrey Consensus and the Doha Development Agenda. There are also specific targets on sanitation, biodiversity loss and energy, which have yet to be agreed. The UK will continue to work constructively with partners to ensure a successful outcome for Johannesburg, including concrete actions and coherent work programmes on energy, water and sustainable patterns of consumption and production.

Waste Management

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when her Department's 2000 to 2002 Municipal Waste Management Survey will be published. [62664]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 18 June 2002]:* Provisional results from the Municipal Waste Management Survey for the 2000–01 financial year were published on 16 April 2002. Final results will be published during the late summer of 2002.

The 2001–02 Municipal Waste Management Survey has not yet been carried out. However, results are expected to be available during 2003, following a timetable similar to that for the 2000–01 survey.

Seeds (National List of Varieties) Regulations

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the Seeds (National List of Varieties) Regulations; and what plans she has to amend them. [62581]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 18 June 2002]:* Changes to the Seeds (National Lists of Varieties) Regulations 2001 will be needed in the near future to amend references to EC seeds marketing directives which are currently being codified by the Council of the European Union, and other minor matters.

In reply to a parliamentary question on 28 November 2000, the Government also made it clear that the arrangements for requesting a hearing on proposed national list decisions would be reviewed during the Chardon LL hearing, in order to consider whether the current arrangements were satisfactory for all parties. The Chardon LL hearing closed on 13 June and it remains the Government's intention to review how those arrangements have worked. If changes are proposed, all interested parties will be consulted in the normal way.

Organic Stewardship Scheme

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what investigation is under way in her Department to examine how an organic stewardship scheme might be introduced. [62990]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 19 June 2002]:* The issue of ongoing support for organic farmers is being taken forward as part of the follow up to the report of the Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food. This is one of the issues under consideration in the stakeholder group drawing up the organic farming and food action plan.

Bovine TB

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with her counterparts in New Zealand and Australia on the subject of bovine TB. [62991]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 19 June 2002]:* DEFRA, and its predecessor MAFF, has a long history of collaboration with the animal health departments in New Zealand and Australia. In 1999 the veterinary head of the endemic animal diseases and zoonoses section of the state veterinary service carried out a fact finding visit to New Zealand to investigate the control of bovine tuberculosis there, and our veterinary service has received several visits from veterinarians from New Zealand and Australia. In addition, our tuberculosis vaccine research programme is being carried out by the veterinary laboratory agency which is working in collaboration with researchers from New Zealand.

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent research her Department has undertaken into the effect of production announcers given to cattle on the development of bovine tuberculosis. [62813]

Mr. Morley: I believe the hon. Member is referring to production enhancers, such as anabolic steroid growth promoters and bovine somatatrophin lactation enhancer, rather than production announcers. As these products are not licensed for use in cattle in the UK, DEFRA has not carried out research into the effects that they might have on the development of bovine tuberculosis.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many confirmed cases of bovine TB have been recorded in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* Dumfries and Galloway region in each of the last 12 months. [62412]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* The information requested is not available in the format requested, in that county figures are not available for 2002. In 2001 there was one herd affected by a new confirmed incident of bovine TB in Scotland. There were none in Dumfriesshire. Raw data for January to April 2002 indicate seven confirmed new TB incidents in Scotland.

Carcase Disposal

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will derogate from the EC directive on carcase disposal in respect of farms in Dumfries and Galloway. [62411]

Mr. Morley: No. The EU animal by-products regulation will permit member states to derogate from the regulation to permit the burial or burning of fallen stock in defined remote areas. Although this is a matter for Scottish Ministers in Scotland, all agriculture Ministers in the UK consider the Highlands and Islands of Scotland to be the only areas which can be considered to be remote within the terms of the regulation.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to change the rules for farmers disposing of fallen stock. [61500]

Mr. Morley: New EU rules (the Animal By-Products Regulation) will prohibit the routine burning or burial of fallen stock, except in defined remote areas, and will specify standards for incinerators which are used to dispose of fallen stock.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects the EC Animal By-Products Regulation 2000/0259 to be implemented. [61494]

Mr. Morley: We expect the EU Animal By-Products Regulation to be adopted in September 2002 and to apply in member states seven to eight months later.

Illegal Meat Imports

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when her Department will conclude its examination of the potential benefits of using X-ray equipment to scan for illegal meat imports. [61586]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* We are still in the process of assessing the X-ray equipment already in use by HMCE and will be discussing with other countries their experiences with particular technologies.

Flood Insurance

Mr. Michael Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if she will take steps to assist householders to find insurance cover for properties affected by flooding; [62333]

(2) what recent discussions she has held with the Association of British Insurers regarding insurance cover for those affected by flooding; [62335]

(3) what estimate her Department has made of the impact on householders of the withdrawal of flood insurance cover. [62334]

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what agreement exists for the present year with the Association of British Insurers about maintaining insurance cover for households in areas at risk of flooding; [62602]

(2) what representations she has received about the decision by Esure to stop providing flood insurance for households in areas at risk of flooding; and if she will discuss this with Esure. [62603]

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations the Government made to the insurance industry during and following the serious floods in 2000 to ensure that property insurance would continue to be available to owners and tenants of residential and commercial premises in areas at risk of flooding; what undertakings the insurance industry gave at that time; if she will respond to Esure's statement that insurers have decided to deny home insurance cover to prospective new clients in the 10 per cent. of postcodes most susceptible to flooding; and if she will make a statement about what steps the Government intend to take to ensure that property insurance remains available to all at a reasonable cost. [63439]

Mr. Morley: There is an agreement in place with the Association of British Insurers member companies that during 2002, other than in exceptional circumstances, they will continue to provide flood cover for domestic properties and small businesses which they currently insure. Cases where there is an alleged breach of this agreement will be investigated by the ABI.

The insurance industry is a competitive one. Government have no plans to intervene in the market either generally or with individual companies. While recognising concern about the recent announcement by Esure, I understand their position to be that they will not provide cover to new clients in areas at risk of flooding. This decision is not a breach of the ABI agreement which relates only to renewal of existing policies. It is also my understanding that as a relatively newly formed company, Esure have few existing clients in the floodplain.

While no formal assessment has been made, I am aware that there could be a significant impact if insurers were to withdraw cover for households and businesses at risk of flooding. The Government are therefore working hard with the industry to try to ensure the continued, widespread availability of affordable flood cover beyond the end of 2002. There have been regular meetings with the insurance industry, at both ministerial and official level, to consider their calls for increased investment in flood and coastal defence, controls on development in areas at risk of flooding, simplified arrangements for implementing flood defences and better information on real flood risk. I expect to meet again with the industry later in the summer.

Mr. Michael Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of insurance payouts made as a result of the floods of autumn 2000. [62331]

Mr. Morley: The Association of British Insurers (ABI) estimate that total insurance losses from weather-related damage in autumn 2000 were some £1.3 billion. This includes damages from both storms and flooding; the ABI do not have separate figures for flooding alone.

Flooding

Mr. Michael Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many properties in England are at risk from a 1 in 50 year flood event. [62332]

Mr. Morley: The information sought is not systematically collected in a consistent form though the Environment Agency have estimated that some 130,000 properties are at risk from a 1 in 50 year event. This is from a total of 1.8 million properties in the floodplain in England.

The agency is currently preparing a strategy on future needs for data across flood defence, which will help inform its programme of floodplain mapping and risk assessment.

Fisheries

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on how many occasions in the past year *(a)* UK fisheries enforcement officers have visited and inspected the enforcement regime of another EU fishing nation and *(b)* enforcement officials from other EU fishing nations have visited the UK to inspect the enforcement regime in the UK. [62624]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* The fisheries enforcement authorities in the UK, including the Royal Navy, have frequent contact with their counterparts in other member states on a wide range of monitoring, control and surveillance matters. Comprehensive records of such contacts are not maintained but in the year ending 31 March 2002 there were at least nine occasions when inspectors from the UK visited other member states and three occasions when inspectors from other member states visited the UK with the purpose of discussing or observing enforcement activity.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the expected cut in the United Kingdom fishing fleet following the publication of the indicative figures contained within the European Commission's monthly published road map for the future reform of the Common Fisheries Policy. [62595]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* The Commission have made clear that they do not seek to impose cuts in fleet capacity on member states. Their figures, which detail fleet cuts by member states, are to be taken as purely illustrative. The scale of decommissioning in any individual member state will depend on the decisions taken by the council on measures to reduce fishing effort and on the decisions by fishermen in the light of the impact of these measures.

Foot and Mouth

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures her Department is taking to prevent the import of foot and mouth disease from South Korea; and if she will make a statement. [59629]

Mr. Morley: Korea is not authorised to export meat or animals to the European Union. DEFRA official veterinary advice is that there is no significant risk of travellers bringing foot and mouth disease back from Korea, provided rules on personal imports of animal products are observed.

In relation to the World cup, the games are played a long distance from the outbreaks and we have issued advice to fans via the Football Association website to keep away from farms and to avoid bringing back animal products.

The British consulate in Korea have placed similar advice on their website. Enforcement agencies were notified of the outbreak of foot and mouth disease in Korea and advised to be vigilant of passengers travelling back from Korea.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions her officials have had with their South Korean counterparts about the spread of foot and mouth disease in that country; and if she will make a statement. [59628]

Mr. Morley: We have received timely, detailed information from Korea on their disease situation through the EU, the Office International des Epizooties (OIE) and direct from the Korean authorities. The foot and mouth disease outbreak in Korea was discussed at a recent bilateral meeting at the OIE General Assembly in Paris.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when her Department will finalise the analysis of the questionnaires completed by foreign veterinary surgeons who assisted in the eradication of foot and mouth disease; and if she will place the analysis in the Library. [62007]

Mr. Morley: Due to other priorities, it has not yet proved possible to finalise the analysis of the questionnaires completed by those foreign veterinary surgeons who assisted in the eradication of foot and mouth disease.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list, on a county basis, the weekly laboratory test results for foot and mouth disease on infected premises, broken down by *(a)* negative, *(b)* antibody positive and *(c)* virus positive results; and how many infected premises in each county were not the subject of laboratory tests. [62259]

Mr. Morley: The information requested is given in tables which have been placed in the Library.

For the samples that returned positive and negative results, premises have been attributed to the week in which samples were received at the laboratory.

Information regarding whether a result was antibody positive or virus positive cannot easily be obtained. Therefore the figures simply report that a positive result returned.

Source:

DEFRA's Disease Control System (DCS) database as at 11 June 2002. Data may be subject to revision as more information becomes available and as the data within DCS is validated.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she is taking to reduce the possibility of a further outbreak of foot and mouth disease; and if she will make a statement. [62157]

Mr. Morley: We are taking a number of steps to reduce the possibility of a further outbreak of foot and mouth disease through initiatives covering prevention; disease surveillance and contingency planning.

On 28 March the Government launched an action plan to reduce the risk of plant and animal disease entering the country illegally and threatening our agricultural and horticultural industries. A copy of the action plan can be found in the House Libraries. As recommended by the Policy Commission on Food and Farming, the action plan commits the Government to undertake a risk assessment of the threat posed by contaminated illegal meat imports. This is well under way and due to report in the autumn. The information provided by the risk assessment will help inform decisions about the nature of risks from imports so that resources can be efficiently targeted. Along side the risk assessment, work is being carried out to improve publicity and raise awareness of the risks posed by personal imports. Other work is concerned with improving detection and a pilot detector dog scheme will be operational later in the year.

We attach great importance to veterinary surveillance for the early detection of new or exotic diseases/infections, including foot and mouth disease. Work on a strategy to enhance veterinary surveillance was curtailed last year because of the foot and mouth epidemic. This work has resumed and a strategy document is now in early draft form and will be issued for public consultation later this year.

In the event of a future outbreak of foot and mouth disease our ability to quickly contain and eradicate the disease will be vital. DEFRA has already published an interim operational contingency plan to support the European Union approved strategic plan, veterinary instructions and local plans that already existed. This draws extensively on experience of the 2001 outbreak and DEFRA will develop this further to achieve better emergency preparedness, taking full account of the recommendations of the independent inquiries.

Additionally, preventive measures introduced during the 2001 outbreak remain in force, for example the ban on feeding pigswill to livestock and the 20 day standstill on the movement of livestock.

WTO Agreement

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the effect of introducing a development box into the World Trade Organisation agreement on agriculture; and if she will make a statement. [62537]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* The creation of a development box would be one way of giving effect to the important Declaration made at Doha last year that special and differential treatment for developing countries must be an integral part of all elements of the WTO agriculture negotiations. Current proposals for such a box contain several elements, including provision for developing countries to reduce tariffs more slowly, extension of the safeguard mechanism and maintaining the flexibilities agreed in the Uruguay Round. We will actively consider these ideas in the negotiations.

Common Agricultural Policy

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the contribution made by the average UK family to the CAP by *(a)* contributions made through tax, *(b)* increases in prices and *(c)* other means in the last 12 months. [62535]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* Individuals in the UK contribute to the CAP as consumers through higher food prices and as taxpayers through CAP direct support payments.

We estimate that, in 2000, a notional UK family of four paid £4-£5 per week in higher food prices as a result of the CAP. UK taxpayers do not contribute specifically to the CAP; rather they contribute to the EU budget as a whole. Total EU payments in 2000 were approximately £51 billion (euro 83 billion), of which around £25 billion (euro 40.5 billion) was spent under the CAP. The UK currently provides around 13.5 per cent. of total budgetary contributions.

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much subsidy was received in the last 12 months per head of UK dairy cattle through the CAP. [62533]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* Market price support in the UK dairy sector was equivalent to around £900 million in 2000, the latest year for which data is available. In addition the dairy sector will have received a substantial share of the £260 million paid to livestock producers through the Over Thirty Month Scheme. The agricultural census undertaken in June 2000 records 2.3 million dairy cows in the UK.

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proportion of common agricultural policy funding went to UK farmers broken down by *(a)* under eight European size units, *(b)* eight to 39 ESUs, *(c)* 40 to 99 ESUs, *(d)* 100 to 199 ESUs and *(e)* 200 and over ESUs in the last 12 months. [62536]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* Exact data on payments under the CAP in the UK cannot be stratified according to the size of farm, e.g. in terms of European size units. The farm business survey provides estimates of direct subsidy receipts for the average farm in England. The latest estimates are given in the following table.

All direct grants and subsidies[1], *England 2000–01*

£ per farm

	All farm types
8–39 ESU	10,200
40–99 ESU	19,900
100 and above ESU	46,300

[1] Average per farm

The farm business survey excludes farms smaller than eight ESUs. These estimates include all grants and subsidies received, including some nationally funded schemes. They represent only direct payments to farmers. They do not include the additional support that farmers receive from the consumer, through CAP market support policies.

Organic Farming

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assistance she plans to give farmers converting to organic farming in 2003–04. [61613]

Mr. Morley: Under the England Rural Development Programme £22 million is budgeted for supporting organic conversion in 2003–04.

National Scrapie Plan

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the total costs under phase one of the national scrapie plan of *(a)* the identification and registration of rams, *(b)* the registration of farms, *(c)* the collection of blood samples and their dispatch to the laboratory, *(d)* the laboratory testing of blood samples to establish genotypes, and *(e)* certification. [61534]

Mr. Morley: Information is not available in the format requested. A major part of the costs under *(a)*, *(c)* and *(e)* relates to the administrative costs of the state veterinary service, and a breakdown of the service's costs by those categories is not available. As regards *(b)*, the national scrapie plan does not maintain a specific and separate register of farms.

Expenditure on the genotyping schemes for both the registered and non-registered sectors which have already been launched under the national scrapie plan will depend on levels of uptake under what are voluntary schemes. Estimated annual expenditure is given in the table for different levels [illegible] assumed uptake. The figures exclude the administrative costs of the state veterinary service and IT costs.

£ million

	Assuming 40 per cent. uptake	*Assuming 60 per cent. uptake*	*Assuming 80 per cent. uptake*
Ram genotyping registered	4	6	8
Ram genotyping non-registered	7	10	13
Total	11	16	21
Of which:			
Laboratory genotyping costs	4.4	6.6	8.8
Animal identification costs	1.5	2.2	2.9

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) when she intends to consult farmers about phases 2 and 3 of the national scrapie plan; [61532]

(2) if she will make a statement on her proposals for the second and third phases of the national scrapie plan. [61535]

Mr. Morley: Action under the national scrapie plan is being rolled out in full consultation with the sheep industry and other stakeholders. The first phase of the plan commenced in July 2001 with the launch of the genotyping scheme for purebred registered flocks. A second genotyping scheme for purebred non-registered flocks was launched in January 2002, extending the national scrapie plan to all purebred sheep flocks. At that time we also announced that any flock that had had scrapie, regardless of whether or not it was a purebred flock, could join the existing plan.

We are currently working on proposals for a specific scheme under the national scrapie plan to cover flocks that have had scrapie. Informal but detailed discussions on these proposals have already taken place with stakeholder representatives and we expect to publish proposals for formal public consultation later this year. We continue to involve all sheep industry stakeholder organisations—including the breed societies, farming unions and the National Sheep Association—as well as other stakeholders in all stages of our consultations. This will remain the case for any further schemes under the national scrapie plan.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many sheep have so far been tested for scrapie under the sheep abattoir survey that began on 7 January; when she expects to meet her target of 20,000 tests; and if she will make a statement. [61608]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 19 June 2002]:* EU legislation (TSE Regulation 999/2001 as amended) required the UK to test 15,000 sheep aged over 18 months and destined for human consumption from 1 January 2002. In addition to this, a SEAC-recommended scientific survey was run concurrently which added an additional 5,000 animals to the abattoir survey.

The European Commission extended the testing requirement from 1 April 2002 to 60,000 sheep aged over 18 months and destined for human consumption.

As at 31 May 2002, 2,134 abattoir sheep had been tested. Results of the testing can be found on the DEFRA website at: http://defraweb/animalh/bse/index.html.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many sheep have had to be destroyed since 1 January as a result of injuries sustained during testing for scrapie. [61491]

Mr. Morley: I understand the hon. Member is referring to the injuries resulting from the administration to sheep of the ruminal bolus used to identify sheep under the national scrapie plan. Since January 2002 some 93,000 sheep have been tested under the plan. Of these 36 have died or have had to be destroyed following problems with the administration of the bolus. Compensation has been (or is in the process of being) paid to the owners concerned.

The losses are very regrettable and steps have been taken to address problems which sprang mainly from initial operator inexperience under a new scheme. Training of operators has been refined. As a result, the number of casualties has fallen significantly in recent months.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her policy is towards native breeds of sheep which have a low frequency of the ARR allele. [61549]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* Through its breeding schemes the national scrapie plan aims to increase genetic resistance to TSEs by increasing the prevalence of the ARR allele. At present participation in the plan is voluntary and it is only rams with the genotypes which are the most susceptible to TSEs (those carrying the VRQ allele) which must be culled or castrated by those farmers who choose to join. Other susceptible genotypes in participating flocks are to be phased out over time. It is clearly in the interest of sheep farmers to convert their flocks to a TSE-resistant basis as quickly as possible and it should be possible for the vast majority, if not all, of them to do so over a planned time scale. If there were any breeds where the existence of the ARR allele is absent or so low as to make this impossible, the Government would of course take that into account. We have initiated, as part of the national scrapie plan, a rare breeds survey to obtain better information on the distribution of genotypes in rare breeds.

Ram Genotyping Scheme

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many breeders have applied to take part in *(a)* the Ram Genotyping Scheme for Purebred Registered Flocks and *(b)* the Ram Genotyping Scheme for Purebred Non-Registered Flocks; how many blood sampling visits have taken place so far for each scheme; and if she will make a statement. [61533]

Mr. Morley: As at 13 June, a total of 6,491 farmers had completed an expression of interest form in respect of the Ram Genotyping Scheme for Purebred Registered Flocks and 4,366 had applied to join the scheme. As at the same date, a total of 2,153 farmers had completed an expression of interest form in respect of the Ram Genotyping Scheme for Purebred Non-registered Flocks; application forms have not yet been issued under this scheme but that will happen shortly.

As at 13 June, a total of 2,405 blood sampling visits had been completed in respect of the Ram Genotyping Scheme for Purebred Registered Flocks and a further 520 had been arranged. Sampling visits in respect of the Ram Genotyping Scheme for Purebred Non-registered Flocks will commence once application forms have been received from those who have expressed an interest in the scheme.

The levels of uptake so far represent an encouraging start to the schemes and the Government are working with the industry to build further on this. The Government attach high importance to the National Scrapie Plan whose objective is to eradicate TSEs from the national sheep flock, thereby helping to ensure that the sheep industry provides a product that meets the high quality standards rightly expected by consumers.

Regional Offices

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she plans to change the number of her Department's regional offices. [61542]

Mr. Morley: The State Veterinary Service (SVS) proposes when resources become available, to realign its animal health divisional office boundaries to coincide with the boundaries of Government offices in order to improve disease emergency response capability. Although a bid has been made to allow the possibility of opening an additional regional office, this will be only one of the issues that may be considered in any accompanying review of the hierarchy of the SVS, and no final decisions have yet been taken.

No other changes to the number of offices in DEFRA's regional structure are planned.

Shellfish Licensing

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to introduce shellfish licensing. [61543]

Mr. Morley: We are committed to introducing shellfish licensing and I am considering the timing and format of a scheme in the light of comments received in response to consultation.

Rural Payments Agency

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make it her policy to pay interest to beef producers on beef support scheme payments that the Rural Payments Agency is unable to pay out by 30 June. [61579]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* The EU regulations do not provide for compensation where payments are made after the expiry of the regulatory payment window. Nor is it Government policy to make such payments. Notwithstanding that general position, the circumstances leading to the failure in some cases to meet the 30 June deadline for bovine payments is under review to identify whether there are any factors which would justify a departure from this position.

Hunting

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent steps she has taken to solicit views on the Government's proposals on hunting with dogs; and if she will make a statement. [62692]

Alun Michael: Following my statement to the House on 21 March I have written to all Members of both Houses of Parliament, to all members of the National Assembly for Wales and to interested organisations and individuals on 10 April and again on 31 May. I have placed these letters on the DEFRA website and sent copies of the letter of 31 May to everyone who responded to that of 10 April. I have also met delegations from the three main umbrella groups and a number of other organisations with a particular interest in the future of hunting. I am also considering other ways of examining evidence and enabling intelligent debate involving those whose views are strongly opposed.

Goats

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether goats are under the same classification as sheep for the purposes of SI No. 843. [62555]

Mr. Morley: TSE measures in relation to sheep and goats are set out in Regulation (EC) No. 999/2001, which came into force across the European Union on 1 July

2001. The TSE (England) Regulations 2002 (SI 2002 No. 843) provide the administration and enforcement powers needed to give effect to the directly applicable Community requirements in this country. Requirements for ovine and caprine animals—covering, for example, suspected and confirmed scrapie cases, compulsory testing and monitoring programmes and specified risk material—are clearly stated throughout the regulations.

GEO-3 Report

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what evaluation she has made of the relevance of the United Nations Environment Programme's Global Environment Outlook-3 (GEO-3) report to the United Kingdom and overseas territories. [62163]

Mr. Meacher: The GEO-3 report provides an authoritative assessment that informs our thinking on global sustainable development. Although it does not single out individual countries, it makes clear that action is required by all countries in the north and the south to reverse environmental degradation. The report is an unequivocal reminder that sustainable development rests on three pillars—economic, social and environmental. It highlights the need for action in key areas, such as biodiversity, climate change, forests and oceans. The UK Government takes the problems identified by the report extremely seriously and is taking appropriate action including;

> Taking the lead in tackling climate change at the national and international level. Through our Climate Change Programme we aim to increase the amount of energy generated from renewable sources, and work with industries to cut emissions and boost efficiency.
>
> Taking significant steps to conserve, and sustainable use, biodiversity in the UK and overseas.
>
> Taking significant steps to achieve sustainable forest management in the UK and assist others to do so abroad.
>
> Providing extra protection for marine species and habitats under threat. We are promoting the case for marine protected areas on the high seas and are conducting an integrated assessment of the state of our seas.

The World Summit for Sustainable Development (WSSD) in August-September is a valuable opportunity to address many of these issues and the UK Government is working hard internationally, with partners, to help make the summit a success.

Contaminated Land

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her estimate is of *(a)* the value and *(b)* the acreage of contaminated land. [61964]

Mr. Meacher: The Environment Agency has estimated that there may be some 300,000 hectares of land in the UK affected to some extent by industrial or natural contamination. However, much of this contamination will be relatively minor. It is not possible to estimate the value of this land because the total is not derived from an assessment of individual sites and value depends on site-specific factors such as land use or planning permissions.

Under Part IIA ("contaminated land") of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, local authorities are under a statutory duty to inspect their areas to identify contaminated land as defined in the Act. Broadly speaking, this is land which poses an unacceptable risk to human health or the environment in its current circumstances. This is an ongoing duty, which came into effect in April 2000 in England and more recently in Wales. It involves detailed risk assessments and determinations on a site-specific basis. The regime is described in DETR Circular 02/2000, "Contaminated Land". The Environment Agency will include data in its periodic State of Contaminated Land reports, the first of which for England is due to be completed this summer. I will arrange for a copy to be placed in the Library.

EU LIFE Programme

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment the Government have made of the success of the EU LIFE Programme. [61993]

Mr. Meacher: The EC LIFE programme provides co-financing for actions both in nature conservation (LIFE-Nature) and in other fields of the environment (LIFE-Environment), as well as specific environmental actions outside the EU (LIFE Third Countries). The European Commission is responsible for implementing the LIFE programme.

My Department has been fully involved in the assessment currently being carried out by the Court of Auditors on the LIFE programme. The Commission are required (under Article 12 of Regulation EC 1655–2000 of the European Parliament and the Council concerning LIFE) to produce a report on the implementation of the LIFE Regulation, including the programme's contribution to the development of Community environment policy, by 30 September 2003.

In the UK, the LIFE fund has provided significant financial assistance to a number of projects under both the LIFE-Nature and LIFE-Environment components. Between 1992 and 2000, the UK has secured 92 LIFE-Environment projects, receiving around 49 million co-funding (approximately £30 million). Over the same period, 30 LIFE-Nature projects have been supported with co-funding amounting to over 30 million (approximately £18.5 million).

The European Commission has just published the document 'Life after LIFE', which sets out a number of LIFE-Nature project case studies and provides an illustration of some of the longer-term results of LIFE-Nature funding. A copy of this will be placed in the House Library.

Food Standards Agency

David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had regarding the continuation of financial assistance to the Food Standards Agency to enable the agency to reduce meat inspection changes for small and medium meat plants after 31 March 2004; and if she will make a statement. [61878]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* Responsibility for the MHS, the Executive Agency responsible for the enforcement of meat hygiene legislation, was transferred from MAFF to the Food Standards Agency when the Food Standards Agency was created on 1 April 2000. Funding transfers were made at the same time.

In 2001 the Government reduced charges to small and medium sized plants, as recommended in the Maclean review. This resulted in a loss of income to the MHS. The then MAFF, and the devolved Administrations in Scotland and Wales, as industry sponsors, contributed towards the cost of this change through baseline funding transfers to the Food Standards Agency.

Responsibility for this issue has therefore passed to the Food Standards Agency, although DEFRA will continue to be consulted, as industry sponsors, on the FSA's proposed charges for future years. I understand the FSA has not made proposals for future charges beyond the present financial year.

Certified Timber

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the refurbishment projects that *(a)* are in progress and *(b)* will start within the next six months; and what action is being taken to ensure that these will procure certified timber. [59768]

Mr. Morley: DEFRA has the following refurbishment projects valued in excess of £250,000 that:

(a) are in progress

9 Millbank—upper floors

Noble House—print room;

(b) will start within the next six months

Nobel House—upper floors

3–8 Whitehall Place.

DEFRA is reviewing these contracts and processes to ensure that it is procuring timber in accordance with the answer given to Mr. Burgon on 28 July 2000, *Official Report,* column 948W.

Bank Branch Closures

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the effect on the rural economy of the closure of rural branches by the major clearing banks. [60366]

Alun Michael: Whereas the closure of branches of the major clearing banks in rural areas can sometimes lead to inconvenience for those who cannot easily travel to the nearest town, there are more rural post offices than rural branches of all the banks combined. Post offices are therefore well placed to provide banking services, and access to banking in rural areas is improving as more banks turn to the Post Office to provide their customers with convenient access. The Government are strongly supporting the Post Office in its plans to help reduce financial exclusion through innovative banking schemes and has made clear that it is prepared to provide funding for 'universal banking' on the basis of a robust business case.

Common Fisheries Policy

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent meetings she has had with the Scottish Executive to discuss the common fisheries policy; and if she will make a statement. [58122]

Mr. Morley: Officials from here who deal with the common fisheries policy maintain frequent contact with their opposite numbers in the Scottish Executive. My most recent meetings with Ross Finnie, Minister for Environment and Rural Development in the Scottish Executive, to discuss the Commission's proposals for the reform of the CFP were on 6 and 10 June.

Live Animal Transportation

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many animals were *(a)* found dead, *(b)* identified as unfit to continue their journey and *(c)* removed from vehicles for other reasons at UK ports in each of the last five years; and what species were involved. [61127]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* This information is available only from 1999 for consignments of slaughter and fattening animals through Dover port. The following figures are for sheep only unless otherwise indicated.

	Number dead	*Number unfit*	*Number removed for other reasons*
1999	15	82	160
2000	[1]23	29	97
2001	5	5	3

[1] Figure includes one pig

Clean Water and Sanitation

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations her Department will make to *(a)* the US, *(b)* Australia, *(c)* Canada and *(d)* Japan on clean water and sanitation before the UN's World summit on sustainable development in September. [62059]

Mr. Meacher: The Department will take every opportunity, at both ministerial and official levels, through bilateral and multilateral contacts with these countries to confirm safe water targets and agree sanitation targets for the World summit.

Nuclear Waste

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what role Nirex plays in the management of plutonium as a nuclear waste. [57976]

Mr. Wilson: I have been asked to reply.

Nirex provides advice to the producers of radioactive waste on the packaging of any trace plutonium present in intermediate level waste.

Anderson Report

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment. Food and Rural Affairs (1) when she expects to receive the report of Sir Iain Anderson's Lessons Learned inquiry; [61604]

(2) when she expects to receive the report of the Royal Society inquiry into infectious diseases in livestock. [61605]

Mr. Morley: *[holding answer 19 June 2002]:* The report of the Royal Society's inquiry into infectious diseases in livestock is currently expected to be published on 16 July, and that of Dr. Iain Anderson's Lessons Learned inquiry on 18 July.

Waste Incineration Directive

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action the Government are taking to implement the Waste Incineration Directive; and if she will make a statement. [64094]

Mr. Meacher: My Department has today published a consultation paper that sets out how the Government intend to implement EC Directive 2000/76/EC on the incineration of waste. It is aimed at operators of incineration and co-incineration plant, regulators, waste producers and waste managers, all of whom will be affected by the implementation of that directive. It is also aimed at waste and environmental interest groups who have an interest in environmentally sound regulation.

The consultation raises a number of issues for consultation and includes a copy of the draft implementing regulations, directions to regulators and an explanatory commentary.

This consultation is solely about the mechanism to implement the tight controls on emissions from incinerators to which the UK has signed up throughout the passage of the Waste Incineration Directive. These controls embody what was already accepted and largely applied in the UK as good practice. This consultation is not about the place of incineration in waste management strategies. It is about ensuring that incinerators continue to be tightly regulated.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Fire Service

Bob Spink: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what proportion of firefighting staff were women in each of the last five years, in each fire service. [61853]

Mr. Raynsford: All fire services in England and Wales are required to provide annually to Her Majesty's fire service inspectorate statistical information about personnel employed, analysed by gender and ethnic origin. The table provides the percentage of the total number of firefighters in each fire service who are female (whole time and retained services combined), based on the statistical returns for the years 31 March 1997 to 31 March 2001.

Percentage of firefighters in post at 31 March 1997 to 31 March 2001—female

Per cent.

	1997[1]	*1998*[1]	*1999*[1]	*2000*[1]	*2001*[1]
Avon	1.04	1.05	1.16	1.16	1.13
Bedfordshire and Luton	2.22	2.91	3.14	2.78	3.23
Buckinghamshire	3.85	2.40	1.79	3.00	1.83
Cambridgeshire	1.98	1.60	1.59	1.91	1.70
Cheshire	0.86	0.74	0.62	0.49	0.62
Cleveland	0.14	0.00	0.00	0.15	0.00
Cornwall	0.34	0.34	0.66	0.83	0.81
County Durham and Darlington	0.53	0.72	0.71	0.54	1.08
Cumbria	0.70	0.70	0.97	1.12	1.41
Derbyshire	1.16	1.53	1.56	1.85	2.04
Devon	0.99	1.62	1.88	1.89	1.73
Dorset	0.47	0.47	0.47	1.11	1.75
East Sussex	1.61	1.50	1.61	1.65	2.37
Essex	0.29	0.29	0.36	0.36	0.79
Gloucestershire	1.57	1.41	2.76	3.09	3.88
Greater Manchester[2]	0.13	0.14	0.09	0.09	0.14
Hampshire	0.68	0.81	0.89	1.36	1.59
Hereford and Worcester	1.61	0.58	1.34	1.44	2.25
Hertfordshire	0.60	0.71	0.73	1.18	0.85
Humberside	0.70	0.68	0.68	0.88	1.04
Isle of Wight	1.36	1.34	1.40	1.35	1.85
Isles of Scilly	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.27	0.00
Kent	0.30	0.41	0.83	1.28	1.52
Lancashire	0.81	0.95	0.99	1.07	1.30
Leicestershire	0.70	0.69	0.99	1.11	1.23
Lincolnshire	2.23	2.98	1.96	2.35	2.23
London	1.01	1.04	1.14	1.16	1.23
Merseyside	0.13	0.27	0.27	0.35	0.37
Mid and West Wales	0.78	1.04	1.02	1.01	1.76
Norfolk	0.97	1.10	0.82	1.08	1.46
North Wales	0.96	0.96	1.10	1.90	1.60
North Yorkshire	1.49	1.38	2.16	2.47	2.61
Northamptonshire	1.38	1.35	1.36	1.55	1.55
Northumberland	0.79	0.77	1.33	1.79	2.28
Nottinghamshire	0.65	0.67	1.52	1.41	1.40
Oxfordshire	2.45	3.16	3.93	4.24	3.94
Royal Berkshire	0.85	1.19	1.20	1.05	0.88
Shropshire	1.26	1.48	1.04	1.00	1.21
Somerset	0.37	0.37	0.74	0.73	1.25
South Wales	0.45	0.50	0.58	0.71	0.70
South Yorkshire	0.10	0.41	0.62	1.42	1.52
Staffordshire	1.92	2.03	1.65	1.99	2.47
Suffolk	0.88	0.90	1.22	1.40	1.99
Surrey	1.28	1.50	1.94	2.14	2.14
Tyne and Wear	0.00	0.10	0.10	0.38	0.68
Warwickshire	1.18	1.44	1.50	1.93	2.77
West Midlands	0.39	0.34	0.39	0.54	1.18
West Sussex	1.21	1.25	2.14	2.79	3.04
West Yorkshire	0.36	0.47	0.47	0.49	0.43
Wiltshire	1.13	1.31	1.32	1.50	1.79
Average	0.84	0.90	1.04	1.22	1.39

[1] As at 31 March

[2] Two firefighters are excluded from the 31 March 2001 percentage as their gender was not known.

Departmental Website

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he will complete his departmental website; what steps is he taking to meet the Government's e-commerce targets; and what his target is for answering correspondence with ministers. [62554]

Mr. Leslie: Following the machinery of government changes, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) has developed an interim website to ensure ongoing access to the Department's material. The website will be developed further over the next few months.

Our approach to meeting the Government's e-commerce and e-government related objectives is set out in the e-business strategies prepared by the former DTLR and the Cabinet Office, from which the Deputy Prime Minister inherited his responsibilities. The

Department is now focusing on delivery of the strategy, a recent example being the planning portal, which will link users of the planning system to a wide range of advice, guidance and services on planning and related topics.

We have also published for consultation a draft national strategy (e.gov@local: towards a national strategy for local e-government) that seeks to clarify a common and ambitious vision of local e-government. This includes £350 million (over three years from 2001–02) of investment to promote its delivery in local government.

On the ODPM's targets for answering correspondence, the Cabinet Office, on an annual basis, publishes a report to Parliament on the volume of Members' correspondence received by Departments. For information for 2001, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, South (Mr. Clarke) on Friday 24 May 2002, *Official Report*, columns 674–76W.

Departmental Re-organisation

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) when he expects to announce specific ministerial responsibilities within his Department; [61619]

(2) how many staff are allocated to each of his responsibilities; and how many of these will be newly recruited; [61617]

(3) if he will list his Office's targets and estimate when he expects each of them to be met; [61620]

(4) if he will list the *(a)* special advisers and *(b)* press officers his Department employs; and how many more he plans to recruit; [61614]

(5) what the estimated cost is of re-organising his Department, broken down into *(a)* re-naming, *(b)* property refurbishment and *(c)* other matters. [61618]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State (Mr. Prescott): I lead an enlarged Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) at the centre of Government separated off from the Cabinet Office.

I am supported by: three Ministers of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Mr. Raynsford), my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche), and my Noble Friend the right hon. Lord Rooker; two Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State, my hon. Friends the Members for Shipley (Mr. Leslie), and Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty). Mavis McDonald CB has been appointed Permanent Secretary.

As First Secretary of State, I will continue to deputise for the Prime Minister across the range of his responsibilities at home and abroad, and to chair a number of Cabinet committees and sub-committees. I will also continue to carry ministerial responsibility for the British Irish Council and the Joint Ministerial Committee.

The ODPM already contained the Social Exclusion Unit, the Regional Co-ordination Unit and the Government Offices for the Regions. The Office has now been expanded to include regional policy, local government, local government finance, planning, housing, urban policy, the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, the Fire Service and a number of executive agencies and non-departmental public bodies. Once the refurbishment is completed, the ODPM will be located at Ripley Court, Whitehall and Eland House, Victoria.

Specific ministerial responsibilities within the ODPM; staff allocated to each responsibility; ODPM targets; lists of special advisers and press officers; and the estimated cost of organising the ODPM, are still being considered.

Voting Methods

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what discussion he has had with Herefordshire council regarding *(a)* electronic voting and *(b)* all postal vote elections for (i) the next general election and (ii) the 2003 local elections; and if he will make a statement. [62703]

Mr. Raynsford: Herefordshire council recently made preliminary inquiries about the likely scope of next year's pilot programme for local elections. As the council was told, it is the Government's intention to issue in September a prospectus giving details about the scope of the 2003 electoral pilots, and how councils will be able to apply for approval to run such pilots.

Ordnance Survey

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister further to the reply of the Under-Secretary of 21 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 572W, if he will announce the outcome of the review of the implications for the National Interest Mapping Service Agreement with the Ordnance Survey of the Ordnance Survey's decision in May 2001 to change to colour photography. [60686]

Mr. McNulty: The NIMSA review group comprising officials from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and Ordnance Survey has yet to conclude its review of the impact on National Interest Mapping Service Agreement (NIMSA) payments to Ordnance Survey on the decision to move to aerial colour photography. The result of this review will be reported within NIMSA annual reports.

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what his policy is on cross-subsidy from public funds for the Ordnance Survey imagery layer business. [60687]

Mr. McNulty: As a trading fund, Ordnance Survey earns its revenue principally from the licensing of its products and the provision of a small number of services. In addition it earns revenue from the National Interest Mapping Service Agreement (NIMSA) which focuses on the provision of national mapping services that would otherwise be uneconomic.

The Government, and Ordnance Survey, will ensure that there is no cross-subsidy from public funds to support Ordnance Survey's imagery layer products.

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether the National Interest Mapping Service Agreement funding makes *(a)* a direct and *(b)* an indirect contribution to the commercial activities of Ordnance Survey. [60685]

Mr. McNulty: As a trading fund, Ordnance Survey is required to deliver a return on capital employed in its activities. Currently the target is to achieve an average of 9 per cent. return over the first five years of the fund, April 1999 to March 2004.

The National Interest Mapping Service Agreement (NIMSA) is an important part of Ordnance Survey's revenue and enables it to undertake uneconomic activities that a purely commercially focused Ordnance Survey could not justify. The NIMSA review group, comprising officials from my Department and from Ordnance Survey takes great care to ensure that NIMSA funds solely support these uneconomic activities.

Planning

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he will publish his analysis of responses to the Green Paper "Planning: Delivering a Fundamental Change". [62851]

Mr. Raynsford: A copy has been placed in the House of Commons Library. It will be placed on the ODPM website shortly.

National Spending Programmes

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what action is being taken to ensure that national spending programmes are being effectively delivered regionally. [63102]

Mr. Raynsford: We are working on several fronts to ensure effective delivery of our regional programmes. The White Paper "Your Region, Your Choice" sets out the general context of our regional policies. We are strengthening the Regional Development Agencies, Regional Chambers and Government Offices, so that programmes can better meet the needs of each region and local area. The White Paper sets out our plans to establish elected assemblies, which will provide more effective and accountable regional decision making, in regions which vote for them in a referendum. Also, the 2002 Spending Review is taking into account assessments of regional priorities provided by the Regional Development Agencies and Government Offices in each region.

Pro-hunting Campaign

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what information he has received from local authorities about *(a)* incidents of slogans, stickers or posters supporting hunting being applied to roads and other public places and *(b)* what the annual cost is of repairing the damage caused in these incidents. [63436]

Mr. Raynsford: I am not aware of any such information having been received.

British-Irish Council

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister which Ministers attended the most recent British-Irish Council; and what his role was in connection with the Council. [63192]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State (Mr. Prescott): My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister led the UK Government's delegation at the British-Irish Council Summit held in Jersey on 14 June. I was present in my capacity as the UK Minister with lead responsibility for the British-Irish Council. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Minister for e-Commerce and Competitiveness were also part of the delegation.

Congestion Charges (Exemptions)

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) if he will discuss with the Secretary of State for Transport exemption for firefighters from London's congestion charges; [63180]

(2) if he will meet the Mayor of London to discuss exemption for firefighters from London's congestion charges. [63177]

Mr. Raynsford: No. The Government's position on national exemptions from congestion charges remains as that set out in our response to the 'Breaking the Logjam' consultation in 1999.

Congestion charging in London is a matter for the Mayor, not the Government.

Summit Communiqués

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will place in the Library the communiqués that were issued by the Governments of the UK and Ireland following the summit meetings on *(a)* the environment and *(b)* drugs policy. [63431]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State (Mr. Prescott): I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) on 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 47W.

The British-Irish Council met at summit level in Jersey on 14 June 2002 and I have placed the communiqué from that summit in the Libraries of the House.

CABINET OFFICE

Advertising

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how much was spent on press and advertising campaigns in 2001–02; and what the planned expenditure is for 2002–03. [60908]

Mr. Alexander: The Cabinet Office spend on advertising in 2001–02 was £2,691,000. This includes £2,491,000 incurred by the Office of the e-Envoy for the UK online advertising campaign in November 2001 and January 2002, offering help to people wanting to use the internet.

The 2001–02 Resource Account is undergoing final adjustments and awaiting audit. As a result, the figure quoted is subject to change.

The information requested for planned advertising expenditure for 2002–03 is not currently available. Budgets will be finalised shortly.

WALES

Training (Aberporth)

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has made to *(a)* ELWA and *(b)* QinetiQ about finding new funding for the training scheme at Aberporth; and if he will make a statement. [55062]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I met representatives of ELWA and QinetiQ on 8 April to discuss the future of training provision at Aberporth.

QinetiQ and ELWA are working together to explore a number of possibilities for continuation of training at the site. These include the possibility of forming partnerships with industry, with other colleges or universities and the use of Objective One funding. I understand that the WDA is developing proposals for an incubator facility at the Aberporth technology park and that WDA and ELWA are considering how this might be integrated with the training facility.

Departmental Reports

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many Wales Office departmental reports were returned and destroyed in *(a)* 2000, *(b)* 2001 and *(c)* 2002. [63107]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The Stationery Office does not keep records of the number of copies which were returned and destroyed because it is not cost-effective for them to do so.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many Wales Office departmental reports were given away free in *(a)* 2000, *(b)* 2001 and *(c)* 2002. [63108]

Mr. Paul Murphy: In those years the Wales Office received 350, 300 and 300 copies of its departmental reports for use within the Department and distribution to those with an interest in it (for example, Welsh MPs and other Government Departments).

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many Wales Office departmental reports were printed in *(a)* 2000, *(b)* 2001 and *(c)* 2002. [63106]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The numbers of Wales Office departmental reports printed in each of those years is a commercial decision for The Stationery Office.

MPs (Personal Data)

Mr. Forth: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information is held by his Department on each hon. Member in relation to *(a)* personal relationships, both current and past, *(b)* financial status and dealings, *(c)* connections with companies and interest groups, *(d)* connections with Governments, and *(e)* published works; and what was held in January 2002. [61830]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Ministers and officials in this Department have access to published reference sources, as well as to the information about hon. Members made publicly available by the House authorities, for the purpose of parliamentary business.

Broadband

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the benefits of access to broadband services for Wales; and if he will make a statement. [61797]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The Government believe that rapid roll-out and adoption of broadband across the UK is important to both their social and economic objectives.

The Welsh Development Agency commissioned a report on the availability of advanced broadband telecommunications in Wales. The report highlighted the need for widespread access to information and communications technology, as it is becoming increasingly important in today's society, as an essential enabler of economic growth, social inclusion and efficient public sector services.

Staff Numbers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many staff were employed by his Department on *(a)* 2 May 1997 and *(b)* 31 May 2002. [60931]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Minister of State (Cabinet Office) on 13 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 1402W.

Delegated Legislation

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Foot-and-Mouth Disease (Amendment) (No. 7) (Wales) Order; [62725]

(2) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Animal By-Products (Amendment) (Wales) Order; [62733]

(3) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the Import and Export Restrictions (Foot-and-Mouth Disease) (No. 5) (Wales) Order; [62741]

(4) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the National Assistance (Assessment of Resources) (Amendment No. 2) (Wales) Regulations; [62749]

(5) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the National Health Service (General Dental Services) and (Dental Charges) (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations; [62757]

(6) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the Housing (Preservation of Right to Buy) (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations; [62765]

(7) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the Crab Claws (Prohibition of Landing) (Revocation) (Wales) Order; [62721]

(8) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the Miscellaneous Food Additives (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations; [62729]

(9) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the National Health Service (Payments by Local Authorities to Health Authorities) (Prescribed Functions) (Wales) Regulations; [62737]

(10) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the General Teaching Council for Wales (Disciplinary Functions) Regulations; [62745]

(11) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the National Health Service (Pharmaceutical Services) (Amendment) (Wales) Order; [62753]

(12) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Local government (Best Value Performance Indicators) (Wales) Order; [62761]

(13) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Learning and Skills Act 2000 (Commencement No. 3 and Transitional Provisions) (Wales) Order; [62769]

(14) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Import and Export Restrictions (Foot-and-Mouth Disease) (Wales) (No. 7) Regulations; [62723]

(15) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Import and Export Restrictions (Foot-and-Mouth Disease) (Wales) (No. 6) Order; [62727]

(16) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Infant Formula and Follow-on Formula (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations; [62735]

(17) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Valuation Tribunals (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations; [62743]

(18) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the Foot-and-Mouth Disease (Amendment) (Wales) (No. 5) Order; [62751]

(19) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the Import and Export Restrictions (Foot-and-Mouth Disease) (Wales) (No. 4) Order; [62759]

(20) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the Local Authorities (Capital Finance) (Rate of Discount for 2001–02) (Wales) Regulations; [62767]

(21) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the Education (Nutritional Standards for School Lunches) (Wales) Regulations; [62731]

(22) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the Foot-and-Mouth Disease (Marking of Meat and Meat Products) (Wales) Regulations; [62739]

(23) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the Local Government Act 2000 (Commencement No. 2) (Wales) Order; [62747]

(24) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the Spreadable Fats (Marketing Standards) (Wales) Regulations; [62755]

(25) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the Restriction on Pithing (Wales) Regulations; [62763]

(26) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the Adoption of Children from Overseas (Wales) Regulations; [62771]

(27) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the Foot-and-Mouth Disease (Marking of Meat, Meat Products, Minced Meat and Meat Preparations) (Wales) Regulations; [62726]

(28) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the Processed Cereal-based Foods and Baby Foods for Infants and Young Children (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations; [62734]

(29) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the Coffee Extracts and Chicory Extracts (Wales) Regulations; [62742]

(30) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the National Assistance (Sums for Personal Requirements) (Wales) Regulations; [62750]

(31) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the National Health Service (Charges for Drugs and Appliances) (Wales) Regulations; [62758]

(32) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the National Health Service (Penalty Charge) (Wales) Regulations; [62766]

(33) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the Education (Extension of Careers Education) (Wales) Regulations; [62722]

(34) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the Housing (Right to Buy) (Priority of Charges) (Wales) Order; [62730]

(35) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the Foot-and-Mouth Disease (Amendment) (Wales) (No. 6) Order; [62738]

(36) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the National Health Service (Optical Charges and Payments) and (General Ophthalmic Services) (Amendment) (No. 2) (Wales) Regulations; [62746]

(37) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the National Health Service (Optical Charges and Payments) and (General Ophthalmic Services) (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations; [62754]

(38) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the Slaughter Premium (Wales) Regulations; [62762]

(39) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the Foot-and-Mouth Disease Ascertainment of Value (Wales) (No. 4) Order; [62770]

(40) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the Import and Export Restrictions (Foot-and-Mouth Disease) (No. 6) (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations; [62724]

(41) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the National Health Service (General Medical Services) (Amendment) (No. 2) (Wales) Regulations; [62728]

(42) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the Products of Animal Origin (Import and Export) (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations; [62736]

(43) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the Ancient Monuments (Applications for Scheduled Monument Consent) (Welsh Forms and Particulars) Regulations; [62744]

(44) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the National Health Service (Travelling Expenses and Remission of Charges) (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations; [62752]

(45) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the South Wales Sea Fisheries District (Variation) Order; [62760]

(46) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the Disabled Facilities Grants and Home Repair Assistance (Maximum Amounts) (Amendment) (Wales) Order; [62768]

(47) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the Plastic Materials and Articles in Contact with Food (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations; [62772]

(48) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the Foot-and-Mouth Disease (Marking of Meat, Minced Meat and Meat Preparation) (Wales) Regulations; [62732]

(49) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the Prescribed Waste (Wales) Regulations; [62740]

(50) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (Commencement No. 2) (Wales) Order; [62748]

(51) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the Beef Labelling (Enforcement) (Wales) Regulations; [62756]

(52) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) (Charges) (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations. [62764]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 18 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 316.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he will reply to the letter to him dated 1 May from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Abigail Fountain. [61690]

Maria Eagle: The reply was sent on 18 June.

Allerdale Borough Council (Benefit Fraud)

Tony Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he will publish the inspection report of the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate in respect of Allerdale borough council. [64091]

Malcolm Wicks: The Benefit Fraud Inspectorate's (BFI) report on Allerdale borough council was published today and copies of the report have been placed in the Library.

This follow up inspection report shows that since the first inspection in October 1999 the council had made substantial progress in most areas of administering benefits. However, further improvements were still needed in counter fraud and overpayment.

Allerdale had been struggling to bring work backlogs under control but the second inspection found work had been reduced to manageable levels through close management and monitoring of the situation.

A significant increase in the number of staff in housing benefit administration and the appointment of a senior fraud officer as well as a restructuring of the teams in line with BFI's first recommendations had brought about a major improvement.

In the fraud team, the long-term absence of a fraud officer had adversely affected the quantity and quality of investigations. BFI noted that the management was addressing the problems during the on-site phase of the inspection.

The first inspection had also recommended the appointment of an overpayment officer. The council had done this and taken other positive steps to managing overpayment better. The situation has improved but further improvements are necessary to, in particular, improve debt recovery.

Progress since the first inspection had been positively supported by greater involvement of Members and senior management in housing benefit administration and counter fraud work.

Allerdale administered some £19 million in housing benefits in 2000–01.

The report makes recommendations to help the council address weaknesses and to improve the administration of housing benefit and council tax benefit, as well as counter fraud activities.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is now considering the report and will be asking the council for its proposals in response to the findings and recommendations of the BFI.

Benefits (Payment Methods)

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether agreement has been reached with the banks on the cost to *(a)* his Department and *(b)* account holders of payment of benefits through bank accounts. [60844]

Malcolm Wicks: Over 40 per cent. of customers are currently paid directly into their bank accounts. Each payment costs taxpayers one penny as opposed to the overall cost of £1.47 for each girocheque cashed and 68p for each order book foil presented. Banks do not normally charge their customers for making withdrawals from their accounts.

East Lothian Council (Benefit Fraud)

Mr. Joyce: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what action he intends to take following the second report, by the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate, on the administration of housing benefit and council tax benefit in East Lothian council. [64092]

Malcolm Wicks: Using the powers available to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in section 139D of the Social Security Administration Act 1992, a direction has today been given to East Lothian council following the Benefit Frauds Inspectorate's report on the council's administration of housing benefit and council tax benefit.

We are disappointed that East Lothian council has been the subject of two critical reports by the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate before taking action to remedy their problems with benefit administration. However, we are pleased that the council is now starting to take its responsibilities seriously and improvements are being made in benefit administration.

We hope the council will look upon the direction as a further stimulus for continuing improvement.

A copy of the direction has been placed in the Library.

Compensation Recovery Unit

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much money the Compensation Recovery Unit has reclaimed from those miners who have received compensation owing to ill health. [62552]

Mr. Wilson: I have been asked to reply.

The Compensation Recovery Unit does not recover money from compensated miners. It recovers its benefit payments from the compensator. It is the responsibility of the compensator—in these cases the DTI—to recover any appropriate benefit from miners' compensation.

To date the DTI has settled 28,000 claims amounting to £137 million of compensation, of which the total sum recovered from miners is £96,500.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Afghanistan

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent discussions she has had with her EU counterparts on aid to Afghanistan. [63085]

Clare Short: I am in regular contact with my EU counterparts on a number of subjects. We discussed latest developments in Afghanistan, and the continued international support for recovery and reconstruction there, at the Development Council meeting on 31 May.

Colonial Officials

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has to review the pension arrangements of British colonial officials. [62713]

Clare Short: None.

Competitive Tendering

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development on how many occasions in the last 12 months the requirement to engage in a competitive tendering process has been waived by her Department due to national security obligations under paragraph 6(h) of the supply regulations. [62820]

Clare Short: None.

Official Photographs

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development on how many occasions during the last 12 months an official photographer has accompanied *(a)* her and *(b)* other Ministers in her Department on official visits (i) overseas and (ii) within the UK; what (A) travel expenses, (B) costs of equipment and processing, (C) staff payment and (D) other costs were incurred on each occasion; what publications official photographs have appeared in during the last 12 months and what terms and conditions were attached to the publication of such photographs; and whether photographs taken on official visits are available for use in non-governmental literature. [62833]

Clare Short: No official photographer has accompanied me or any junior Minister on any visits.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

National Stadium

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) when she received a copy of the report by Tropus about the proposed English National Stadium at Wembley; and if she will publish it; [58113]

(2) if she will list those reports on an English National Stadium received by her Department, stating for each one *(a)* the date on which it was received, *(b)* the name of the person, or company responsible for the compilation of the report and *(c)* the date on which it (i) was published or (ii) will be published; [58112]

(3) if she [illegible] list those reports on an English National Stadium commissioned by her Department, stating for each one *(a)* the date on which it was commissioned, *(b)* the date on which it was received and *(c)* the date on which it (i) was published or (ii) will be published. [58111]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* Over the course of the English National Stadium project's history my Department has received a great deal of information. Since June 2001, the following reports have been received by my Department.

Received by DCMS	*Report commissioned by*	*Publication date*
19 December 2001	English National Stadium Review Interim Report—December 2001 by Patrick Carter for the Department of Culture, Media and Sport.	HC479 published 19 December 2001 by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.
Received 15 December 2001 (draft), 18 December 2001 (final)	David N. James CBE and Berwin Leighton Paisner for Wembley National Stadium Ltd.	The full report has not been published. With the agreement of WNSL the Culture, Media and Sport committee published an abridged version as a memorandum (HC843) on 21 May 2001.
Received 11 April 2002	Office of Government Commerce Gateway Review for Wembley National Stadium Ltd.	The publication of this report is a matter for WNSL.
Received 11 April 2002	Report on Value for Money Analysis by Cyril Sweett Ltd. for Wembley National Stadium Ltd.	Full report containing commercially confidential information not published. Abridged version published by WNSL and laid in the House of Commons Library on 20 May 2002.
Received 26 April 2002	Report of Athletics Provision Analysis by Sports Concepts and Citex for Sport England.	8 May 2002 by Sport England.
Received 21 May 2002	The Tropus Report, commissioned by Tropus Consultancy.	The publication of this report is a matter for Tropus Consultancy.

Culture Online

Mr. Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when Culture Online will be launched; and whether further funding will be available. [63907]

Tessa Jowell: I am announcing today the commitment of a further £10 million for Culture Online.

Together with over £3 million remaining development funding, this new investment will allow Culture Online to develop a range of innovative projects over the next two years. Culture Online will involve partnerships between cultural organisations and the private sector and we will be commissioning proposals for projects later this year. The funding will provide exciting new digital materials to enhance the school curriculum and lifelong learning. These new materials will be available through a Culture Online website and linked to the DfES Curriculum Online portal and the National Grid for Learning. Culture Online will monitor and evaluate projects to ensure the success of the programme.

DEFENCE

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much and what proportion of the departmental expenditure limit for 2002–03 had been spent by 31 May; what the figures were for 2001–02; and if he will make a statement. [61011]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary (Mr. Boateng) on 17 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 130W.

Kashmir

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assistance he has offered to India and Pakistan to help secure the border of Kashmir; what assistance has been requested; and if he will make a statement. [62910]

Mr. Hoon: In the context of the current crisis, I have not offered assistance to either India or Pakistan. Nevertheless, Her Majesty's Government believe that a verifiable end to cross-border infiltration from Pakistan into India is the first step in resolving the current tensions and have made this clear to the Governments of both countries.

Afghanistan

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what specialist troops Finland, Italy and Sweden have contributed to the ISAF; how long they will remain at ISAF's disposal; and if he will make a statement. [62894]

Mr. Hoon: Finland has contributed liaison teams and a civil military co-ordination team. Italy has contributed infantry, including an explosive ordnance disposal team, nuclear biological and chemical warfare reconnaissance troops, general support engineers and air transport. Sweden has contributed intelligence troops. How long those countries will leave their troops at ISAF's disposal is a matter for them. We were pleased with the swiftness and generosity with which contributing nations offered troops to ISAF when the UK was planning its leadership, and the large number of countries contributing demonstrates the strength of international commitment to the war against terrorism.

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions members of the UK armed forces have entered Pakistan during current operations based in Afghanistan. [62902]

Mr. Hoon: Since the United Kingdom element of the International Security Assistance Force was first deployed to Afghanistan, we have used a Forward Mounting Base in Pakistan. As a result, UK armed forces personnel regularly enter Pakistan.

Service Women

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the deployment of women into front line positions in the Royal Navy. [63175]

Mr. Ingram: Women have served in the front line in surface ships since 1 September 1990. Women are currently excluded from serving in submarines and as mine clearance divers for medical safety reasons, but this policy is kept under review.

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the role of women in the Royal Marines. [63174]

Mr. Ingram: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence on 22 May 2002, *Official Report*, columns 363–64W to my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, North (Helen Jones). Women may serve in the Royal Marines Band Service and in units operating in support of 3 Commando Brigade. They are, however, excluded from the Royal Marine General Service. The policy will be kept under periodic review.

Colchester Garrison

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 17 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 37W, on Colchester garrison, on what date his Department's PFI project team and RMPA Services co-located in offices in central London; who owns the premises; who is paying the operating costs of *(a)* the premises and *(b)* staff; and how many (i) of his Department's and (ii) RMPA Services staff are engaged. [63458]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 19 June 2002]:* Elements of the Ministry of Defence's Private Finance Initiative (PFI) project team and RMPA Services co-located in offices in central London on 7 February this year. The building is owned by a third party. Sir Robert McAlpine have taken a lease on one floor of the building and have sub-let offices to the MOD and RMPA Services, who are each paying their own costs for both offices and staff. Five members of the MOD Colchester project team (including consultants' staff) have been co-located with nine RMPA Services staff (including members of three partner companies: Sir Robert McAlpine, Sodexho and WS Atkins).

Red Arrows

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how long he expects the Red Arrows' Hawk aeroplanes to remain in service; and what his long-term plans are for their replacement. [63382]

Mr. Ingram: Current plans assume that the Red Arrows' Hawk aircraft will remain in service until 2010. It has not yet been necessary to make plans for their replacement.

Defence Attachés

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the countries in which UK defence attachés were in place in *(a)* July 1998 and *(b)* April 2002, stating in each case the number of attachés in post; and if he will make a statement. [51253]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 25 April 2002]:* This information has been placed in the Library.

TRANSPORT

Lewes Bypass

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent assessment he has made of the noise levels experienced by residents of Lewes arising from surface noise from the A27 Lewes bypass; if he will make it his policy to secure the early resurfacing of this road; and if he will make a statement. [62312]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 18 June 2002]:* I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Tim Matthews, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Tim Matthews to Mr. Norman Baker, dated 20 June 2002:

I have been asked by the Transport Minister, John Spellar, to reply to your recent question about surface noise from the A27 Lewes Bypass.

The position with regard to noise levels and future resurfacing of the A27 Lewes Bypass remains as set out in John Spellar's letter to you dated 3 January 2002.

Whilst writing, I would take the opportunity to clarify the information in paragraph 3 of that letter about compensation under Part I of the Land Compensation Act 1973.

Compensation is payable under Part I for depreciation of £50 or more in the value of a property caused by physical factors arising from the road in use. Those factors include noise but it is not necessary for the noise levels to reach 68 dB (A).

Downing Street

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what legal curtailments are in place to prevent the exercise of rights to use the public highway in the case of Downing Street. [62663]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 18 June 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave to the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) on 7 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1094W, and 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 538W.

Bus Services

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what mechanisms are available to local authorities to influence the quality, accessibility and coverage of bus services. [62967]

Mr. Spellar: The Transport Act 2000 requires local authorities to draw up a local transport plan with policies to promote and encourage safe, integrated, efficient and economic transport services and facilities. Every plan must include a bus strategy containing policies as to how they intend to use their powers to secure the provision of local bus services meeting local needs.

The Act also provides powers for local authorities to make quality partnership schemes with operators of local bus services, to make ticketing schemes to promote joint or through ticketing between operators, and to make provision for making information about bus services available to the public. The Act also provides for local authorities to make quality contract schemes, involving the tendering of an entire local network, where this is the only practicable way for them to implement the policies set out in their bus strategies.

Pedestrian Crossings

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of reducing accidents by the construction of *(a)* pelican, *(b)* puffin and *(c)* zebra crossings; and if he will make a statement. [62878]

Mr. Spellar: Primarily, pedestrian crossings are installed to help people cross roads without undue delay or danger. The advice that my Department issues on the assessment of pedestrian crossing facilities covers circumstances where accident reduction is an objective, as well as other factors. But the assessment of options, implementation and any subsequent monitoring of new crossings is for the relevant traffic authority and we do not hold centrally information on accident reductions at such sites.

Taxis and Minicabs

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what residual roles he retains over the administration and licensing of taxis and minicabs in London. [62677]

Mr. Spellar: The administration and licensing of London's taxis and private hire vehicles (minicabs) are matters for the licensing authority, Transport for London. However, the Secretary of State retains responsibility for the commencement and transitional provisions for London private hire vehicles and their drivers in accordance with the implementation of the Private Hire Vehicles (London) Act 1998; statutory instruments will be made to coincide with Transport for London's regulations when they have completed their consultations.

Prestwick Air Traffic Control Centre

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the answer of 10 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 762W, on Prestwick, if a threshold level in traffic forecasts has been set for the commission of further work in the building of the air traffic control centre at Prestwick; and how current traffic forecasts compare to this level. [61942]

Mr. Spellar: No threshold level in traffic forecasts has been set. Both NATS and the Government remain committed to the new Scottish centre and further work will be commenced once traffic levels make it financially prudent to do so.

Tram and Light Rail Schemes

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what procedures he applies for considering proposals for tram and light rail schemes. [62803]

Mr. Spellar: Proposals for new tram and light rail schemes normally need Transport and Works Act (TWA) powers. If funding from my Department is essential for the project to proceed, promoters should seek a provisional view from my Department on whether the scheme passes the Government's appraisal tests which are used to decide whether a project is eligible for funding before seeking powers. In such cases, if and when such powers are obtained, my Department then reaches a decision on whether funding should be provided for the scheme.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what criteria his Department uses to assess proposals for tram and light rail schemes. [62802]

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how his Department computes the cost-benefits of tram and light rail systems. [62862]

Mr. Spellar: Major schemes in local transport plans, including light rail schemes, are assessed under the New Approach to Appraisal, which takes account of five over-arching objectives: environment, safety, economy, accessibility and integration. More details are contained in "Major Scheme Appraisal in Local Transport Plans—Part 1: Detailed Guidance on Public Transport and Highway Schemes", published in May 2002.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what his targets are for the numbers of *(a)* bus journeys and *(b)* tram and light rail journeys for each year of his Department's current plan's operation. [62775]

Mr. Spellar: My Department's 10-year plan includes targets for *(a)* increasing bus use by 10 per cent. and *(b)* doubling light rail use. The base figures for passenger journeys in 2000–01 are *(a)* 3,761 million and *(b)* 120 million. The targets for passenger journeys in 2010–11 are therefore *(a)* 4,137 million and *(b)* 240 million. No targets have been set for the intervening years.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what his assessment is of the benefits to business of tram and light rail schemes in *(a)* urban and *(b)* outer-city areas. [62806]

Mr. Spellar: Light rail schemes can offer a range of benefits to business, in both urban and outer-city areas, depending on the circumstances of the particular case. They can provide a safe, reliable and efficient mode of transport for employees and customers; they may contribute to reducing congestion by attracting motorists from their cars; and they can increase the attractiveness of an area to potential investors.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent representations he has made to the Comprehensive Spending Review on trams and light rail schemes. [62809]

Mr. Spellar: We continue to discuss progress towards the targets set out in our 10-Year Plan for Transport, including that for light rail, with colleagues across Government.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the role of tram and light rail schemes in integrated transport strategies. [62807]

Mr. Spellar: The potential role of light rail schemes in integrated transport strategies is summarised in paragraphs 107–08 of my Department's Guidance on Full Local Transport Plans, as follows:

> "107. Light rail, and similar rapid transit systems, can have an important role to play in delivering integrated transport in major conurbations. Experience from existing light rail schemes shows

that they can be effective in providing a high quality public transport option in densely used transport corridors and in encouraging motorists to switch from their cars.

108. However the capital costs of light rail schemes are high, particularly compared to bus priority measures and modest guided bus schemes which may offer a more cost-effective alternative. Therefore if authorities with to develop light rail schemes, they will need to be able to demonstrate that they represent good value for money, form an essential part of a local integrated transport strategy and that the objectives of that strategy cannot be met in better ways. It will also be important to show that a light rail scheme is fully integrated with other public transport modes in the area and that appropriate traffic managements schemes are to be introduced so that light rail has priority over other road space users and that the road decongestion benefits of the light rail scheme are maintained over a long period. We would also expect local authorities to develop public-private partnerships to take forward such schemes where this is necessary to secure Best Value and to consider private finance arrangements under which the maximum degree of responsibility for constructing, managing and operating the project is taken on by the private sector."

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list existing tram and light railway schemes indicating *(a)* how much revenue subsidy they have received for each year since they have been in existence and *(b)* the capital cost in each case. [62804]

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will list each *(a)* tram and *(b)* light rail system operating within the United Kingdom; [62869]

(2) what criteria he employs, other than financial ones, in assessing and approving proposed tram and light rail systems; [62863]

(3) how much his Department has spent on each tram and light rail system operation. [62885]

Mr. Spellar: The information is as follows.

Light rail scheme	*Year of opening*	*Gross capital cost at outturn prices (£ million)*	*Central Government funding including ERDF (£ million)*
Manchester Metrolink: Bury-Altrincham	1992	155	150
Manchester Metrolink: Salford Quays-Eccles	2000	160	27
Sheffield Supertram	1994	240	235
Midland Metro	1999	145	111
Tyne and Wear Metro	1980–84	284	200
Tyne and Wear Metro: Airport extension	1991	12	2
Tyne and Wear Metro: Sunderland extension	2002	100	50
Docklands Light Railway: original system, Bank and Beckton extensions	1987–94	580	480
Docklands Light Railway: Lewisham extension	1999	250	50
Croydon Tramlink	2000	200	125

The original cost of the Blackpool tramway is not known. No central Government earmarked funding has been provided for it since the introduction of local transport plans in 1999.

None of these systems receive revenue subsidy from central Government.

Stafford Railway Station

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will provide funding for greater car parking capacity at Stafford railway station. [63162]

Mr. Spellar: The provision of car parking facilities at railway stations was not a requirement of the original franchise agreements. Car parking capacity at Stafford station is a matter for the station operator, Virgin West Coast. The Strategic Rail Authority's rail passenger partnership scheme is a potential source of funding.

Rail Freight

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what *(a)* statutory rules, *(b)* guidelines and *(c)* regulations exist with respect to applications made to Railtrack for new freight connections; [62284]

(2) how many applications have been made to Railtrack, in each of the last three years, for the construction of new freight connections to the rail network; [62283]

(3) what *(a)* statutory rules, *(b)* guidelines and *(c)* regulations there are relating to the construction of new freight connections (i) by organisations other than Railtrack and (ii) that are sponsored by organisations other than Railtrack. [62286]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* Agreements between Railtrack and other persons regarding new freight connections to Railtrack's network are subject to the approval or discretion of the rail regulator under section 17 or 18 of the Railways Act 1993. The rail regulator has issued directions to Railtrack under section 18 for 31, six and four new connection agreements with Railtrack in each of the last three calendar years. Any such connection is subject to the Railways Act 1993, Railway Group Standards, the Railways and Other Transport Systems (Approval of Works, Plant and Equipment) Regulation 1994, the Transport and Works Act 1992, and Part G of the Railtrack Track Access Conditions. Railtrack publishes guidance for anyone seeking to connect to its network in a publication entitled "A Guide to Freight Connections". The latest edition was published in October 1998. Substantially the same regime applies to connections which do not involve Railtrack.

Rail Track Access Charges

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the change in track access charges paid by each train operating company was from 1 April 2001, resulting from the increase in access charges granted to Railtrack as part of the last periodic review carried out by the ORR; and if he will make a statement. [62296]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* The fixed track access charges paid by each franchised train operating company for 2001–02 are shown in the table. In total these charges are 20.5 per cent. lower in real terms than the aggregate fixed track access charges for 2000–01. This reduction takes account of direct grants from the SRA, in the absence of which access charges would need to be higher.

A directly comparable breakdown of 2000–01 access charges by train operating company is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

£

Train operating company	*Fixed charge*[1]
Anglia	14,315,915
Cardiff Railway	5,708,415
Central Trains	74,823,111
Chiltern	9,801,611
South Central	55,990,684
Connex South Eastern	100,158,195
Gatwick Express	6,643,844
GNER	72,589,461
Great Eastern	23,781,313
Great Western Trains	74,468,341
C2C (formerly LTS)	17,613,747
Merseyrail	14,731,783
Midland Mainline	18,587,481
North West Trains	80,071,189
Northern Spirit	99,144,817
Scotrail	117,818,012
Silverlink	56,830,709
South West Trains	78,702,527
Thames Trains	20,631,385
Thameslink	17,617,111
Virgin Cross Country	118,321,190
Virgin West Coast	239,910,734
WAGN	49,987,277
Wales and West	38,918,620
Total	1,407,167,474

[1] 2001–02 prices

Rail Franchises

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will make a statement on the guarantees within the franchise agreements to the train operating companies with regard to the Rail Regulator; [62299]

(2) if he will make a statement on the protection within franchise agreements for the train operating companies with regard to *(a)* discriminatory changes in law and *(b)* Railtrack non-performance; and whose responsibility it is to enforce such protection. [62300]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to her on 15 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 742W. In replacement franchises there is a similar provision in relation to changes of law. There are no generic provisions relating to Railtrack's performance.

Responsibility for awarding and managing franchises rests with the Strategic Rail Authority.

Rail Safety

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many speed restrictions there were on the *(a)* east coast and *(b)* west coast main lines (i) in 1999 and (ii) at the latest available date. [62056]

Mr. Spellar: Railtrack inform me that on 10 June there were 47 temporary speed restrictions (TSRs) on the east coast main line and 100 on the west coast main line. Similar information was not collected by Railtrack in 1999.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his reply of 13 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 508, if he will make a statement on progress on Lord Cullen's recommendations on rail safety reported by the chairman of the Health and Safety Commission; if he will place copies of correspondence received in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [61482]

Mr. Spellar: The Health and Safety Commission (HSC) has published progress reports on how the recommendations of the Cullen reports have been implemented: Part 1 on 14 March 2002 and Part 2 on 29 April 2002. These reports describe the original and revised timetables for all the recommendations and copies have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

The Secretary of State asked the HSC for a further progress report on the reasons for the delay in implementing those recommendations associated with the management of contractors. The HSC published that report on 10 June when copies were also placed in the Libraries of the House.

Network Rail

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) on what date he applied for state aid approval for the payment of £300 million to Network Rail to provide compensation for shareholders of Rail Track Group; [61269]

(2) when he applied to the European Commission for state aid approval in relation to the underwriting of funding for Network Rail; and if he will make a statement. [61268]

Mr. Spellar: The financial support package which the Government have agreed to make available to Network Rail if it is successful in acquiring Railtrack plc was notified to the European Commission on 31 May 2002. That includes the £300 million which is being made available to Network Rail in recognition of the benefits which would be delivered by an early end to Railtrack's administration.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether there is an agreed work programme of track renewal for the first year of Network Rail's trading. [61298]

Mr. Spellar: Any bidder to succeed Railtrack as the rail network operator—including Network Rail—would need to have in place a programme of track renewal to enable it to fulfil its licence condition, to maintain the rail network, in accordance with best practice and in a timely, economic and efficient manner.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how much money he estimates will be raised from *(a)* Government and *(b)* private sector sources to finance Network Rail; [61251]

(2) how much money he estimates the SRA will need in *(a)* 2002–03 and *(b)* 2003–04 to finance Network Rail; [61253]

(3) what adjustments to the forecasts for transport spending under the 10-year plan he is proposing to accommodate the financing of Network Rail; [61300]

(4) what his estimate is of the expenditure needed in the next three years to bring the rail network up to acceptable standard; [61252]

(5) whether the additional grant and guarantees needed by Network Rail compared with the plans for Railtrack in the 10-year plan represent additional public funding above the 10-year plan levels. [61299]

Mr. Spellar: Network Rail will have improved management focus, lower financing costs and no dividends to pay. Negotiations are continuing with Network Rail over its support requirements. The Government expect that any support offered to Network Rail could be found within the 10-year transport plan funding levels.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) whether the Government stand behind any guarantees offered by the SRA on behalf of Network Rail; [61279]

(2) how much capital Network Rail will have on its balance sheet on its first day of trading after the transfer to it of Railtrack assets. [61280]

Mr. Spellar: Negotiations between Network Rail and Railtrack Group plc are continuing on a commercial confidential basis.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what guarantees about the state of the rail network *(a)* the Government and *(b)* the SRA will offer to Network Rail. [61297]

Mr. Spellar: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 10 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 777W.

Strategic Rail Authority

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether the Government guarantee the borrowings of the SRA. [61278]

Mr. Spellar: Paragraph 10 of schedule 14 to the Transport Act 2000 gives the Secretary of State the power to guarantee the repayment of any sums borrowed by the SRA temporarily, by way of overdraft or otherwise, from another person. The SRA has not exercised its powers to borrow money.

Commuters

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the average time was spent commuting *(a)* predominantly by rail and *(b)* predominantly by road, in minutes per person, in each of the last six years in each nation and region. [61285]

Mr. Spellar: The average time spent travelling to work is available from the Labour Forces Survey. The table shows the average time (in minutes) for trips to work *(a)* by predominantly rail and *(b)* by predominantly road for the autumn of the last six years by region of workplace.

Average time travelling to work by Government office region and country of workplace

Minutes per trip

	Autumn					
	1996	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
By rail						
North East	37	42	43	42	45	40
North West	48	44	49	50	55	50
Yorkshire and the Humber	56	60	53	54	56	58
East Midlands	62	73	44	57	61	63
West Midlands	62	58	53	56	58	60
East of England	54	51	57	57	60	51
London	59	60	59	59	61	61
South East	52	59	58	58	60	56
South West	76	58	58	73	69	65
England	58	59	58	59	60	59
Wales	50	49	50	52	38	43
Scotland	58	42	55	53	52	48
Great Britain	58	58	58	58	59	59
By road						
North East	21	21	21	21	22	22
North West	22	23	23	23	24	24
Yorkshire and the Humber	23	23	23	22	23	24
East Midlands	21	22	21	21	21	22
West Midlands	23	23	23	23	24	24
East of England	22	22	22	22	23	23
London	34	34	35	35	36	35
South East	23	24	24	24	24	24
South West	21	21	21	22	22	22
England	23	24	24	24	25	25
Wales	20	21	20	21	21	20
Scotland	23	24	23	23	24	24
Great Britain	23	24	24	24	24	24

Ordnance Survey Contracts

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what restrictions are placed on EU, but non-UK companies in subcontracting Ordnance Survey contracts to non-EU companies. [63155]

Mr. Jamieson: This matter is commercially confidential.

Meetings

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which Ministers and officials had meetings with representatives of *(a)* the Confederation of British Industry, *(b)* the Engineering Employees Federation, and *(c)* the Engineering Marine Training Authority during the last year; who they met; and what the subjects and outcomes of their discussions were. [62207]

Mr. Spellar: Ministers and civil servants have meetings with a wide range of organisations and individuals as part of the process of policy development and analysis.

As with previous Administrations it is not this Government's practice to provide details of all such meetings. All such contacts are conducted in accordance with the Ministerial Code, the Civil Service Code and Guidance to Civil Servants: Contacts with Lobbyists.

Departmental Restructuring

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the *(a)* timetable and *(b)* terms of reference are for the review of the appropriate institutional structure and departmental responsibilities for transport safety and other health and safety at work issues deemed necessary as a result of departmental restructuring; and if he will make a statement. [61266]

Mr. Darling: Further details will be announced shortly.

Illegal Fuel

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many roadside tests were carried out on motor vehicles to test for illegal petrol and diesel in each year since 1995. [62947]

John Healey: I have been asked to reply.

Roadside checks do not include risk-targeted checks made at premises. They are therefore only part of Customs activity to test for illegal petrol and diesel.

The decline in the number of tests made reflects a move to more risk assessed challenges. This makes better use of Customs' resources and results in a greater hit rate than for fully random testing. Figures for 2000 show hit rates of approximately 4.5 per cent. for random tests and 45 per cent. for risk-assessed challenges.

Customs figures for roadside checks do not go back as far as 1995. However, the table shows the number of roadside checks carried out from financial year 1996–97.

Year	*Number*
1996–97	39,087
1997–98	35,603
1998–99	34,963
1999–2000	30,405
2000–01	17,158
2001–02	11,012

Red Diesel

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what restrictions exist on the use of red diesel in the United Kingdom; and whether these regulations were changed following shortages in fuel supplies in September 2000. [62939]

John Healey: I have been asked to reply.

Restrictions on the use of red diesel and other 'rebated oils' are contained in the Hydrocarbon Oil Duties Act 1979, and published in Customs and Excise Public Notice 75 "Fuel for Diesel Vehicles".

This legislation was not changed after the shortages in fuel supplies that occurred in September 2000, though for a brief period at the time motorists were permitted to use red diesel, provided that duty at the full, road fuel, rate was paid.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Youth Services

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what the average amount spent on youth services is by local authorities per 13 to 19-year-old per year in each of the last three years; [57595]

(2) if she will list by local authority the amount spent on youth services per 13 to 19-year-old for *(a)* the last year for which figures are available and *(b)* the preceding three years. [57596]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested is contained in the following tables:

NCE per head of population, real terms (2000–01) prices

	Unit costs per head of population (£)			
LEA name	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
City of London	380	400	960	260
Camden	140	150	180	240
Greenwich	100	110	130	130
Hackney	80	70	100	—
Hammersmith and Fulham	150	110	160	150
Islington	310	240	400	300
Kensington and Chelsea	350	240	350	350
Lambeth	100	90	90	120
Lewisham	100	100	110	130
Southwark	220	230	140	170
Tower Hamlets	230	210	200	210
Wandsworth	190	190	190	180
Westminster	200	150	130	110
Barking and Dagenham	100	100	80	70
Barnet	60	70	90	60
Bexley	70	80	90	90
Brent	120	120	100	110
Bromley	40	50	50	50
Croydon	70	70	80	110
Ealing	40	40	50	70
Enfield	40	50	50	50
Haringey	70	90	80	100
Harrow	40	40	40	40
Havering	60	70	70	80
Hillingdon	80	80	70	70
Hounslow	60	70	50	50
Kingston upon Thames	60	50	60	60
Merton	40	40	50	50
Newham	110	80	80	80
Redbridge	60	70	70	90
Richmond upon Thames	70	70	50	60
Sutton	90	90	90	80
Waltham Forest	110	130	110	120
Birmingham	80	90	90	40
Coventry	90	70	80	80
Dudley	50	50	60	70
Sandwell	50	50	60	60
Solihull	40	40	40	40
Walsall	60	60	90	50
Wolverhampton	140	130	140	160
Knowsley	—	30	10	10
Liverpool	160	160	140	130
St. Helens	60	60	70	70
Sefton	70	70	70	70
Wirral	70	70	80	70
Bolton	60	60	60	60
Bury	50	50	80	80
Manchester	60	70	70	70
Oldham	120	130	80	70
Rochdale	80	70	60	70
Salford	60	60	60	80
Stockport	60	60	70	70
Tameside	100	90	70	120
Trafford	60	80	80	70
Wigan	50	50	50	50
Barnsley	80	90	100	90
Doncaster	70	80	70	70
Rotherham	130	160	160	170
Sheffield	100	100	90	100
Bradford	90	90	100	80

NCE per head of population, real terms (2000–01) prices

LEA name	*Unit costs per head of population (£)*			
	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Calderdale	140	120	120	130
Kirklees	40	40	40	50
Leeds	90	200	100	120
Wakefield	70	60	60	70
Gateshead	60	70	70	70
Newcastle upon Tyne	110	120	—	150
North Tyneside	20	20	30	50
South Tyneside	80	70	50	110
Sunderland	20	40	60	60
Isles of Scilly	—	10	10	20
Bath and North East Somerset	90	100	90	90
City of Bristol	80	80	80	80
North Somerset	60	60	60	50
South Gloucestershire	50	50	60	50
Hartlepool	110	110	100	100
Middlesbrough	20	40	80	80
Redcar and Cleveland	90	90	90	100
Stockton-on-Tees	70	60	60	60
City of Kingston-upon-Hull	100	100	100	100
East Riding of Yorkshire	50	50	60	50
North East Lincolnshire	50	50	70	80
North Lincolnshire	80	90	80	80
North Yorkshire	40	30	40	30
York	60	70	70	70
Bedfordshire	50	40	50	40
Luton	70	60	50	70
Buckinghamshire	60	50	60	60
Milton Keynes	80	80	80	80
Derbyshire	80	80	70	60
Derby	60	70	60	80
Dorset	70	70	70	70
Poole	70	60	70	70
Bournemouth	90	90	100	110
Durham	90	90	70	40
Darlington	70	70	50	50
East Sussex	50	40	50	50
Brighton and Hove	40	60	40	40
Hampshire	30	30	30	40
Portsmouth	—	—	—	—
Southampton	40	50	40	40
Leicestershire	60	70	70	60
Leicester	90	90	80	70
Rutland	40	60	60	50
Staffordshire	100	90	80	80
Stoke on Trent	50	40	70	80
Wiltshire	80	50	60	50
Swindon	90	70	80	80
Pre LGR Berkshire	80			
Bracknell Forest		80	90	90
Windsor and Maidenhead		50	50	50
West Berkshire		50	50	60
Reading		180	90	100
Slough		90	100	100
Wokingham		40	50	10
Pre LGR Cambridgeshire	50			
Cambridgeshire		50	40	40
Peterborough		10	40	70
Pre LGR Cheshire	50			
Cheshire		50	50	50
Halton		70	80	70
Warrington		50	50	50
Pre LGR Devon	40			
Devon		40	40	40
Plymouth		10	50	50
Torbay		40	40	40
Pre LGR Essex	70			
Essex		60	60	60
Southend		60	50	60
Thurrock		100	80	100
Hereford and Worcester	40			
Herefordshire		40	40	60
Worcestershire		40	40	40
Pre LGR Kent	40			
Kent		40	40	50
Rochester and Gillingham		40	40	50
Pre LGR Lancashire	90			
Lancashire		70	70	70
Blackburn		80	80	90
Blackpool		60	60	60
Pre LGR Nottinghamshire	90			
Nottinghamshire		80	80	90
Nottingham City		120	120	120
Pre LGR Shropshire	70			
Shropshire		60	70	60
The Wrekin		90	90	90
Cornwall	56	50	50	70
Cumbria	42	40	40	40
Gloucestershire	68	60	60	60
Hertfordshire	70	60	60	70
Isle of Wight	109	100	90	90
Lincolnshire	47	50	40	50
Norfolk	55	50	40	40
Northamptonshire	58	60	60	50
Northumberland	51	40	50	50
Oxfordshire	52	50	40	50
Somerset	61	60	60	70
Suffolk	—	—	40	50
Surrey	57	60	60	70
Warwickshire	24	30	30	50
West Sussex	62	60	60	60
England	71	70	70	70
Min.	—	—	—	—
Max.	380	400	960	350
Median	70	70	70	70
25 per cent. LEAs	90	90	90	90
75 per cent. LEAs	50	50	50	50

Notes:

All figures are in £s, rounded to the nearest £10.

All figures are in real terms (2000–01) prices based on GDP deflators published on 18 April 2002.

Unit costs are calculated using net current expenditure after recharges.

Expenditure data for 1999–2000 is taken from section 52 outturn statements completed by local education authorities and returned to DfES.

Data for previous years is taken from DTLR's revenue outturn returns.

Population data relate to ages 13 to 19 and are estimates produced by the DfES, using data from the ONS and Government Actuaries Department (GAD).

Education Standards

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* boys and *(b)* girls from ethnic minority backgrounds reached the required standards of (i) English and (ii) Maths at Key Stages (A) 1, (B) 2, (C) 3 and (D) 4 in each year since 1997, broken down by local education authority. [57713]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested is not available centrally at present. The new Pupil Level Annual Schools' Census that my Department introduced in January 2002 will enable for the first time linkage between the characteristics of individual pupils to their Key Stage and GCSE/GNVQ achievements. Statistical analyses from these linkages will be published in the autumn.

Equal Treatment

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what new data series separated by gender, race, disability and age have been commissioned by her Department since August 1997. [58338]

Mr. Stephen Twigg *[holding answer 22 May 2002]:* Statistics published by the Department routinely include breakdowns by gender and age, except (in the latter case) where they relate to programmes for children or young people of a specific age (for example national curriculum assessments).

In the early years and child care field, a number of survey series have been introduced since 1997. The topics covered include parents of three and four-year-old children and their use of early years services, parents' demand for child care, and the child care work force. The data collected include gender, age, ethnicity and disability, and analyses are published accordingly where sample sizes allow.

Since 1997 the Department has developed and implemented a "Pupil Level Annual Schools Census" (PLASC) collecting far more detailed data than hitherto from maintained schools. Data were collected for all maintained school pupils for the first time in January 2002, and are being linked with their Key Stage and examination achievements as they occur. These data will allow far more detailed investigation of the impact of gender, ethnicity, special educational needs and other factors on the experiences and achievements of school pupils, and new analyses or series will be published from this source in due course.

Since 1997 the Department has introduced several new statistical series on young people and adults embarking on Government supported training, their qualification achievements and subsequent destinations. These include breakdowns by some or all of gender, ethnicity, disability and literacy/numeracy need.

In 2000 a new series was introduced on the level of highest qualification held by young people and adults of working age, including breakdowns by gender, age and ethnicity. This was a new analysis of data from the long-standing Labour Force Survey.

The Department, in collaboration with the Office for National Statistics and the Department for Work and Pensions, introduced the English Local Labour Force Survey in 2000, a new annual exercise expanding on the Labour Force Survey. First results from the enlarged survey were published in 2001, including a wide range of qualifications and labour market analyses with breakdowns by gender, age, ethnicity and disability.

In addition to new data series, since 1997 the Department has commissioned, conducted itself or contributed to a wide range of one-off or time limited exercises, yielding information including gender, age, ethnicity or disability (or special educational need) dimensions:

Effective Provision of Pre-School Education—a longitudinal study of children;

the Millennium Cohort, a new longitudinal study led by the Economic and Social Research Council and co-funded by DfES and other Departments, which surveyed 20,000 babies born between July 2000 and June 2001, and will (for example) provide vital information for the evaluation of Sure Start;

17 published research reports, plus two more in preparation, on topics related to special educational needs, including the evaluation of provision for different kinds of special need, the development of good practice in special needs provision, and the achievements of special needs pupils;

three published research reports on topics related to ethnicity (teaching and learning strategies in successful multi-ethnic schools; minority ethnic participation and achievements in education, training and the labour market; Black Caribbean young men's experiences of education and employment), plus three more in preparation (on exclusions of minority ethnic pupils, minority ethnic pupils in mainly White schools, and the experiences of minority ethnic students in higher education and their transition into the labour market);

evaluation of the Department's "Excellence in Cities" initiatives, and their impact for pupils of different gender, age and ethnicity;

evaluation of the impact of Educational Maintenance Allowances on participation and achievement in post-16 education;

the "Excellence Challenge" to increase and widen participation in higher education, the evaluation of which will assess the aspirations of minority ethnic and female students, their achievements at ages 14–18 and progression into higher education;

the National Survey of Adult Basic Skills Needs (scheduled for completion in 2003), plus a longitudinal study of the impact of basic skills learning (scheduled for completion in 2005);

the National Adult Learning Survey—a special survey in 1999 for adults from ethnic minorities, and a boosted sample in 2000 to capture information for adults with disabilities;

an on-going study of the impact of gender, ethnicity, age and disability on teachers' career patterns (scheduled for completion in 2003);

an on-going survey of the use of and attitudes towards ICT by people from ethnic minorities compared with White people;

the "Young people and ICT" survey published in 2002, looking at use of, attitudes to and expenditure on ICT by children and their parents, plus a repeat survey to be published in 2003, which will examine variations by ethnic group in greater depth;

a study of the position of women in IT, electronic and communication courses and careers (conducted jointly with the Department of Trade and Industry and Cabinet Office).

School Expenditure

Mr. Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of UK GDP was spent on *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools in each of the last three years. [60346]

Mr. Miliband: Data are not recorded to indicate how funding is split between secondary schools and primary schools in the United Kingdom. The following table provides details of the proportion of gross domestic product spent on schools in the United Kingdom in the last three years. Some under fives are educated in primary schools and therefore funding for this group is also shown.

Percentage

	1999–2000	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Schools	2.7	2.8	3.0
Under Fives	0.2	0.2	0.3
Total Schools and Under Fives	2.9	3.0	3.3

In England, approximately 46 per cent. of recurrent spending on schools is targeted for funding primary schools and educating the under-fives. Some 44 per cent. is directed into secondary schools and sixth form colleges. The remaining funding supports other services such as school transport, school meals, teacher development and child guidance.

Information on schools spending by the devolved Assemblies is a matter for them and not for my Department.

Computers

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many computers were replaced in her Department in each of the past three years; how the replaced units were disposed of and by which companies; and at what cost. [60738]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The number of computers replaced in each of the past three years by the Department for Education and Employment (until June 2001) and the Department for Education and Skills (from June 2001 onwards) was:

Date	*Number*
April 1999-March 2000	1,250
April 2000-March 2001	3,155
April 2001-March 2002	2,542

The Department's policy is to give suitable computer equipment to non-profit organisations active in education, training and employment and to dispose of other computer equipment by auction. Over the three years 3,500 computers were provided to schools and other non-profit making organisations.

Two companies, London Computer Auctions (until July 2000) and Northern Realisations, have handled the transfer to non-profit organisations, making a small charge to cover their costs. They have also handled the auction sales.

The cost to the Department over the three years was about £30,000.

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what has been the *(a)* cost and *(b)* saving from the pursuit of the Department's public service agreement targets in each year since they were introduced. [61039]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The Department's public service agreement set out the key outcomes it is committed to deliver with the resources provided, and its service delivery agreement sets out the key steps towards delivery of those targets. Every year the Department publishes performance against its targets—including on value for money—and the resources it has used, in its departmental report.

Home Education

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what support and guidance is provided by her Department for parents educating their children at home; and what guidance has been given to education authorities about support for the education of children at home. [61369]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Government fully recognise and support the right of any parent who wishes to educate their child at home, a right established under Section 7 of the Education Act 1996.

Parents choose to educate their children at home for a variety of reasons and the Department encourages LEAs to be sympathetic to these and endeavour to enter in to a discussion with home-educators. They should not seek to prevent parents from opting for home education, but must assure themselves that the education is appropriate to their child's age, ability and aptitude, and to any special educational needs they may have (Section 7 of the Education Act 1996). In addition, the local education authority must satisfy itself that the child is receiving suitable education (Section 19 of the Education Act 1996), and the Department suggests that parents should provide sufficient information for the local education authority to be able to do this.

The Department has compiled a fact sheet regarding home education which is available to parents and local education authorities on request or can be downloaded from the Department's website at: www.dfes.gov.uk/parents/learning/home.

Bullying

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 16 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1189W, on bullying, what measures have been *(a)* drawn up and *(b)* implemented to prevent bullying, with special reference to racist and homophobic bullying in schools and colleges; and if she will make a statement. [61529]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: We are determined to help all schools prevent homophobic or racist bullying, and other forms of bullying, among pupils. Our anti-bullying pack contains specific advice on tackling bullying because of race or sexual orientation, and we have also provided a foreword to "Safe for All: a best practice guide to prevent homophobic bullying in secondary schools" published by Stonewall.

We are funding new research by ChildLine to obtain young people's views on schools' anti-bullying policies. In addition, external researchers are evaluating the use of our anti-bullying pack and video by schools. We have taken steps to publicise further the pack's availability, and plan to re-launch the document later this year. In addition, our guidance on the Safer Schools Partnerships (covering the areas of highest crime) mentions that the police and schools need to be essential partners in the prevention of bullying and antisocial behaviour.

We are not directly responsible for further education colleges as they are independent institutions. I understand that the further education sector has developed guidance regarding positive duties on promoting race relations in colleges; these might be helpful in creating an appropriately supportive environment.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1189W, on bullying, what review has taken place to assess the anti-bullying strategy; what plans she has to introduce legislation to prevent bullying and harassment in further education colleges; and if she will make a statement. [61530]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: We have not carried out a review of this strategy. However, external researchers are evaluating the use of our anti-bullying pack and video by schools; the results should be available early next year.

We have no plans to require further education colleges to draw up anti-bullying policies, as they are independent institutions. However, we would encourage any college to draw up such a policy if they believe that one is needed.

Qualifications

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how the parity of esteem between general academic, vocational and work-based qualifications for young people is to be funded; to what extent; from what sources; and over what time scale. [62461]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 18 June 2002]:* The arrangements for the relative funding levels of different qualifications are a matter for the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). I have therefore asked John Harwood, the council's chief executive, to write to my hon. Friend providing the information requested and to place a copy of his reply in the Library.

The Government are committed to bringing up the funding for colleges towards that of schools in time and as resources allow. This will help the LSC to ensure that qualification funding levels are equitable across different learning sectors.

Truancy

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many primary schools and how many secondary schools reported zero per cent. for unauthorised absence in her Department's absence tables in academic year 2000–01. [62659]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: There were 3,675 primary schools, which represents 20 per cent. of all maintained primary schools, and 29 secondary schools, which represents almost 1 per cent. of all maintained secondary schools, that reported zero per cent. for unauthorised absence in 2000–01.

Edexcel

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many errors have been found in examination papers set by Edexcel for examinations in the current year. [62795]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Seven errors have been found in Edexcel examination papers during 2002, consisting of five in the January series of examinations and two in the May/June series.

Community Schools

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the community schools that in each of the last five years have become voluntary aided schools, with any resulting religious affiliation, and stating in each case the *(a)* estimated value of the land and buildings transferred from public ownership and *(b)* amount paid by the voluntary organisation for those assets. [62841]

Mr. Miliband: Community schools were introduced by the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 with effect from 1 September 1999. Since that time the Department has been informed that proposals have been approved for the community schools in the tables to close and re-open as a voluntary aided school with a religious character, or to close and amalgamate with other voluntary aided schools with a religious character.

The Department is not routinely told of the value of the school assets transferred by an LEA to school trustees in connection with such proposals. Details are, however, provided of the purchase price agreed between the LEA and trustees where voluntary aided school grant has been agreed to assist trustees with a purchase.

Community schools closed to become new voluntary aided schools

	Details
LEA	Hartlepool
Community school name	Henry Smith School
VA school name	St. Hild's CofE VA School
Religious character	Church of England
Date of change	1 September 2001
Grant aided purchase cost (£)	700,000

Community schools closed to amalgamate with voluntary aided schools

LEA	*Previous school names*	*New VA school name*	*Religious character*	*Date of change*	*Grant-aided purchase cost*
Liverpool	Kirkdale Primary School (Community) and St. Lawrence's Primary School (VA)	Kirkdale St. Lawrence CofE Primary School	Church of England	1 September 2000	0
Barnsley	Dodworth CofE Infant School (VA) and Dodworth Junior School (Community)	Dodworth CofE (VA) Primary School	Church of England	1 September 2001	0
Stockton-on-Tees	Elm Tree Community Infant School and St. Marks CE VA Junior School	St. Marks Elm Tree Primary School	Church of England	1 September 2001	[1]—
Sheffield	Pye Bank Community Infant School and Pye Bank Trinity CE VA Junior School	Pye Bank Trinity CofE Primary School	Church of England	1 September 2001	0
Gateshead	Derwent Infant School (Community) and St Cuthberts VA Junior School	St. Aidens Church of England Primary School	Church of England	1 September 2000	0

[1] Expected to be £8,000 but not yet finalised

Parenting

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the role parents of school age children can play in helping improve children's academic performance at home. [62858]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Parents have an important role to play in supporting their children's learning at home to improve their academic performance. At a general level, for example, parents can discuss the school day with their child so they can praise and encourage them for good results and help them through any academic or other problems they might have. Parents can provide support with homework set by the school where it is appropriate; indeed our national homework guidelines for schools, published in 1998, emphasise, among other things, that schools should ensure they work closely with parents and ensure that they are given guidance about how best to help their children. A survey my Department published this April found that 76 per cent. of parents believe helping their children with homework is extremely important.

A great deal of work has been carried out by my Department to help parents become more involved, based on the strategy for involving parents which was first described in the 1997 White Paper "Excellence in Schools". This strategy comprised three strands: providing information to parents, giving parents a more effective voice, and encouraging families to learn together. Resources which have been produced for parents as part of this strategy include the Parents' Centre website, the Learning Journey parents' guides to the curriculum, and the "Parents + Schools" magazine, as well as several hints and tips booklets produced as part of publicity campaigns including the National Year of Reading, Maths Year 2000, and the Dads and Sons campaign.

Of course there are also many specific activities that parents can carry out: for younger children, reading with them and to them, playing number games or helping them with spellings; for older children, giving advice on how to organise their time, giving them support with using the internet, and encouraging children to engage in activities of general educational benefit, such as reading, and visiting museums and galleries. Underlying all these and many other activities is the idea that parents have a responsibility to show children that they believe in the value of education and learning, both for their own sake and as a means to achieving greater success in later life.

Overseas Travel

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 28 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1542W, if she will provide details of the *(a)* destination and *(b)* purpose of the overseas trip undertaken by a special adviser in her Department between 1 April 2000 and 31 March 2001; and if she will provide a breakdown of the costs incurred on the stated trip, including (i) travel, (ii) accommodation and (iii) subsistence allowance. [62959]

Estelle Morris: A special adviser from my Department accompanied the then Secretary of State, David Blunkett to China in June 2000. The purpose of the visit was to consolidate and develop bilateral relations between China and the UK.

For the costs incurred on the above trip I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 28 February.

Specialist Schools

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the criteria used to select specialist schools. [63079]

Mr. Miliband: The assessment criteria for specialist school applications are set out in published guidance. This is available to schools on request and can also be downloaded from the specialist schools website at www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/specialistschools. Copies of latest edition of the guidance against which schools will make applications in October 2002 and March 2003 have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

European Languages Day

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps her Department is taking to mark European Languages Day on 26 September. [60882]

Mr. Miliband: This Department, through the Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research (CILT), will be raising awareness of the day with the help of all the partners involved in last year's European Year of Languages. CILT are forming a working group to take this work forward. An award ceremony will take place on the day that will recognise about 12 innovative projects, ranging from primary school projects to adult education projects.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Entry Clearance

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many appeals against refusal of entry clearance were outstanding at the end of each *(a)* month since June 2001 and *(b)* June since 1997. [60830]

Beverley Hughes: Historical figures on the numbers of outstanding entry clearance appeals are not recorded centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Dungavel Detention Centre

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the only people who have been detained in Dungavel Detention Centre are those who *(a)* are subject to removal, *(b)* have committed an offence and *(c)* are regular absconders. [62699]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 18 June 2002]:* The detention of those held in Dungavel House Removal Centre will have been considered in line with the published criteria referred to in the Government's 1998 White Paper "Fairer, Faster and Firmer". The criteria is as follows:

(a) where there is a reasonable belief that the individual will fail to keep the terms of temporary admission or temporary release; (b) initially to clarify a person's identity and the basis of their claim; or (c) where removal is imminent.

Accommodation/Removal Centres

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the successful examples of the contracting out of the running of accommodation and removal centres referred to by him during the report stage of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill, 11 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 767. [62702]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 18 June 2002]:* Five removal centres have been contracted out successfully. These are Tinsley House to Wackenhut UK Ltd.; Dungavel to Premier Detention Services; Harmondsworth to Harmondsworth Detention Services Ltd.; Yarl's Wood to Group 4 Amey Immigration Ltd. and Campsfield to Group 4 Falk UK Global Solutions Ltd.

The National Asylum Support Service (NASS) has also successfully entered into contracts with the private and public sector and social landlords to provide accommodation for asylum seekers who request accommodation and who are dispersed away from London and the south-east, thereby alleviating pressure on authorities in those areas.

Non-departmental Public Bodies

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what have been the total salary costs of each of the non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible in each of the last five years. [50292]

Beverley Hughes: Details of executive non-departmental public bodies' salary costs are available in each individual body's annual report. All annual reports are presented to Parliament and copies placed in the Library. The majority of bodies have also posted recent annual reports on their websites.

Asylum Seekers

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* Pakistan nationals and *(b)* Indian nationals have applied for asylum (i) on entry and (ii) after entry, in each of the last five years. [62288]

Beverley Hughes: The information requested is shown in the table.

Applications[1,2] received for asylum in the United Kingdom, excluding dependants from nationals of India and Pakistan, and locations where made, 1997 to 2001

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*[3]	*2001*[3]
Nationals of India					
Total	1,285	1,030	1,365	2,120	1,850
Applied at port	200	340	435	455	430
Applied in country	1,085	690	930	1,660	1,420
Nationals of Pakistan					
Total	1,615	1,975	2,615	3,165	2,810
Applied at port	645	950	925	865	625
Applied in country	970	1,025	1,690	2,300	2,185

[1] Figures rounded to the nearest five

[2] May exclude some cases lodged at local enforcement offices between January 1999 and March 2000

[3] Provisional figures

Information on asylum applications is published quarterly. The next publication will be available from 30 August 2002 on the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1/html.

Leave to Remain

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were granted exceptional leave to remain in Britain in each of the last five years for which statistics exist. [62292]

Beverley Hughes: The data requested are shown in the table.

Asylum cases granted exceptional leave to remain (ELR)[1,2], 1997 to 2001

Principal applicants

	Granted ELR	*Granted ELR under backlog clearance exercise*
1997	3,115	—
1998	3,910	—
1999	2,465	10,195
2000[3]	11,495	10,020
2001[3]	19,510	—

[1] Figures are rounded to the nearest five, and exclude dependants

[2] Some cases decided under the backlog criteria may not be included, as they may be included in the figures showing cases considered under normal procedures

[3] Data are provisional

Information on initial decisions is published quarterly. The next publication will be available from 30 August 2002 on the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many appeals against refusal of leave to remain in the UK were outstanding *(a)* at the end of each month since June 2001 and *(b)* since June 1997. [62380]

Beverley Hughes: Historical figures on the numbers of outstanding appeals against refusal of leave to remain in the United Kingdom are not recorded centrally and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Genetic Modification

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the genetically modified animals whose creation has been authorised under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986, indicating in each case the novel characteristics developed. [61089]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The production of genetically modified animals (as well as their use in experiments or other scientific procedures) is controlled under the terms of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. The production and use of such animals allows new areas of medical and other scientific research to be explored: provides the potential for investigating a wide variety of conditions including cancer, cystic fibrosis and multiple sclerosis; and allows the quality of the science in many areas of research and testing to be improved. The Home Office does not maintain a central register of the lines produced of their physical characteristics. There are, however, a number of third party databases detailing genetically modified animals and their characteristics.

Non-UK Minors

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many children not of UK nationality have been brought into the UK for adoption by residents of the UK since the introduction of the Adoption (Inter-Country Aspects) Act 1999, broken down by nationality. [62213]

Beverley Hughes: The requested information is not currently available, as we do not identify children not of United Kingdom nationality brought into the United Kingdom for adoption separately in our statistics. This is currently under review to enable us to do so in the future.

There are only three sections of the Adoption (Inter-Country Aspects) Act that have been enacted at present. These provisions were enacted in advance of the main body to tighten controls on the assessment process as quickly as possible.

Immigration, Asylum and Citizenship Bill

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many representations he has received from groups concerning the Immigration, Asylum and Citizenship Bill. [62201]

Beverley Hughes: We invited comments on the proposals in the White Paper, "Secure Borders, Safe Haven: Integration with Diversity in Modern Britain", and have placed copies of the 330 responses from organisations and individuals in the Library.

We did not undertake a formal consultation exercise when we introduced the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill. But we have received comments from a number of groups which we are taking into account during the Bill's passage through Parliament.

Youth Courts

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans the Department has to introduce *(a)* a hearings system and *(b)* an inquisitorial magistracy in youth courts. [60324]

Hilary Benn: We have no current plans to introduce an inquisitorial system in the youth courts, but are keen to investigate the possibility of pre-hearing arrangements.

Illegal Meat Imports

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment the Government have made of the potential use of illegal meat imports as a vehicle for bio-terrorism. [50441]

Mr. Morley: I have been asked to reply.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department is responsible for counter terrorism policy. The Government have a range of contingency plans in place to respond to terrorist threats including those from chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear agents. In relation to illegal imports of meat, my Department announced a Government action plan on 28 March to reduce the risks of illegal meat imports resulting in disease entering the UK.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Legal Aid Solicitors

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will provide funding for the training of future legal aid solicitors. [62651]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Lord Chancellor has made £1.5 million available in this financial year to contribute to the costs of tuition fees and training contracts for prospective solicitors who undertake to carry out publicly funded work for at least two years after qualification. The Legal Services Commission (LSC) published a consultation paper "Developing Legal Aid Solicitors" on 12 June 2002. The paper sets out the details of two schemes which will provide support for up to 100 training contracts, and 100 LSC sponsorship grants, from September 2002. Copies of the paper have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Powers of Attorney

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will list the cost of fees to register powers of attorney over the last five years. [63119]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The fee for registering an Enduring Power of Attorney was set at £50 on 1 May 1990; at £75 on 1 October 1999; and at £220 on 17 April 2002.

Child Abductions

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many children have been abducted from the UK since 1 January. [62780]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Since 1 January this year, a total of 75 cases have been reported to the central authorities, under the Hague convention. The breakdown is as follows:

69 cases in England and Wales, involving 116 children;

two cases in Northern Ireland involving three children; and

four cases in Scotland involving five children.

For countries not under the Hague convention, a total of 37 cases, involving 38 children have been reported to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how much money has been spent on legal aid for asylum seekers in each of the last three years; how much of this was for the initial application; how much of this was for fighting appeals; how many asylum seekers were involved in legal aid procedures in both categories; and if he will make a statement. [46673]

Ms Rosie Winterton *[pursuant to her answer of 7 May 2002, col. 68–69W]:* In my original answer to the hon. Member's question I advised that total expenditure on immigration and asylum matters in 2000–01 was £88.3 million. This was incorrect and I apologise for this error. The true figure was in fact £81.3 million.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Correspondence

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the average response time was for responding to departmental correspondence; what percentage of letters took longer than one month for a response; and what percentage took longer than three months for a response in each of the last five years. [37447]

Mr. Straw: The information requested is not available. However the Cabinet Office publishes an annual report to Parliament on the volume of Members' correspondence received by Departments, and their performance against their service target. The Foreign and Commonwealth's service target is 20 working days. The report for 2001 was published on Friday 24 May. Copies of previous reports are available in the Library of the house. Figures for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for each year are as follows:

Year	*Total number of Members'correspondence*	*Percentage to in 20 working days*
1997	18,553	68.5
1998	19,493	66
2000	17,141	64
2001	18,551	78.5

Records of other correspondence received by my Department are not kept centrally and can only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

I apologise to the hon. Member for the unacceptable delay in answering this question.

Computers

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many computers were replaced in his Department in each of the past three years; how the replaced units were disposed of and by which companies; and at what cost. [60732]

Mr. MacShane: Figures for the PCs disposed of in the UK over the last three years are as follows:

1999 PCs 488 Monitors 133

2000 PCs 150 Monitors 305

2001 PCs 180 Monitors 498.

We do not hold the information regarding how the replaced units are disposed of centrally and this information could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. However, under its environmental policy on operations, the FCO endeavours to minimise the generation of waste and implement recycling initiatives and we encourage posts to consider the option of donating replaced units to charitable causes.

Staff Numbers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many staff were employed by his Department on *(a)* 2 May 1997 and *(b)* 31 May 2002. [60894]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given him by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Cabinet Office on 13 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 1402W.

Arms Trade

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions his officials have had with the German Government regarding the re-export of MP5 submachine guns from Turkey to Indonesia by MKEK (Turkey) in 1999. [61986]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We have had no such discussions with the German Government.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions his officials have had with other signatories to the EU Code of Conduct on Arms Exports on agreeing common standards for the re-export of small arms imported or transferred from non-EU countries. [61988]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: My officials have held no discussions with our EU partners about developing common standards specifically to control re-export from EU member states of small arms imported or transferred from non-EU countries. Such re-exports are covered by EU member states' arms export control legislation, and licence applications for such re-exports are subject to assessment against the EU code of conduct in the same way as other arms export licence applications, providing the same level of control as for any other arms exports.

Members of Parliament (Personal Data)

Mr. Forth: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information is held by his Department on each hon. Member in relation to *(a)* personal relationships, both current and past, *(b)* financial status and dealings, *(c)* connections with companies and interest groups, *(d)* connections with Governments and *(e)* published works; and what was held in January 2002. [61821]

Mr. Straw: Ministers and officials in this Department have access to published reference sources, as well as to the information about hon. Members made publicly available by the House authorities, for the purpose of parliamentary business.

Kyoto Agreement

Mr. Tom Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Australian Prime Minister on his Government's decision not to sign the Kyoto Agreement. [61967]

Mr. MacShane: Since 5 June when the Australian Prime Minister said that Australia would not ratify the Kyoto protocol at the present time, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has not discussed this issue with him. A senior level meeting between British and Australian officials took place in Bonn last week at a UN Framework Convention on Climate Change meeting. The UK Government will continue to engage constructively with the Australian Government and with all our international partners on the issue of climate change.

Departmental Grants

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which organisations which were in receipt of a grant from him in 1997–98 no longer are; what the annual saving is; which organisations which were not in receipt of a grant in 1997–98 now are; and what the annual cost is. [61392]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given him by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary of the Treasury on 17 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 137W.

Timber

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Government of Malaysia concerning the export of illegal timber products. [63057]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Ministers from DFID and DEFRA and officials from the Forestry Commission have been party to a number of discussions with the Government of Malaysia this year on environmental and forestry issues including the export of illegal timber products.

Malaysia and the UK both participate in several international environmental fora where illegal logging and related forest issues are discussed at high level such as the Convention on Biodiversity and the United Nations Forum on Forests, which both held constructive meetings earlier this year. The UK was represented at ministerial level at both of these sets of discussions, by my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) (DEFRA) at the United Nations Forum on Forests and by my right hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West and Royton (Mr. Meacher) (DEFRA) at the Convention on Biodiversity conference.

The Malaysian Minister for Primary Industries, the hon. Dato' Seri Dr. Lim Keng Yaik, visited the UN on 10 June 2002. During his visit, he met with two Ministers, my right hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West and Royton (Mr. Meacher) (DEFRA) and my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble) (DfID), and discussed the illegal timber trade, certification schemes and related issues.

The UK is funding two projects that should contribute to the sustainable management of tropical forests in Malaysia through the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Environment Project Fund.

Bilateral Ministerial Meetings

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when Ministers in his Department have held meetings with Ministers and officials of the Irish Government since 1 June 2000; when and where each meeting took place; which Ministers were involved in each meeting; which Irish Government Departments were involved in each meeting; and which Ministers and officials from the Irish Government attended each meeting. [63075]

Peter Hain: FCO Ministers meet the Irish Foreign Minister regularly, eg in the margins of UN conferences (New York) and in the margins of EU Councils. My noble Friend Baroness Amos visited Dublin in July 2001, and the President of Ireland met my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary after the funeral of HM the Queen Mother in London in May. In addition, the Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Northern Ireland have regular contacts with the Taoiseach and other Irish Ministers, most recently at the British Irish Council in Jersey on 14 June.

India-Pakistan

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what support was given by the United Kingdom to the United States during the recent peacekeeping mission to the India-Pakistan border. [62705]

Mr. MacShane *[holding answer 19 June 2002]:* We are very concerned about the situation on the India-Pakistan border. We continue to work closely with the United States and other partners on all initiatives for easing the tension in the region.

Zimbabwe

Barbara Follett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on charging for consular and visa services in Zimbabwe, in the light of the divergence in the official and parallel rates of exchange in that country. [64093]

Mr. MacShane: Since July 2000, the British high commission has been running its sterling post account using the parallel rate of exchange, and charging for some of its consular and visa services using the parallel rate. It has held charges for other consular and visa services at the official rate. Initially, the two rates were broadly similar. But since February 2001, the parallel rate has diverged increasingly from the official rate, and the Zimbabwe dollar is now trading on the parallel market at around 10 times the official sterling rate of exchange. In financial year 2001–02, this resulted in an under-recovery by the FCO of around £422,000 in consular fees.

In order to regularise the position, and avoid any future shortfalls in recovery, the British high commission will charge for all consular and visa services at the parallel exchange rate, with effect from midnight on 23/24 June.

Heroin

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what changes have been recorded in the availability of street heroin in the EU since the removal of the Taliban regime. [63337]

Mr. MacShane: General analysis of drugs markets suggests that changes at source take 12–18 months to have an impact on street level availability. In the first quarter of 2002 there were indications of heroin shortages in some member states, but in others no significant changes were reported. In the UK some local shortages of heroin have been accompanied by price rises and reductions in purity, but there is no indication of a widespread shortage or of a general upward trend in prices.

International Travel Ban

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what procedures are in place to monitor whether a person, subject to an international travel ban by either the EU or the United States, transits via a UK port en route to another destination. [62165]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

We are not aware of any nationals, subject to a travel ban, passing through the United Kingdom to other countries. But at major United Kingdom airports, only passengers who present themselves at the immigration control seeking entry while in transit would come to the attention of the Immigration Service. Many others will remain airside and travel on in direct transit to their destinations without seeking leave to enter the United Kingdom.

The United Kingdom Immigration Service is responsible for enforcing the travel bans. Immigration officers at ports have been instructed not to grant entry to those identified as being on the ban lists.

SCOTLAND

Flexible Working

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many and what proportion of the staff of her Department are *(a)* job sharing, *(b)* term working and *(c)* engaged in another form of flexible working. [42426]

Mrs. Liddell: My Department currently has four members of staff employed in a total of two job-share positions. There are no staff on term working.

My Department operates a flexible working hours scheme.

Staff Numbers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many staff have been employed by her Department in each of the last 10 years. [42457]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999. Since that date my Department has employed the following staff:

Year	*Average number of staff*
1999–2000	70
2000–01	94
2001–02	109

New Deal

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people employed by the non-departmental public bodies for which she is responsible under the new deal for young people in each of the last four years have subsequently *(a)* found unsubsidised employment for more than 13 weeks and *(b)* returned to jobseekers' allowance or other benefits. [49606]

Mrs. Liddell: My Department is responsible for the Boundary Commission for Scotland. No new deal for young people appointments have been made by the commission.

Age Discrimination

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether her Department enforces a maximum retirement age for most staff; and whether it has a policy of not considering applications for employment by persons over a particular age. [59295]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* The expected retirement age for staff below the senior civil service is 60 years. Beyond this, staff can be retained on a year-by-year basis if they meet certain criteria. This policy is currently under review. In considering applications for employment my Department does not discriminate on grounds of age.

Longannet Deep Mine

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussions she has held with Scottish Coal on the future of the Longannet deep mine in Fife. [60823]

Mrs. Liddell: Prior to liquidation, I had numerous discussions with Scottish Coal and the constituency Members of Parliament about the future of Longannet mine.

Unpaid Advisers

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to her answer of 8 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 202W, on unpaid advisers, if she will list the steps that were taken to ensure no conflicts of interest arose as a result of this appointment. [62972]

Mrs. Liddell: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 19 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 332W.

Ministerial Training

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how much has been spent by her Department on voice coaching for Ministers and officials in each of the last five years; [52695]

(2) how much has been spent by her Department on training by the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts for Ministers and officials in each of the last five years. [52741]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* The Scotland Office was established on 1 July 1999.

My Department has incurred no expenditure on either voice coaching or training by the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arms for Ministers and officials.

Aggregates Tax

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement on the impact of the aggregates tax on the quarrying industry in Scotland. [63080]

John Healey: I have been asked to reply.

A regulatory impact assessment for the aggregates levy was published at the time of Budget 2000. It is available from the Customs and Excise website.

ADVOCATE-GENERAL

New Deal

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Advocate-General how many people employed by the non-departmental public bodies for which she is responsible under the new deal for young people in each of the last four years have subsequently *(a)* found unsubsidised employment for more than 13 weeks and *(b)* returned to jobseekers' allowance or other benefits. [49476]

The Advocate-General: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, *Official Report*, column 535W.

Ministerial Training

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Advocate-General (1) how much has been spent by her Department on training by the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts for Ministers and officials in each of the last five years; [52735]

(2) how much has been spent by her Department on voice coaching for Ministers and officials in each of the last five years. [52696]

The Advocate-General *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, *Official Report*, column 536W.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Rape and Sexual Assault

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many rape and sexual assault incidents were recorded in each year since 1993; and how many arrests and how many successful prosecutions were recorded in these years. [60859]

Jane Kennedy: The PSNI record criminal offences in terms of clearance rates as opposed to arrests. The following table indicates the number of sexual offences recorded in Northern Ireland 1993 to 2000–01.

	Total sexual offences	*Percentage cleared*	*Rape/ attempted rape offences*	*Percentage cleared*
1996	1,187	74.1	193	77.2
1994	1,333	88.9	208	69.7
1995	1,697	81.5	259	81.1
1996	1,745	85.0	292	80.5
1997	1,444	85.7	294	80.3
1998–99[1]	1,605	76.1	324	74.4
1999–2000[1]	1,333	75.1	311	75.9
2000–01[1]	1,176	67.8	232	67.7

[1] As recorded under revised Home Office counting rules

The following table provides information on the number of prosecutions and convictions for rape, assault with intent to rape, and indecent assault from 1993 to 1999 (the latest figures available).

	Prosecutions				*Convictions*			
	Rape	*Assault with intent to rape*	*Indecent assault*	*Total*	*Rape*	*Assault with intent to rape*	*Indecent assault*	*Total*
1993	40	7	121	168	10	3	85	98
1994	43	2	148	193	14	1	98	113
1995	78	0	163	241	24	0	103	127
1996	64	5	194	263	15	0	108	123
1997	60	1	153	214	21	0	87	108
1998	47	1	113	161	18	0	71	89
1999	33	3	86	122	7	1	61	69

Car Crime

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* stinger and *(b)* similar devices used for the rapid arrest of a speeding vehicle have been purchased by the police in the past five years; and on how many occasions the occupants of stopped vehicles have been (i) arrested and (ii) successfully prosecuted. [60855]

Jane Kennedy: The PSNI has purchased 314 stinger spiked belts (245 of size 4.5m and 69 of size 7.6m) within the past five years. No similar devices have been purchased.

The PSNI advise that recording of the use of stingers was implemented only at District Command level in September last year; therefore arrest statistics over the past five years are not available.

Similarly, prosecution information specifically on persons stopped by the use of stingers is not available.

Advertising

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much was spent on press and advertising campaigns in 2001–02; and what the planned expenditure is for 2002–03. [60910]

Jane Kennedy: Details of the Department's (including its agencies but excluding NDPBs) spend on press and advertising is as follows:

	£
2001–02	[1]1,245,114
2002–03	705,000

[1] This figure includes publicity costs for the General Election, which explains the difference between the two years.

Staff Numbers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many staff were employed by his Department on *(a)* 2 May 1997 and *(b)* 31 May 2002. [60930]

Jane Kennedy: Information is not held in the format requested.

Full-time equivalent staff numbers in the Northern Ireland Office, for 1997–98 and April 2002, including civil servants, special advisers and prison governor and uniformed prison officer grades, are as follows:

In 1997–98 there were 4,446 staff employed in the Department.

In April 2002 there were 3,318 staff employed in the Department.

Police Informants (Children)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what his policy is on the use of children as police informants. [60856]

Jane Kennedy: The policy on the use of children as police informants is governed by Part 2 of the Regulations of Investigatory Powers 2000, Sections 29 and 43(8).

The Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Juvenile) Order 2000 further clarifies this issue.

In addition, the Home Office has draft codes of practice that set out the special safeguards relating to the use of juveniles. Although in draft form, they are widely available and have been used for some time.

Staff Training

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much the Department has spent on staff training and development in each of the last five years. [61057]

Jane Kennedy: The amount of money spent on direct training over the last five years was:

	£
1997–98	693,445
1998–99	873,260
1999–2000	1,057,797
2000–01	1,290,625
2001–02	1,166,365

Performance Targets

Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the performance targets that his Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies are required to meet, apart from those set out in the public service agreements for 1999 to 2002 and 2001 to 2004; and if he will specify for each target *(a)* who sets it and *(b)* who monitors achievement against it. [60475]

Jane Kennedy: Apart from those set out in its PSA, the Northern Ireland Office and its agencies apply the following performance targets:

Six service standards for central Government—standards set and, up until 2001, monitored by the Cabinet Office and performance results published in an annual report. Now monitored internally.

Handling of ministerial correspondence—standards set and monitored by the Cabinet Office. Performance results published by means of an arranged PQ.

Code of Practice on Government Information—standards set and monitored by the Lord Chancellor's Office with performance published in an annual report.

More details about these targets and NIO's performance results can be found in its departmental report, the 2002 version due to be published on 14 June.

Further information on performance targets for our agencies and NDPBs are detailed as follows:

Agencies

Northern Ireland Prison Service

The Minister sets the key performance targets for the Northern Ireland Prison Service. The Director General is directly accountable to the Minister for the Prison Service's performance. The Director General, through the 'Fraser Figure', provides quarterly reports on performance against key targets to the Minister.

The table gives the targets set for the prison service from 1999–2000 to 2002–03 excluding PSA targets.

Key targets 1999–2000 to 2002–03

Key business area	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Safety	Breaches of order and control do not exceed 7.1 per 100 prisoners.	Number of incidents of assault by prisoners on staff less than five per 100 prisoners Number of incidents of assault by prisoners on prisoners less than 9.5 per 100 prisoners	Number of staff assaulted by prisoners is less than a ratio of 6.8 per 100 prisoners Number of prisoners assault by prisoners is less than a ratio 8.8 per 100 prisoners	Number of staff assaulted by prisoners is less than a ratio of six per 100 prisoners Number of prisoners assaulted by prisoners is less than a ratio of 8.8 per 100 prisoners
Regimes and reducing re-offending	50 per cent. uptake on sentence planning in Maghaberry and Magilligan Prisons	50 per cent. uptake on sentence planning in Maghaberry and Magilligan Prisons	60 per cent. uptake on sentence planning Maghaberry and Magilligan Prisons	An average minimum of 70 per cent. of prisoners serving six months or more, including 90 per cent. of life sentence prisoners, is working to a sentence plan
	3 per cent. increase in average constructive activity hours	80 per cent. utilisation of available places in education and workshop	Establish baselines for weekly average hours of constructive activity attendance per prisoner for each prisoner group and set targets and systems of measurement for 2002–03	An average of at least 18 hours constructive activity per week for each sentenced prisoner
				An average of at least 9.5 hours constructive activity per week for each remand prisoner

Key targets 1999–2000 to 2002–03

Key business area	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Staff and developing the service	An average minimum of five days development and training per member of staff	An average minimum of five days development and training per member of staff	An average minimum of five days development and training per member of staff. Representation in recruitment competitions of: (a) Women; (b) Roman Catholics; and (c) Other under-represented groups	An average minimum of five days development and training per member of staff. Deliver at least 85 per cent. of the planned training days associated with the agreed corporate training priorities
Finance, corporate governance and improving business performance	n/a	n/a	Lay annual report and audited accounts before Parliament prior to summer recess	Lay annual report and audited accounts before Parliament prior to summer recess Expenditure is within the budget allocated

Forensic Science Northern Ireland

The agency's key targets are set by the Minister and are published each year in the agency's corporate and business plan. Performance against these key targets is monitored by the NIO as the agency's parent Department. The agency's performance against key targets is published in its annual report and accounts. Both publications are presented to Parliament.

Compensation Agency

The performance targets for the Compensation Agency are set out in its published corporate plan 2001–04 and business plan 2001–02. The key performance targets are set by the departmental Minister and are monitored on a quarterly basis by the Department and reported to the Minister. Outturn against targets are published annually in the agency's annual report and accounts which are laid in Parliament.

NDPSs

Juvenile Justice Board

The Juvenile Justice Board was appointed on a temporary basis in July 2000, pending the creation of a youth justice agency as recommended following a review of the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland. The board currently operates on the basis of a ministerial strategic steer which it is then required to convert into an agreed action plan. The current programme which covers the period August 2001 to July 2002 includes the following key issues:

Regime development.

Revised assessment procedures.

Updated child protection procedures.

In addition, and in preparation for establishing a purpose-built single centre at Rathgael, the board is also required to develop and further provide:

Staff training—to ensure that staff have all the necessary skills required to meet the objectives set by the board.

Community projects—which seek to provide further support for vulnerable young people in the community.

The board has responsibility for on-going monitoring of each of the key action points and formal meetings are held with the Northern Ireland Office at regular intervals to review progress. The Northern Ireland Office retains responsibility for routine monitoring of related expenditure.

Police Service for Northern Ireland

The performance targets for the Police Service of Northern Ireland (formerly the Royal Ulster Constabulary) from 1999 to 2004 can be found in the following publications:

A Policing Plan for Northern Ireland 1999–2000 (published by the Police Authority for Northern Ireland)

A Policing Plan for Northern Ireland 2000–01 (published by the Police Authority for Northern Ireland)

A Policing Plan for Northern Ireland 2001–02 (published by the Police Authority for Northern Ireland)

Policing Plan 2002–05 (published by the Northern Ireland Policing Board).

The performance targets are (a) set by the Northern Ireland Policing Board (formerly the Police Authority for Northern Ireland); and (b) achievement is monitored by the Northern Ireland Policing Board and actual performance against targets is contained in the Northern Ireland Policing Board's annual report.

Ombudsman

The performance targets for the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland are contained in their corporate plan and annual business plan. The performance targets are (a) set by the Police Ombudsman and (b) achievement is monitored by the Police Ombudsman and actual performance against targets is contained in the Police Ombudsman's annual report which is laid in Parliament.

PBNI Performance Indicators

Performance targets for the Probation Board for Northern Ireland are agreed on an annual basis by the Department on behalf of the Secretary of State in accordance with the Probation Board Management Statement. The management statement has been in place since April 1999 and the following table outlines the performance indicators which have been agreed to date. Achievement of the targets is monitored by the Department at regular overview meetings and at the end of year Ministerial Accountability Review. The targets are set out in the Probation Board annual business plan and achievement levels are recorded in the relevant annual report. Information prior to 2000–01 is not readily accessible and was in a different format. The targets outlined are those agreed as a result of the development of the management statement.

Percentage

	Target for 2000–01	*Target for 2001–02*	*Target for 2002–03*
The proportion of induction interviews arranged within five working days of sentence	90	97	98
The achievement of the agreed standards regarding minimum levels of contact:			
Offered	90	92	92
Kept	40	45	60
The proportion of supervision plans (within an agreed sample of 224) written to the agreed standards	80	80	83
Where breaches of proceedings are appropriate, the proportion commenced within 10 working days of the incident occurring (within an agreed sample of 224)	85	85	87

Percentage

	Target for 2000–01	*Target for 2001–02*	*Target for 2002–03*
The proportion of offenders subject to an active community service order that work an average of five hours or more per week (within an agreed sample of 224)	85	85	87
The proportion of community service orders that complete their sentence within 12 months	85	95	97
The proportion of offenders whose risk assessment is reviewed at least every four months	80	85	90
The proportion of pre-sentence reports or explanatory letters delivered to the courts by the date specified by the court	95	98	99

HEALTH

Pharmaceutical Lobbying

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he undertakes of the extent to which patients and professional groups who lobby for the increased use of pharmaceutical drugs are *(a)* financed and *(b)* influenced by pharmaceutical companies. [55849]

Mr. Lammy: We make no such formal assessments, but do recognise that patient and professional representative groups receive funding from a variety of sources, including pharmaceutical companies.

Prescription Exemptions

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to review the prescription exemption system; and what plans he has to extend the prescription exemption to people suffering from asthma. [56254]

Mr. Lammy: We have no current plans to review the prescription charging arrangements. Our policy is to give priority to helping people who may have difficulty in paying charges, rather than extending the exemption arrangements to people with other medical conditions including asthma.

Architectural Commission

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which 10 architectural partnerships have received the most commissions since 1997 from the NHS; and how much money each has each received for its work. [56931]

Mr. Hutton: Of the 28 major hospital schemes (24 private finance initiatives and four public capital) which have reached financial close, the following architect firms and services have been commissioned by national health service trusts:

Trust	*Architect*	*Cost (£)*
South Buckinghamshire NHS trust	David Hutchison Partnership	55,006
South Manchester university hospitals NHS trust	HLM	275,000
Hereford hospitals NHS trust	Strategic Health	[1]—
Worcestershire acute hospitals NHS trust	Strategic Health	[1]—
Swindon and Marlborough NHS trust	Ansell and Bailey	134,178
Leeds community and mental health services teaching NHS trust	Thompson Spencer Associates	[1]—
St. George's hospital NHS trust	Broadway Malyan	45,000
Dudley group of hospitals NHS trust	Llewellyn Davies	[1]—
Berkshire healthcare NHS trust	Llewellyn Davies	36,879
Gloucestershire Royal NHS trust	Nightingale Associates	163,100
	Post PITN: Anshen Dyer Architects	39,273
Publicly funded schemes		
Rochdale healthcare NHS trust	Gilling Dod	144,000
Central Sheffield university hospitals NHS trust	George Trew Dunn Partnership	415,000
Royal Berkshire and Battle hospital NHS trust	Nightingale Associates	3,552,845
Guy's and St. Thomas NHS trust	Michael Hopkins and Partners	2,190,169

[1] Provided a package of advisory services, which included design elements, so not possible to identify architectural fees separately

Prescription Charges

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will add cystic fibrosis to the list of medical conditions entitled to free NHS prescriptions; [58352]

(2) for what reason cystic fibrosis was not added to the list of medical conditions entitled to free NHS prescriptions in the 1998 review; [58353]

(3) what percentage of sufferers of cystic fibrosis are in receipt of free prescriptions because they receive income-related benefits or for other reasons. [58354]

Mr. Lammy: Our policy is to give priority to helping people who may have difficulty in paying charges, rather than extending the exemption arrangements to people with other medical conditions such as cystic fibrosis.

When we reviewed the prescription charging arrangements as part of the 1998 comprehensive spending review, we noted that there was no consensus on what additional conditions might be included in any revised list of medical exemptions, or how distinctions could be drawn between one condition and another. We concluded that it would not be right to consider one group in isolation.

We do not have information on what percentage of sufferers of cystic fibrosis are in receipt of free prescriptions. Information about items dispensed does not include information about patients.

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what medical conditions confer NHS prescription charge exemption; and in which year they were made exempt. [58355]

Mr. Lammy: The medical conditions conferring exemption from prescription charge were introduced in 1968 and are set out in the National Health Service (Charges for Drugs and Appliances) Regulations 2000. They are:

1. permanent fistula (including caecostomy, colostomy, laryngostomy or ileostomy) requiring continuous surgical dressing or an appliance;
2. the following disorders:
   forms of hypoadrenalism (including Addison's disease) for which specific substitution therapy is essential
   diabetes insipidus and other forms of hypopituitarism
   diabetes mellitus—except where treatment is by diet alone
   hypoparathyroidism
   myasthenia gravis
   myxoedema
3. epilepsy requiring continuous anti-convulsive therapy;
4. a continuing physical disability which prevents the patient from leaving his residence without the help of another person.

Mr. Lyons: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the estimated cost would be of removing prescription charges in the UK. [60483]

Mr. Lammy: We estimate that the loss of prescription charge income in England would be around £434 million in 2002–03. Additionally, there could be significant additional costs to the drugs bill if people who currently pay charges sought prescriptions for medicines and other items which they currently purchase.

Diabetes

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what proportion of extra spending announced for the NHS in the recent Budget will be allocated for treatment of and research into diabetes; [59324]

(2) how much his Department plans to invest into long term cures for diabetes type one over each of the next five years; [59322]

(3) how much type one diabetes has cost the NHS in treatment over each of the last five years. [59323]

Mr. Lammy: Information is not collected centrally how much Type 1 diabetes costs the national health service in treatment, but it has been estimated that around 5 per cent. of total NHS resources are used for the care of people with diabetes.

The Budget provides the highest sustained growth in NHS history, with annual average increases of 7.4 per cent. in real terms over the five years 2003–04 to 2007–08. Decisions about the allocation of the increased funding will be announced later this year.

North Staffordshire (Health Care)

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will visit North Staffordshire to discuss with constituents in Packmoor progress on their petition for a GP surgery. [59742]

Mr. Lammy: A range of options are being considered by North Stoke Primary Care Trust (PCT) in order to ensure that the residents of Packmoor and the rest of North Stoke receive a general practitioner service fit for the needs of the local population. I have no current plans to visit North Stoke but would be willing to meet constituents to discuss their concerns when I or one of my colleagues are next in the area, and the PCT's plans are more fully developed.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding was given to the North Staffordshire health authority to assist it in producing the strategic service development plan; and if he will place a copy of the consultant's report in the Library. [59740]

Mr. Hutton: North Staffordshire health authority received £60,000 from the Department to assist in producing its strategic service development plan. The PriceWaterhouseCoopers consultants' report formed one element of the overall expenditure.

The consultants' report contains confidential and sensitive information about general practitioner services and cannot in its current format be placed in the public domain. The consultants' report is being used to inform the strategic services development plan, the main report of which is due for completion in summer. A copy of that report will be made available to local MPs and stakeholders.

Fibromyalgia

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on fibromyalgia; and what assistance is available through the National Health Service for sufferers of fibromyalgia. [60072]

Ms Blears: The Department funds research to support its work on policy development and evaluation in health and social care. The Department supports research and development of relevance to the national health service in hospitals, general practice and other health care settings. The Medical Research Council (MRC), which is funded by the Department of Trade and Industry, funds medical research as part of the Government's funding of the research base.

The Department commissioned a research project entitled "A Randomised Control Trial of exercise prescription in fibromyalgia" which was completed in September 2001. In addition the Department provides NHS support funding for research commissioned by the research councils and charities but which takes place in the NHS. The Department is currently supporting 9 such ongoing projects on fibromyalgia and full details can be found on the National Research Register at:hhtp:;;www.doh.gov.uk/research/nrr.htm

The MRC is not currently supporting any projects on fibromyalgia. However, it always welcomes high quality applications for support, which are judged in open competition with other demands on funding. Awards are made according to their scientific quality and importance to human health.

The NHS provides a wide range of services to which people with fibromyalgia have access, and such patients are seen within a wide range of hospital specialities. Under the present system it is for primary care trusts to plan and arrange the services available to people in their care, as they are closest to the people they serve and so best placed to respond sensitively to their needs.

Epilepsy

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines on the treatment of patients with epilepsy have been given to primary care trusts; and if he will make a statement. [60082]

Ms Blears: The Department has supported the Joint Epilepsy Council in developing a "National Statement of Good Practice for the Treatment and Care of People who have Epilepsy", which was published in May 2002. The statement makes a series of recommendations for good quality epilepsy services. It is intended to facilitate commissioning and will be of use to national health service purchasers, providers and service users.

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) provides advice on best clinical practice to NHS clinicians, commissioners of NHS services, and to patients and their carers. NICE is developing a clinical guideline for the diagnosis, management and treatment of epilepsy. NICE is also conducting a technology appraisal of the clinical and cost effectiveness of new anti-epileptic drugs in children and adults to help promote appropriate uptake and equitable access. The appraisal is due late next year and the guideline summer 2004, and both will be available to primary care trusts.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if further research will be undertaken into the causes of sudden death of epilepsy sufferers; [60079]

(2) what further research he plans to undertake into SUDEP and epilepsy. [60084]

Ms Blears: The Department has recently welcomed the publication of the National Sentinel Audit of Epilepsy-Related Death. The audit looked at investigations into epilepsy deaths, care provided prior to death and contact with bereaved families. It makes recommendations for improving epilepsy services. The Department has given a commitment to consider these and develop an action plan by September 2002 to try to reduce the number of epilepsy-related deaths.

It is a long-standing, and important, principle of successive Governments that they do not prescribe to the individual research councils the detail of how they should distribute resources between competing priorities.

The Medical Research Council (MRC) is the main Government agency for research into the causes of and treatments for disease. The MRC always welcomes high quality applications from the scientific community for support into any aspect of biomedical research, including epilepsy. Applications are judged in open competition with other demands on funding.

In 2000–01 the MRC spent around £3 million on research relevant to epilepsy. Additionally, the Department has spent around £1.5 million on directly commissioned projects on epilepsy since May 1997. This research will help to improve our understanding of the condition and aid in the development of treatments for it.

Teenage Pregnancy

Jim Dobbin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evidence underlay the statement of his noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary that international research contradicted the claims made by Dr. David Paton of Nottingham university, in his paper on teenage pregnancy in the *Journal of Health Economics*, March 2002. [60265]

Ms Blears: The social exclusion unit report on teenage pregnancy gathered evidence from the best available international research to inform the cross-Government teenage pregnancy strategy. That evidence is supported by more recent research which concludes that improved sex and relationship education and access to youth contraceptive clinics have been shown to reduce teenage pregnancy rates but do not hasten the onset of or increase sexual activity among young people.

Copies of the following relevant publications are available in the Library:

"Emerging Answers: Research Findings on Programs to Reduce Teen Pregnancy".

"Factors Affecting Changes in Rates of Teenage Conceptions 1991 to 1997".

"Teenage Sexual and Reproductive Behaviour in Developed Countries. Can more progress be made?"

"Why is Teenage Pregnancy Declining? The roles of abstinence, sexual activity and contraceptive use".

"A League Table of Teenage Births in Rich Nations".

Nutrients

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of *(a)* the provisional findings of the EU Scientific Committee on Food on the upper safe levels of nutrient intake for vitamin-B6 and Niacin and *(b)* the levels accepted as safe in the UK by health food manufacturers; and by how much and for what reasons he expects those levels to be further reduced under the Provisions of Article 5 of the European Food Supplements Directive when being used as the basis for setting maximum permitted levels of nutrient content in food supplements. [60197]

Ms Blears: The Government will take a view on these provisional findings when it receives advice from the expert group on vitamins and minerals (EVM), which has been established to draw up advice on maximum safe intakes of vitamins and minerals. The EVM is expected to publish its findings during the summer, and is aware of both the assessments of the SCF and other expert evaluations of the available evidence.

The Government continues to press for a safety-based approach to setting of maximum limits under Article 5 of the EU food supplements directive; no specific levels for individual nutrients have yet been discussed.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action the Food Standards Agency and his Department plans to take *(a)* to promote to other European Member States and Commission officials the conclusions of the forthcoming report from his Ad Hoc Expert Advisory Group on Vitamins and Minerals, *(b)* to commence a dialogue with Commission officials and the EU Scientific Committee on Foods about the information requirements for dossiers submitted for consideration in relation to the safety of vitamins and minerals which have been on the market for many years and *(c)* to use interGovernmental contact with other EU Member States to pursue his objectives in relation to the interpretation of the provisions of Article 5 of the Food Supplements Directive. [60198]

Ms Blears: The food standards agency (FSA) will circulate the draft report of the expert group on vitamins and minerals (EVM) to the commission and all EU Member States, and will contact key officials to discuss the implications of these findings as appropriate.

At the request of industry the scientific committee for foods has issued guidance on the required content of safety dossiers supporting use of nutrient sources, and the commission has issued guidance on the procedures for submitting such dossiers. The Government considers the guidance to be helpful and does not intend to intervene.

The FSA continues to take every opportunity to put the case to other European Union member states that Article 5 of the EU food supplements directive should not be used to restrict unnecessarily the range of food supplements available to consumes specific plans for further contacts will be drawn up as appropriate when detailed risk assessments are available for discussion.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list *(a)* those nutrients and nutrient sources which are permitted for inclusion in food supplements under the annexes of the European Food Supplements Directive and *(b)* those nutrients and nutrient sources which are available on the UK market but which are not included in those annexes. [60194]

Ms Blears: The final text of the directive, following adoption at development council on 30 May 2002, has not yet been published. Nutrients and nutrient sources permitted for inclusion in food supplements under the annexes of the European Food Supplements Directive (common position adopted by the Council on 3 December 2001) and published in the *Official Journal* C 90 E/1 on 16 April 2002 are listed.

Nutrients

Vitamins A, C, D, E, K, B1, B2, B6, B12, biotin, folic acid, niacin, pantothenic acid

Minerals: calcium, magnesium, iron, copper, iodine, zinc, manganese, sodium, potassium, selenium, chromium, molybdenum, fluoride, chloride, phosphorus

Nutrient sources

Sources of vitamin A
  Retinol
  Retinyl acetate
  Retinyl palmitate
  Beta-carotene
Sources of vitamin B
  Thiamin hydrochloride
  Thiamin mononitrate
  Riboflavin
  Riboflavin 5-phosphate, sodium
  Nicotinic acid
  Nicotinamide
  D-pantothenate, calcium
  D-pantothenate, sodium
  Dexpanthenol
  Pyridoxine hydrochloride
  Pyridoxine 5-phosphate
  Pterolylmonoglutamic acid
  Cyanocobalamin
  Hydroxycobalamin
  D-biotin
Sources of vitamin C
  L-ascorbic acid
  Sodium L-ascorbate
  Calcium L-ascorbate
  Potassium L-ascorbate
  L-ascorbyl 6-palmitate
Sources of vitamin D
  Cholecalciferol
  Ergocalciferol
Sources of vitamin E
  D-alpha-tocopherol
  DL-alpha-tocopherol
  D-alpha-tocopherol acetate
  DL-alpha-tocopherol acetate
  D-alpha-tocopherol acid succinate
Source of vitamin K
  Phylloquinone
Sources of minerals
  Calcium carbonate
  Calcium chloride
  Calcium salts of citric acid
  Calcium gluconate
  Calcium glycerophosphate
  Calcium lactate
  Calcium slats of orthophosphoric acid
  Calcium hydroxide
  Calcium oxide
  Cupric carbonate
  Cupric citrate
  Cupric gluconate
  Cupric sulphate
  Copper lysine complex
  Chromium chloride
  Chromium sulphate
  Potassium fluoride
  Sodium fluoride
  Ferrous carbonate
  Ferrous citrate
  Ferric ammonium citrate
  Ferrous fumarate
  Ferric sodium diphosphate

Ferrous lactate
Ferrous sulphate
Ferric diphosphate
Ferric saccharate
Elemental iron
Potassium iodide
Potassium iodate
Sodium iodide
Sodium iodate
Magnesium acetate
Magnesium carbonate
Magnesium chloride
Magnesium salts of citric acid
Magnesium gluconate
Magnesium glycerophosphate
Magnesium salts of orthophosphoric acid
Magnesium lactate
Magnesium hydroxide
Magnesium sulphate
Manganese carbonate
Manganese chloride
Manganese citrate
Manganese gluconate
Manganese glycerophosphate
Manganese sulphate
Ammonium molybdate
Sodium molybdate
Potassium bicarbonate
Potassium carbonate
Potassium chloride
Potassium citrate
Potassium gluconate
Potassium glycerophosphate
Potassium lactate
Potassium hydroxide
Potassium salts of orthophosphoric acid
Sodium bicarbonate
Sodium carbonate
Sodium chloride
Sodium citrate
Sodium gluconate
Sodium lactate
Sodium hydroxide
Sodium salts of orthophosphoric acid
Sodium selenate
Sodium hydrogen selenite
Sodium selenate
Zinc acetate
Zinc chloride
Zinc citrate
Zinc gluconate
Zinc lactate
Zinc oxide
Zinc carbonate
Zinc sulphate.

Boron, cobalt, nickel, silicon, tin and vanadium are used in products on the UK market, but are not include in annexe I of the Food Supplements Directive (common position adopted by the Council on 3 December 2001) and published in the *Official Journal* C 90 E/1 on 16 April 2002. The Government have not compiled a definitive list of the many nutrient sources used in UK products and not listed in annexe II of that directive.

Motor Neurone Disease

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research into motor neurone disease the Government are funding; and what financial assistance the Government gives to the Motor Neurone Disease Association. [60764]

Ms Blears: The main Government agency for research into the causes of and treatment for disease is the Medical Research Council (MRC). The Department also funds research to support policy and the delivery of effective practice in the national health service.

The MRC spent £1.4 million in 2001–02 on research relevant to motor neurone disease (MND) and on basic work on the function of motor neurones. The MRC also support a large portfolio of basic research into the biology of the brain and the nervous system in both normal and diseased states. Such studies may well have relevance to the treatment of MND and related conditions in the future.

The Department has also supported work in this area. Recent research projects include the clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of riluzole for the treatment of motor neurone disease that completed in August 2000. There is an on-going project on speech recognition for people with severe dysarthria (dysarthria is the inability to articulate speech and is common in MND patients) which is due for completion in July 2003.

The Government give no financial assistance to the Motor Neurone Disease Association.

Capital Projects

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the 35 per cent. design component of his Department's capital projects. [60318]

Mr. Hutton: In order to evaluate tenders from bidders a preliminary invitation to negotiate (PITN) is sent out. The bidder's response to each question on the PITN is allocated a score and weighted percentage. 35 per cent. is the percentage mark attributed to the weighting of the design component.

Consultant Waiting Times

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether there was a change in the basis for calculating the numbers of people waiting 13 weeks or more to see a consultant between the statistics for 31 December 2001 and those for 31 March 2002; and if he will make a statement. [60458]

Mr. Hutton: There have been no changes in the basis for calculating out-patient over 13 week waiters since data collection started in 1994. The data collected refer to the waiting time from general practitioners written referral to first out-patient appointment.

HOUSE OF COMMONS PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES (HANSARD) ● 2001-02

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Voluntary Hospices

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what powers he has to direct voluntary hospices. [60850]

Ms Blears: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has no powers to direct voluntary hospices.

Palliative Care

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money was earmarked for palliative care for the three years ending 2003–04 *(a)* for the central south coast area and *(b)* for each other part of England; and how much of each sum was (i) committed and (ii) spent in 2001–02. [60847]

Ms Blears: The Government have pledged in the NHS cancer plan that funding for specialist palliative care services, including hospices, will increase by £50 million per annum by 2004. This investment is included in the overall national health service investment for implementing the cancer plan. How the £50 million is deployed locally will depend on the needs of the area. Cancer networks have drawn up service delivery plans on palliative care to review the level of services offered in their area and these will ensure that each network has a range of palliative care services available. We are currently reviewing the outturn position for 2001–02 and the progress in that year.

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much and what proportion of the departmental expenditure limit for 2002–03 had been spent by 31 May; what the figures were for 2001–02; and if he will make a statement. [61006]

Mr. Lammy: Reliable estimates for 2002–03 spending to 31 May are not available. Estimated outturn spending figures for 2001–02 can be found in "Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses 2002–03", published in May 2002 as command paper Cm 5401.

Staff Training

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much the Department has spent on staff training and development in each of the last five years. [61067]

Mr. Lammy: Spend on training and development in the Department for the last five years has been as follows:

	£000
1997–98	5,119
1998–99	8,366
1999–2000	6,554
2000–01	6,395
2001–02	5,411

Hospital Appointments

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what restrictions will apply to the ability of patients and general practitioners to book hospital appointments at a time and place of the patient's convenience. [61429]

Mr. Hutton: On 6 December 2001, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health announced proposals to give patients choice over where they are treated in the national health service.

By 2005, all patients and their general practitioners will be able to book hospital appointments at both a time and place that is convenient to the patient. This might include local NHS hospitals, NHS hospitals or diagnostic and treatment centres elsewhere, private hospitals, private diagnostic and treatment centres, or even hospitals overseas. Lessons learned in pilots will be taken forward in the arrangements that operate from 2005.

General Practitioner Contract

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what diseases will qualify for quality payments under the tiered system outlined in the general practitioner contract. [61421]

Mr. Hutton: The new general medical services contract framework agreement sets out the principles of how the new quality framework will work. The national health service confederation and the general practitioner committee of the British Medical Association are continuing to negotiate the detailed clinical and organisational standards and levels and will make them public in due course.

Nurses (Assaults)

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many physical assaults against nurses were recorded in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000 and *(e)* 2001; [61449]

(2) when he last met representatives of *(a)* Unison and *(b)* the Royal College of Nursing to discuss violence against nurses; [61448]

(3) what action the Government are taking to reduce assaults on nurses. [61419]

Mr. Hutton: Violence against any member of staff working in the national health service is unacceptable. Significant action has been taken at both national and local levels to tackle the problem of violence as part of the cross-Government NHS zero tolerance zone campaign. This includes the issuing of new sentencing guidelines to magistrates courts, the publication of new guidelines on the withholding of treatment from violent and abusive patients and, for the first time ever, the allocation of central funding to support the large number of local initiatives being introduced to protect staff. A distance learning package developed specifically to support nurses in dealing with violence has also been issued jointly with the Royal College of Nursing.

Information on the levels of violent incidents by individual staff group is not collected centrally, but may be held at a local level by NHS employers. The results of the 2000–01 survey of reported violent or abusive incidents, accidents involving staff and sickness absence in NHS trust and health authorities, in England, have been placed in the Library, along with a report setting out the Government's proposed action in the light of the findings.

"Delivering the NHS Plan—next steps on investment, next steps on reform" included the commitment to ensure that all general practitioners have access to secure services for the treatment of violent patients, and the Government will be providing extra resources to primary care trusts to deal with violent patients.

Officials have worked closely with the Royal College of Nursing, UNISON and other staff representative bodies on the development of each stage of the zero tolerance campaign, and will continue to do so.

Pharmaceutical Industry

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the contribution of medical science and education to the pharmaceutical industry. [61464]

Ms Blears: The Government recognise that education and the science base are important factors in maintaining the attractiveness of the UK as a location for the research and development (R&D) pharmaceutical industry. Last year the Government published, jointly with the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry, a set of competitiveness and performance indicators which will be used to monitor trends in UK competitiveness as a location for the R&D pharmaceutical industry. Baseline data collected show that in the late 1990s the number of graduates in medical sciences from UK universities was similar to that in Germany and rather greater than in other European countries. Data also show that the UK Government spends more on R&D in health fields than does any other European Government. Copies of the Pharmaceutical Industry Competitiveness Task Force (PICTF)—Competitiveness and Performance Indicators 2001 report are available in the Library.

Health Care Professionals

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether it is his intention that health care professionals who refuse to provide him with patient information will face fines. [61425]

Mr. Lammy: The possibility of a doctor being fined for refusing to disclose information on ethical grounds was a concern voiced during the affirmative procedure debates on the regulations. While the imposition of such a fine cannot be ruled out, circumstances where it would be the appropriate response are difficult to imagine. It is more likely that the involvement of appropriate bodies such as the General Medical Council would be the appropriate response.

Research Projects

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the future of long-term funding of dual support for externally-funded research projects. [61465]

Ms Blears: The Department continues to provide resources in the national health service (NHS) to secure research funded through the dual support system. In March 2000, my noble Friend the Lord Hunt of Kings Heath announced the development programme for NHS research and development (R&D) funding set out in "Research and Development for a First Class Service: R&D funding in the new NHS". This includes transparent and accountable arrangements for targeting NHS funding on providing the NHS base for high quality science and on meeting the NHS costs of supporting high quality R&D under appropriate standards of strategic direction and quality assurance.

Cervical Smear Tests

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average waiting time for results of cervical smear tests in each of the London health authorities was in *(a)* March 2001 and *(b)* March 2002. [61432]

Ms Blears: The information is not available in the format requested. Information on waiting times for screening test results is only available for those areas where the result letters are sent to women directly by the health authorities (around two thirds of health authorities do this).

In 2000–01, 60 per cent. of women in these health authorities received their written cervical screening test result within six weeks (54 per cent. in London). 91 per cent. (84 per cent. in London) received their written result within 10 weeks. It is likely that even where a letter is sent, general practitioners will notify their patients by more rapid means as soon as they have a result.

Guidance from the national health service cervical screening programme states that women should have to wait no longer than six weeks for the written results of their cervical smear test. It is regrettable when delays occur and we look to the relevant trust and health authority to work together to address the reasons for any delay.

Bowel Cancer

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding is available for the treatment of bowel cancer at Chase Farm hospital in Enfield. [61452]

Ms Blears: This information is not held by the Department.

Tuberculosis

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the trends in the incidence of TB in England in the last five years; and if he will make a statement on the reasons for changes. [61136]

Ms Blears: Data taken from five-yearly surveys of tuberculosis undertaken in 1988, 1993 and 1998 show that the incidences of TB are multi-factorial taking into consideration geographic distribution, ethnic distribution, age, place of birth and other risk factors of developing TB.

Tuberculosis is a disease that we take very seriously and we continue to develop and implement programmes to improve TB control.

Toxoplasma Gondii

Mr. Plaskitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in the UK are known to be infected by toxoplasma gondii; how many reported deaths from toxoplasma gondii infection there have been in each of the last five years; and what research is being sponsored by the Department into the causes and treatment of toxoplasma gondii. [61146]

Ms Blears: There is no current data available on the number of people known to be infected with toxoplasma gondii, as toxoplasmosis, the infection associated with toxoplasma gondii, is not a disease reportable under the Public Health (Infectious Diseases) Regulations 1988. However, the Public Health Laboratory Service (PHLS) has received the following confirmed laboratory reports for Toxoplasma gondii in England and Wales for the years 1999 to 2001:

Year	*Number*
1999	610
2000	662
2001	551

The numbers of deaths from toxoplasma gondii infection are not known, as the Office for National Statistics does not collect these statistics.

There are two projects on the causes and treatment of toxoplasma gondii currently sponsored by the Department. These are:

Use of neonatal blood spots for HIV and toxoplasmosis screening. Dr. H. Wilcox, St. Helier Hospital, Surrey, England

GENET-EMSCOT: A study of genetic susceptibility in congenital toxoplasmosis. Dr. R. E. Gilbert, Great Ormond Street Hospital, London.

Deep Vein Thrombosis

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients with deep vein thrombosis were treated by the NHS in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001. [61520]

Ms Blears: The information shown in the table is the number of admissions to national health service hospitals in England where the patient's main diagnosis was deep vein thrombosis.

Year	*Finished consultant episode*
1998–99	24,871
1999–2000	25,155
2000–01	24,903

Notes:

1. Admissions are defined as the *first* period of patient care under one consultant within one health care provider. Admissions do not represent the number of patients, as a person may have more than one admission within the year.

2. Figures are only given for NHS hospital in-patient admissions; there are no figures available for patients diagnosed or treated elsewhere. The figures are the latest available.

3. The figures for 1998–99 to 1999–2000 are grossed for both coverage and invalid/unknown clinical data, but the figures for 2000–01 have not yet been adjusted for shortfalls in data (ie it is ungrossed).

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health

The International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10) code used: 180.2

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the estimated time is between the formation of blood clots in the lower limbs of air travellers and the development of a deep vein thrombosis. [61521]

Ms Blears: The formation of a blood clot in the deep veins of the lower limbs is a deep vein thrombosis. People who sustain a blood clot/deep vein thrombosis in the lower limbs may or may not have symptoms. In those who do have symptoms, these may occur soon after and any time up to several weeks after the blood clot/thrombosis occurred.

A two-year project by the World Health Organisation will start in June 2002 to establish whether there is a link between deep vein thrombosis and air travel.

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what proportion of long haul air travellers he estimates suffer from blood clots in their lower limbs; [61522]

(2) what proportion of deep vein thromboses treated by the NHS since 1999 have been air travel related. [61519]

Ms Blears: Information on the proportion of deep vein thromboses treated by the national health service which may have been travel related is not collected.

We do not yet have sufficient scientific understanding of whether there are elements specific to the aircraft cabin environment that can increase the risk of deep vein thrombosis. For this reason the UK Government fully support the World Health Organisation's research into air travel and venous thromboembolism and has agreed to provide up to £1.2 million in funding for this work. The two-year project will start in June 2002.

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what records are kept by the NHS on the incidence of thromboembolic diseases among air travellers; [61524]

(2) what plans he has to record the incidence of patients suffering from a deep vein thrombosis who have made a long haul flight up to four weeks before they contracted the disease. [61523]

Ms Blears: The national health service does not currently record the travel history of patients with thromboembolic disease as a matter of routine. However, we recognise the importance of improving the understanding of any link between air travel and deep vein thrombosis. The United Kingdom Government therefore fully support the aims of the World Health Organisation's research into air travel and venous thromboembolism and have agreed to provide up to £1.2 million in funding for this work. The two-year project will start in June 2002.

Any future plans to record such information will be informed by the outcome of this research.

Labelling

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures she has put in place to ensure the implementation of the Curry report recommendations for clear and honest labelling of meat products. [53703]

Ms Blears: The Food Standards Agency is taking the lead in pressing for changes to European Union labelling rules to require country of origin labelling on a wider range of foods, particularly meat products. It is also pressing for changes that would prevent misleading labelling by restricting the use of terms like "produce of . . ." to those foods where the main ingredients come from, and production processes occur in, the named place or country. Other EU member states are supporting the UK's initiative on this issue. In addition, the recent adoption of a harmonised definition of meat across Europe for food labelling purposes means meat products will declare and quantify their meat ingredients on a common basis, making it easier for consumers to compare products and make better informed choices.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to amend the law to require the labels on imported processed food to state whether the food contains beef from animals more than 30 months old or has been processed in a country where such meat is allowed to enter the human food chain. [61590]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 12 June 2002]:* The Government are in favour of positive labelling giving consumers the information they need to make properly informed choices. The Food Standards Agency is taking the lead in pressing for changes to European labelling rules to require more informative country-of-origin labelling on a wider range of foods, particularly those containing meat.

However, it would not be possible to extend labelling requirements to cover imported processed food containing beef from animals over 30 months old in the way that has been suggested. The rules covering the restrictions on sale of over thirty-month imported beef are UK national measures and such additional labelling requirements may not be in conformity with EU law. In addition, it is usually not possible to tell the age of the animal from which processed beef products have been derived.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many alleged incidents of condemned meat being illegally mislabelled and sold on for consumption have been investigated in each of the last five years; and how many prosecutions have been instigated for such offences in each of these years. [62095]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* The information requested is not held centrally.

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Committee for the Adaptation to Technical Progress of the Directive on the Removal of Technical Barriers to Trade in Colouring Matters which may be Added to Medicinal Products is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55216]

Mr. Lammy: The committee for the adaption to technical progress of the directives on the elimination of technical barriers to trade in the sector of colouring matters which may be added to medicinal products is a regulatory committee which assists the European Commission in exercising its powers of implementation and facilitates the adoption of draft measures in the field permitted colours for medicinal products. It consists of representatives of member states with a representative of the European Commission as chairman. The UK representatives are the chief executive of the Medicines Control Agency (MCA), in relation to medicines for human use, and the chief executive of the veterinary medicines directorate in relation to veterinary medicines. The committee has not met during the last 12 months and no costs to public funds have been incurred. Its rules provide for a written procedure which may be invoked as an alternative to convening meetings.

Together with member states, the European Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". The Commission has published an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February (Com(2001) 783 Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the mandate of the Scientific Committee on Animal Nutrition is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [61695]

Ms Blears: The mandate for the scientific committee on animal nutrition (SCAN) is set out in European Commission Decision 1997/579/EC, as amended by Commission Decision 2000/443/EC. The committee provides opinions on scientific questions concerning animal nutrition.

The committee has met seven times in plenary session in the year ending 30 April 2002. In addition, there have been several working group meetings. SCAN is composed of independent experts who do not represent the views of the member states in which they work. Three members are based in the UK.

The committee is accountable solely to the European Commission, which pays the travel and subsistence costs of members. There are no additional costs to UK public funds. The committee is currently considering a number of dossiers for products used in animal nutrition. Minutes and current agendas of the committee's meetings can be found on the SCAN website.

European Economic Area Doctors

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many doctors from the European Economic Area have been appointed as associate specialists in the NHS; and if he will make a statement. [62698]

Mr. Hutton: At 30 September 2001 there were 50 associate specialists working in the national health service in England who had obtained their primary medical qualification in the European Economic Area.

Smallpox Vaccine

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 15 May 2002 to the hon.

Member for North Durham (Mr. Jones), *Official Report*, column 725W, on smallpox vaccine, when the new supplies of vaccine will be delivered. [59466]

Mr. Hutton: The Department is not putting information about the size of its smallpox vaccine stocks, delivery schedules or its deployment into the public domain as this is information that might be useful to terrorists.

Parliamentary Questions

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will answer the questions of 19 March from the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon on heart failure. [63381]

Ms Blears: I replied to the hon. Member on Wednesday 19 June 2002.

Locum Doctors

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much was spent by each acute trust on agency locum doctors as *(a)* a total annual amount, *(b)* a proportion of the annual expenditure on doctors' salaries and *(c)* as a proportion of the total operating expenses in each of the last five years for which records are available. [47996]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the savings which NHS trusts can make by recruiting locums from NHS Professionals rather than private agencies. [59442]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* NHS Professionals for doctors will improve the quality of patient care by establishing a national database of doctors outside managed organisations, improving standards and providing locum doctors with suitable appraisal and in due course support for general medical Council revalidation.

NHS Professionals are non-profit making service designed for, and led by, the national health service. We expect it to provide a high quality competitive service as the first-choice supplier to the NHS. It is difficult to predict the precise savings as NHS employers have a variety of different arrangements with the private sector agencies.

Heart Disease Treatment

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on waiting times for heart disease treatment, broken down by *(a)* regional health areas and *(b)* PCT areas. [53320]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 29 April 2002]:* Data on waiting times by primary care trust area are not yet available as many primary care trusts have only recently been formed. The following data show numbers waiting over nine months for coronary artery by-pass surgery and percutaneous transluminal coronary angioplasty on 31 March 2002, by region and health authority, as was.

Waiting times have been substantially reduced since the publication of the national service framework for coronary heart disease in March 2000. At that time 1,093 patients had been waiting for more than 12 months for a heart operation. By March 2002 we have achieved, with the exception of 20 patients who declined earlier dates, a 12-month maximum wait for revascularisation.

Coronary revascularisation, position at 31 December 2001

	CABG		PTCA	
Region/HA code/HA name	*9–11 months*	*12+ months*	*9–11 months*	*12+ months*
Northern and Yorkshire				
QDD Bradford	11	3	0	0
QDE County Durham and Darlington	19	3	3	0
QDF East Riding and Hull	30	3	1	0
QDG Gateshead and South Tyneside	6	0	0	0
QDH Leeds	0	0	0	0
QDJ Newcastle and North Tyneside	11	0	1	0
QDK North Cumbria	25	0	0	0
QDM Northumberland	3	0	0	0
QDN Sunderland	4	0	0	0
QDP Tees	16	1	0	0
QDQ Wakefield	4	1	0	0
QDR North Yorkshire	21	3	0	0
QDT Calderdale and Kirklees	26	3	4	0
	176	17	9	0
Trent				
QCG Barnsley	1	0	1	0
QCH North Derbyshire	1	4	1	0
QCJ Southern Derbyshire	0	0	2	1
QCK Doncaster	10	0	1	0
QCL Leicestershire	33	11	0	1
QCM Lincolnshire	34	1	1	1
QCN North Nottinghamshire	0	1	1	1
QCP Nottingham	0	1	5	10
QCQ Rotherham	6	0	0	0
QCR Sheffield	7	0	0	0
QDL South Humber	0	0	0	0
	92	18	11	14

Coronary revascularisation, position at 31 December 2001

	CABG		*PTCA*	
Region/HA code/HA name	*9–11 months*	*12+ months*	*9–11 months*	*12+ months*
West Midlands				
QD9 Birmingham	41	58	7	1
QEA Coventry	11	4	0	0
QEC Dudley	17	13	3	1
QED Herefordshire	8	7	1	0
QEE Sandwell	22	20	1	0
QEF Shropshire	0	0	0	0
QEG Solihull	8	11	0	0
QEH North Staffordshire	6	8	0	0
QEJ South Staffordshire	12	11	1	0
QEK Walsall	18	15	2	0
QEL Warwickshire	14	9	0	0
QEM Wolverhampton	20	23	4	0
QEN Worcestershire	17	23	0	1
	194	202	19	3
North West				
QC1 South Lancashire	15	7	3	0
QC2 Liverpool	20	10	3	0
QC3 Manchester	19	6	1	0
QC4 Morecambe Bay	21	11	0	0
QC5 St. Helens and Knowsley	16	9	1	1
QC6 Salford and Trafford	10	2	0	0
QC7 Sefton	6	0	2	0
QC8 Stockport	9	8	0	0
QC9 West Pennine	9	5	0	0
QCT Bury and Rochdale	16	5	0	0
QCV North Cheshire	7	6	1	1
QCW South Cheshire	16	7	2	0
QCX East Lancashire	15	5	8	2
QCY North West Lancashire	20	7	15	1
QDA Wigan and Bolton	11	3	0	0
QDC Wirral	6	5	1	0
	216	96	37	5
Eastern				
QA6 Bedfordshire	2	2	0	0
QAX North Essex	25	6	1	0
QAY South Essex	41	12	0	0
QCF Suffolk	20	1	1	0
QER Cambridgeshire	19	0	2	0
QET Norfolk	19	1	1	0
QEX Hertfordshire	60	11	9	1
	186	33	14	1
London				
QA2 Hillingdon	1	0	0	0
QA3 Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	0	0	0	0
QA5 Redbridge and Waltham Forest	29	15	0	0
QAD Croydon	0	0	6	0
QAG Kingston and Richmond	7	0	2	0
QAH Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	0	0	0	0
QAJ Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	3	0	14	0
QAP Barking and Havering	15	6	0	0
QAR Brent and Harrow	3	0	5	0
QAT Camden and Islington	3	2	0	0
QAV Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	0	0	0	0
QAW East London and City	17	7	0	0
QEW Barnet, Enfield and Haringey	1	7	0	0
QEY Bexley, Bromley and Greenwich	3	2	1	0
	82	39	28	0
South East				
QA7 Berkshire	15	0	2	1
QA8 Buckinghamshire	13	1	1	0
QAE East Kent	7	0	0	0
QAF West Kent	9	1	1	0
QAK East Surrey	0	0	0	0
QAL West Surrey	2	0	3	0
QAM East Sussex Brighton and Hove	29	2	0	0
QAN West Sussex	12	1	0	0
QCC Northamptonshire	13	2	0	0

Coronary revascularisation, position at 31 December 2001

Region/HA code/HA name	CABG 9–11 months	CABG 12+ months	PTCA 9–11 months	PTCA 12+ months
QCE Oxfordshire HA	7	3	0	0
QD1 North and Mid Hampshire	8	1	3	0
QD3 Southampton and SW Hampshire	9	3	4	1
QEV Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	6	7	0	0
	130	21	14	2
South West				
QD5 Somerset	1	9	10	10
QD6 South and West Devon	14	8	1	0
QD7 Wiltshire	13	0	3	0
QD8 Avon	12	10	5	5
QDV Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	20	7	4	0
QDW Dorset	0	0	0	0
QDX North and East Devon	4	0	1	0
QDY Gloucestershire	15	0	0	0
	79	34	24	15
England	1,155	460	156	40

Source:

Department of Health form QF01

Immunisation Policy

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representatives of parents' organisations participate in his Department's studies of immunisation policy. [57530]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 23 May 2002]:* We do not routinely seek the views of parent organisations. However, over the course of one year the Department consults a sample of 3,000 mothers. The purpose of this is to elicit their knowledge, attitudes and understanding of the immunisation programme. The information gained from this exercise is then used to inform our communications with health professionals and parents.

A lay representative is shortly to be appointed to the joint committee on vaccine and immunisation who advise the Government on immunisation policy.

NHS Direct

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the nurse grade structure is of nurses that offer medical advice on NHS Direct. [59575]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* The nurse grade structure for NHS Direct consists of F and G grade nurses offering medical advice.

NHS Direct defines what it requires of its nurses through a set of competency statements. Nurses can be recruited from any speciality provided they meet these competencies, although they must have between three and five year's post-qualification experience.

Fraud

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer of 17 April, *Official Report*, column 1037W, what the remit of the NHS counter-fraud service covers; and how many *(a)* staff and (b) members of the public the counter-fraud service has successfully investigated, and what range of penalties was imposed, in each year since 1998. [59553]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* The NHS Counter Fraud Service (NHS CFS) has the strategic, policy and operational remit to tackle fraud and corruption across the National Health Service, wherever it occurs.

Information on successful investigations is shown in the table as follows. The information it contains was current as of 31 March 2002.

	[1]1998–1999	1999–2000	[2]2000–2001	2001–2002
NHS staff and contractors				
Prosecutions[4]	1	18	45	42
Civil redress and disciplinary	4	37	74	44
The public	—	—	—	—
Penalty charge notices issued	n/a	n/a	n/a	[3]34,249
Prosecutions[4]	2	3	1	3

[1] The director of the NHS CFS was appointed in September 1998 to establish the new organisation, and the strategy document "Countering Fraud in the NHS" was published in December 1998.

[2] The NHS CFS Operational Service was established and became fully operational in January 2000.

[3] Because of the low value of most NHS patient fraud (the current prescription charge is £6.20) it is not appropriate or cost effective to routinely prosecute those who perpetrate it. A process to recover the value of the charges evaded has been in place since the NHS CFS was established. In addition, Penalty Charges are applied. These are for a sum which is five times the charge which should have been paid plus the original charge up to a maximum of £100.

[4] Only one prosecution (out of 115) has been unsuccessful in the last three years, however, the NHS CFS do not merely seek to apply criminal sanctions. Rather it seeks to combine criminal, civil and disciplinary sanctions to best effect.

Organ Storage (Alder Hey)

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many parents are pursuing information about the whereabouts of their children's organs improperly removed at Alder Hey Hospital; and if he will make a statement. [59796]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 11 June 2002]:* As at 11 June 2002 the serious incident team at the Royal Liverpool Children's Hospital National Health Service Trust has received inquiries about organ retention from parents of 4,541 deceased children.

The trust acts on behalf of parents inquiring about organ retention at the trust as well as that for the University of Liverpool.

From all enquiries received, 1,372 have had organs and/or blocks and slides retained. This figure represents retention by the trust and the University of Liverpool.

Multiple Sclerosis

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding he is making available for *(a)* research into and *(b)* greater awareness of primary progressive multiple sclerosis. [61564]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* The main Government agency for research into the causes of and treatments for disease is the Medical Research Council (MRC) which receives its funding via the Department of Trade and Industry. The Department funds research to support policy and the delivery of effective practice in the national health service.

The Department and MRC spend for 2001–02 is estimated at £2.2 million on research into multiple sclerosis. This includes spend on basic work on a whole range of autoimmune disease.

We are not making funds available directly for increasing awareness of primary progressive multiple sclerosis. The Department and the drug manufacturers have, however, agreed on an innovative way to secure disease modifying therapies on behalf of multiple sclerosis (MS) patients. The scheme allows patients with MS meeting the criteria of the association of British neurologists to be treated cost-effectively on the NHS. The scheme started on 6 May 2002 and is backed by statutory directions to ensure there is no postcode prescribing of these treatments.

My hon. Friend the Minister of State (Jacqui Smith) announced on 12 June 2002 at the college of occupational therapists "Making Waves" conference that the national service framework (NSF) for long-term conditions will have a particular focus on the needs of people with neurological conditions and brain and spinal injury, and also address some of the common issues faced by people living with long-term conditions. We are now considering the next stage of work, which includes selecting and appointing an external reference group and developing further the communication and consultation strategy. We expect to publish the NSF in 2004 and to start implementation in 2005.

Correspondence

David Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Walsall, North of 30 April concerning a constituent. [61113]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 12 June 2002]:* A reply was sent on 20 June.

Mechanically Recovered Meat

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what reports the FSA has received from meat processors on which products contained mechanically recovered meat. [62532]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* The Food Standards Agency has commissioned a study on the historic use of mechanically recovered meat from bovine animals undertaken before this practice became illegal. Arising from this, there have been consultations with meat processors, among others. Initial findings from the study, once available, will be considered by the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee later this year.

Myeloma

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what percentage of myeloma patients in the UK are *(a)* men and *(b)* women; [62686]

(2) how many people in the UK were diagnosed with multiple myeloma in *(a)* 1975, *(b)* 1980, *(c)* 1985, *(d)* 1990, *(e)* 1995, *(f)* 2000 and *(g)* 2001; [62682]

(3) what percentage of myeloma patients in the UK are under *(a)* 50, *(b)* 40 and *(c)* 30 years of age; [62685]

(4) if he will list areas in the UK in which there are clusters of multiple myeloma sufferers. [62684]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Ian Gibson, dated 20 June 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply on how many people in the UK were diagnosed with multiple myeloma in (a) 1975, (b) 1980, (c) 1985, (d) 1990, (e) 1995, (f) 2000 and (g) 2001, what percentage of myeloma patients in the UK are (a) men and (b) women, what percentage of myeloma patients in the UK are under (a) 50, (b) 40 and (c) 30 years of age, and to list areas in the UK in which there are clusters of multiple myeloma sufferers. (62684, 62682, 62686, 62685)

The available information on the incidence of multiple myeloma in the United Kingdom is shown in the attached tables.

We have no information on areas in the UK where there may be clusters of multiple myeloma 'sufferers'. To determine if indeed there are clusters, and if so where, would require an appropriate research study.

Further information on trends in the incidence, survival and mortality from multiple myeloma can be found in Chapter 14 of the book 'Cancer Trends in England and Wales 1950–1999, SMPS No. 66, author M. Quinn et al, copies of which are available in the House of Commons Library.

Number of newly diagnosed cases of multiple myeloma[1] in the United Kingdom[2], 1975 to 1998

	Total number of cases
1975	1,890
1980	2,327
1985	2,946
1990	2,960
1995	3,538
1998	3,770

Percentage of newly diagnosed cases of multiple myeloma[1] in the United Kingdom by sex and age group, 1998

	Percentage of all newly diagnosed cases
Male	53
Female	47
Age	
Less than 30 years	0.2
Less than 40 years	1.3
Less than 50 years	5.0

Total number of cases—3,770

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[1] Multiple myeloma has been defined to the International Classification of Disease eight and nine revision (ICD8 and ICD9) code 203 for the period 1975–1994, and to codes C88 and C90 according to the International Classification of Disease tenth revision (ICD10) from 1995 onwards.

[2] Cancer incidence figures for Northern Ireland are only available since 1993.

Sources:

England—Office for National Statistics

Wales—Welsh Cancer Intelligence and Surveillance Unit

Scotland—Information and Statistics Division

Northern Ireland—Northern Ireland Cancer Registry

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average life expectancy is of a myeloma patient. [62688]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

The information falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Dr. Ian Gibson, dated 20 June 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply on what the average life expectancy is of a myeloma patient. (62688)

Life expectancy is generally not estimated for cancer patients, because death rates in any age group would be much more heavily influenced by age at diagnosis than by survival from the disease.

A better indicator is the proportion of patients who are still alive at various period of time after diagnosis. This is used almost universally in the assessment of cancer control programmes. The crude survival rate is simply the proportion of the original group of patients alive at the specified time since diagnosis, i.e. it takes into account both deaths from the cancer concerned and deaths from all other causes.

The latest available information on crude survival for patients diagnosed with multiple myeloma in England and Wales is given detailed in the table.

One and five year crude (percentage) of patients aged 15–99 diagnosed during 1991–93 with multiple myeloma[1], by sex, England and Wales

	Number of cases 1991–93	*One year survival (percentage)*	*Five year survival (percentage)*
Men	3,774	55	16
Women	3,408	53	14

[1] International Classification of Disease Ninth Revision Code 203

Source:

Report: Cancer survival in England and Wales, 1991–98. Health Statistics Quarterly 2000; 6: 71–80

The most useful summary measure is the median crude survival time, i.e. the point in time at which 50% of the original group have died (from any cause), but diagnosed with myeloma; this was just about 15 months for men and 14 months for women.

More information is available in Health Statistics Quarterly 2000; 6, copies of which are available in the House of Commons Library.

Drug Treatment

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average waiting time has been for treatment for a heroin addict in Plymouth in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [59743]

Ms Blears: The current waiting time for non-urgent specialist prescribing for a heroin addict in Plymouth through statutory drug services is 65 weeks (which has remained stable since December 2001)[1] and through those general practitioners who initiate prescribing the waiting varies from immediate access to three months[1]. For non-urgent specialist prescribing through the non-statutory services that facilitate shared care with general practitioners, the maximum wait for community opiate detoxification is three months[1] and the maximum wait for longer-term opiate substitute prescribing is 12 months[1].

Urgent cases are seen within one week[2].

[1] Information as of June 2002 from local DAT Co-ordinator

[2] Information as of June 2002 from Primary Care Trust

Oestrogenic Steroids

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps are being taken to monitor the flow of oestrogenic steroids into the human food chain. [60832]

Ms Blears: The use of all hormones, including oestrogenic steroids, as growth promoters in food producing animals is banned throughout the European Union. The veterinary medicines directorate routinely monitors for synthetic hormones in animals in Great Britain as part of our EU obligations. No evidence of their use has been reported in recent years.

Age Discrimination

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each NDPB or agency sponsored by his Department *(a)* the maximum retirement age adopted for most employees, and that age and *(b)* whether they have a policy of not considering applications for employment by persons over a particular age, and that age. [59581]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* At present the Department and its executive agencies have a normal staff retirement age of 60 and do not consider applications for employment from those over that age. However, the Department is now involved in a centrally led initiative, Winning the Generation Game, which will examine age-related issues such as flexible retirement beyond the normal retiring age of 60. The Department would expect that its non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) would also wish to adopt any revised policy the Department itself adopted as a consequence of that initiative. The following policies on retirement age apply in the Department's NDPBs:

Commission for Health Improvement (CHI)

> CHI does not set a particular retirement age for any of its employees. It would however anticipate that most staff would choose to retire by the age of 60 as this is the age at which they could retire without losing any pension benefits. CHI will consider applications for employment from people of any age and does not have a policy of not considering applicants over a certain age.

General Social Care Council (GSCC)

> The retirement age for GSCC employees is 65 years of age for both men and women. The GSCC policy allows staff to continue to work beyond the usual retirement age following an annual review on retirement date. Decisions to continue employment are authorised by the chief executive or one of the directors. The GSCC currently has two staff employed over the age of 65, one male and one female. The GSCC has no upper age limit for the appointment of staff. All appointments are made on the assessment of the applicant's competence to undertake the job.

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA)

> The normal retirement age for HFEA employees is 60. The retention of any employee beyond that age is a matter for the chief executive's discretion. These principles also apply to the HFEA's recruitment policies.

National Biological Standards Board (NBSB)

> The NBSB has a normal retirement age of 60. However, this is not a maximum retirement age. The board operates a policy whereby, in exceptional cases, staff may be asked to work beyond their normal retirement age. There is no policy of not considering applications for employment by persons over a particular age. The board's policy on retirement age is currently under review.

National Care Standards Commission (NCSC)

> The normal age of retirement for the majority of employees at the NCSC is 65, although some staff who transferred from local authorities and health authorities carried forward existing contracts enabling them to work beyond 65 at the employer's discretion. The Commission does not put an age limit on its consideration of applications for employment.

National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB)

> NRPB's normal retirement age is 60, but in the event of ill health, redundancy, limited efficiency or to remedy defects in the staffing structure an earlier retirement date may be effected. At present, NRPB employs people up to age 60.

Public Health Laboratory Service (PHLS)

> While the policy of the PHLS does normally require staff to retire at age 65, the service has been flexible where necessary, consistent with both the wishes of the individual and the needs of the PHLS. The PHLS recognises, however, that it is becoming apparent that the significant shortfalls in various professional groups of employees will require a further review of its position to ensure that the service's professional standards are maintained. Although the service does not normally appoint new staff aged over 65, there is no PHLS policy of not considering applications from people over a particular age.

Stents

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment his Department has made of the relative costs and benefits of stents and drug eluting stents in *(a)* reducing the need for open heart surgery, *(b)* increasing the number of treatments undertaken and *(c)* reducing the incidence of restenosis after angioplasty. [59777]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) issued guidance on the use of stents in May 2000. This guidance is due for review in April 2003. The Department referred drug eluting stents to NICE on 20 May 2002.

NICE will provide evidence based advice to the National Health Service in England and Wales on the clinical and cost-effectiveness of drug eluting stents compared to 'bare' stents, and on their appropriate use.

Cutting Plants

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cutting plants there are in the United Kingdom that are licensed to remove specified risk material from slaughtered cattle; what the locations of these plants are; and if he will make a statement. [61576]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 12 June 2002]:* The only specified risk material that can be legally removed at cutting plants is the vertebral column of certain bovine animals. In the United Kingdom there are 50 cutting plants licensed for this purpose. The are located as follows: 20 in England, two in Wales, eight in Scotland and 20 in Northern Ireland. There is one cutting plant in Scotland that is licensed only to remove the vertebral column of cattle from beef assurance scheme herds.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 21 June 2002

TRANSPORT

Tram and Light Rail Schemes

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the effect on pollution of *(a)* buses and *(b)* light rail schemes. [62812]

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what recent studies his Department has carried out to establish the environmental impact of tram and light rail systems; [62871]

(2) what recent studies his Department has undertaken to establish the impact of tram and light rail systems on crime figures. [62881]

Mr. Spellar: The studies below include some assessment of the environmental impact of tram and light rail systems.

Light Rail and Complementary Measures (Part 1). (Environmental and Transport Planning, 1998).

Light Rail and Complementary Measures (Part 2). (MVA, 2001.)

The Department's framework for the appraisal of individual major local transport schemes includes environment and safety among the five overarching objectives which are considered.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what evaluation his Department has made of the impact of *(a)* tram and light rail schemes and *(b)* bus routes on social exclusion. [62794]

Mr. Spellar: The Social Exclusion Unit's interim report, *Making the Connections: transport and social exclusion*, looks at the ways in which transport problems can reinforce social exclusion. It concluded that bus services have a particularly important role to play in tackling these. When we consider proposals for major schemes in Local Transport Plans, we take into account their likely impacts on access to the transport system and on different social groups. These can only be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received on tram and light rail schemes from *(a)* passenger transport authorities, *(b)* passenger groups, *(c)* trade manufacturing organisations and *(d)* trades unions during the last 12 months. [62808]

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) which local authorities have been consulted on tram and light rail proposals over the last five years; [62864]

(2) how many local authorities have sought guidance from his Department on tram and light rail systems. [62865]

Mr. Spellar: No records are kept listing all such representations and contacts. However, in the last three years my officials have met local authorities responsible for the Local Transport Plans covering all six Passenger Transport Authorities and the other plan areas listed below to discuss tram and light rail systems.

Blackpool;
Bristol;
Central Leicestershire;
Greater Nottingham;
Hampshire;
Kingston-upon-Hull;
Lancashire;
Portsmouth;
Reading;
South Gloucestershire; and
Tees Valley.

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how often during the last five years the Council of Ministers discussed tram and light rail systems; [62890]

(2) what recent discussions he has had with his European counterparts on the development of tram and light rail systems. [62887]

Mr. Spellar: My Department does not keep records of all such discussions. However, light rail systems have been discussed on a number of occasions in the context of the European Commission's proposal of 26 July 2000 for a Regulation concerning public service requirements and the award of public service contracts in passenger transport by rail, road and inland waterway.

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what research his Department has carried out on engineering developments for tram and light rail systems; [62882]

(2) what consideration he has given to the use of tram and light rail infrastructure as part of the European Electronic Railway under the RECITE-II Programme. [62888]

Mr. Spellar: None.

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) who is responsible for the regulation of tram and light rail systems; [62861]

(2) how many non-departmental public bodies for which his Department is responsible have a locus in the development of tram and light rail systems. [62859]

Mr. Spellar: The Health and Safety Executive is responsible for the regulation of tram and light rail systems. Tram drivers must also comply with certain highways legislation, enforced by the police.

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on how many occasions since 1997 tram and light rail systems have been discussed with other departments as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review. [62884]

Mr. Spellar: Light rail systems will have been mentioned from time to time during the discussions with colleagues across Government which take place during spending reviews. No records exist of the number of such occasions.

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many qualified tram and light rail drivers there are in the United Kingdom. [62867]

Mr. Spellar: My Department does not hold this information. Figures for the number of drivers and on-vehicle staff employed on each system are below.

	Number
Manchester Metrolink	133
Sheffield Supertram	160
Midland Metro	91
Tyne and Wear Metro	242
Docklands Light Railway	200
Croydon Tramlink	90
Blackpool Tramway	35

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many civil servants within his Department work on tram and light rail systems' policy. [62866]

Mr. Spellar: Policy on major public transport schemes, including light rail, in Local Transport Plans is handled by a team of three staff. Other colleagues, including specialist economists and lawyers, assist as required.

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many proposals there have been for tram and light rail systems which his Department has rejected; and if he will list them. [62860]

Mr. Spellar: New arrangements were introduced with the inception of Local Transport Plans in 1999. Proposals for new tram and light rail schemes normally need Transport and Works Act powers. If funding from my Department is essential for the project to proceed, promoters should seek a provisional view from my Department on whether the scheme passes the Government's appraisal tests which are used to decide whether a project is eligible for funding before seeking powers. Since the start of these arrangements, two light rail lines (Midland Metro extensions to Birmingham city centre and to Brierley Hill) have received a positive provisional view, a number of others are under consideration, and none have yet been given a negative provisional view.

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those tram and light rail systems visited by ministers over the last five years in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* overseas. [62870]

Mr. Spellar: All seven tram and light rail systems in the United Kingdom, as listed below, have been visited by Ministers over the last five years. No information is available on visits to systems overseas.

Blackpool Tramway

Manchester Metrolink

Sheffield Supertram

Midland Metro

Tyne and Wear Metro

Docklands Light Railway

Croydon Tramlink

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many times he has met with *(a)* the Environment Minister and *(b)* the Housing Minister to establish the impact of tram and light rail systems on their policy evaluation. [62886]

Mr. Spellar: None. However, the appraisal of tram and light rail systems takes account of five over-arching objectives: environment, safety, economy, accessibility and integration (including the extent of integration with land use and other government policies).

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which manufacturers of components of tram and light rail systems have been consulted in drawing up departmental policy on tram and light rail systems. [62883]

Mr. Spellar: Departmental policy on tram and light rail systems is set out in the 10 Year Plan, published in July 2000. In preparing the Plan we took account of the large number of comments we received from consultees and a wide range of other stakeholders on the Integrated Transport White Paper, published in July 1998.

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what statistics he collates on the number of tram and light rail systems in each state in the European Union. [62889]

Mr. Spellar: None. This information is published annually in *Jane's Urban Transport Systems*.

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what qualifications are required to drive a *(a)* tram and *(b)* light rail train. [62868]

Mr. Spellar: A category 'B' Motor Vehicle driving license (Driving License Regulations, 1987) is the required qualification.

Road User Charging Schemes

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list recent Government commissioned studies which have made recommendations for road user charging schemes; and if he will make a statement. [62880]

Mr. Spellar: Consultants for four Multi-Modal Studies have recommended in their Final Reports that consideration be given to the future introduction of road user charging schemes. These are the West Midlands Area MMS, West Midlands to North West MMS, North/South Movements in the East Midlands MMS and London to South West and South Wales MMS. The Final Reports are now with the respective Regional Planning Bodies who will make recommendations to Ministers. In addition the consultants carrying out the ORBIT (M25 Corridor) MMS have made provisional recommendations which include road user charging proposals.

Given the practical considerations, we do not believe that a system of inter-urban road user charging for cars could be introduced this decade; accordingly the

Government has no plans to do so. However, this is a subject where further work and research is needed and we will revisit it when sufficient progress has been made in clarifying the technical and practical issues involved. In the meantime, we note the arguments put forward both for and against inter-urban charging and are listening to the debate.

Traffic Lights

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the bodies responsible for the maintenance and control of traffic lights in each area of the United Kingdom, including a brief description of their *(a)* function and *(b)* statutory duties. [62873]

Mr. Spellar: The Statutory responsibility for traffic lights in England rests with the relevant traffic authority. This will be a County Council, Metropolitan District Council, or a Unitary Authority. In London, Transport for London is the traffic authority for strategic routes, London Boroughs for all other roads. However, Transport for London control all traffic lights within the London area, regardless of whether they are the traffic authority for the roads at the junction. The Highways Agency is responsible for trunk roads.

Similar arrangements apply in Scotland and Wales. The Scottish Executive and Welsh Assembly Government are responsible for trunk roads in Scotland and Wales. Local Authorities in Scotland and Unitary Authorities in Wales are responsible for other roads.

In Northern Ireland, the Department for Regional Development is responsible for all roads.

The function and duties of traffic authorities are set out in the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 (RTRA 84). In the present context the authorities' general duty is

> "to secure the expeditious, convenient and safe movement of vehicular and other traffic (including pedestrians)".

Specific duties in relation to traffic signals are covered in Part V of the RTRA 84 and the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 1994.

Airport (Severn Site)

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether the Severn Side site in Monmouth will be included as an option for a new airport in the consultation document for the airport white paper. [63150]

Mr. Spellar: In advance of the consultation, I do not intend to comment on the status of any specific options as releasing information at this stage could result in unnecessary blight as well as multiplying uncertainty and anxiety. This approach is consistent with my Department's Code of Practice on the Dissemination of Information during Major Infrastructure Developments.

Transport Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the outcome was of the Transport Council meeting on 17 June; what the Government's stance was on each issue discussed, including its voting record; and if he will make a statement. [63142]

Mr. Spellar: The Transport Council was held on 17 June in Luxembourg. I represented the UK.

I was pleased to see the adoption by the Council of two directives on passenger vessel safety. The first of these requires compliance by 2015 by all Member States with the higher standards of damage stability for ro-ro passenger ships engaged on international voyages already introduced following the *Estonia* disaster by eight EU countries, including the UK (the "Stockholm Agreement"). These requirements are complementary to the International Maritime Organisation's (IMO) standard, aimed at increasing the survivability of damaged ro-ro vessels. The very large majority of UK ro-ro ferries have already been altered to comply with the Stockholm standard and those few remaining will be altered as necessary before the deadline of September 2002.

The second directive on safety of passenger ships makes a number of technical amendments to the existing Directive 98/18. I would particularly draw attention to provisions bringing into Community law the IMO rules and standards on High Speed Craft and placing a duty on Member States to encourage owners to improve accessibility to their ships for people with limited mobility.

The Council reached agreement on a Directive to open the market for the provision of services, including cargo handling and pilotage, in large and medium-sized ports. For service contracts, there will be maximum durations of 10, 15 and 36 years (plus a possible further 10 years), respectively, for services with no significant investment, services with significant investment in movable assets, and services with significant investment in immovable assets. In addition, I argued successfully for a 40 year period for new ports in the future. The agreed text includes a number of other significant changes, which meet many of the concerns we have had on the Commission's original proposals including protecting working conditions for port workers. The Commission said it would come forward with guidelines as soon as possible to address the important issue of competition between ports.

The Council did not reach agreement on a Regulation establishing a programme (the Marco Polo programme) to succeed the PACT programme for the promotion of combined transport. The Marco Polo programme would offer Community financial support for modal shift projects, with a budget of € 85 million and various thresholds for different types of eligible project. I joined other Member States in arguing that there should be a reduced budget.

The Commission reported on the need for further action in Europe in the field of maritime security. This would be principally within the framework of the IMO.

The Council was unable to agree Conclusions on the Commission's transport White Paper of September 2001, which proposes a range of measures to address significant issues such as congestion, safety and the environmental impact of transport. During the debate I was one of a number of Ministers to reject any reference in the Conclusions to tax harmonisation. I also referred to the need to update the existing Eurovignette Directive, to allow Member States to proceed with implementing distance-based charging schemes. Following the debate, the Presidency issued Conclusions.

The Council did not agree a common position on amendment of the Trans European Network Guidelines. Discussion centred principally on the new list of priority projects. More work will be done on this in preparation for consideration by Ministers during the Danish Presidency.

The Commission presented a proposal for Community accession to the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) and the IMO. It will be seeking a mandate from the Council to negotiate with these organisations.

The Council reached agreement on a decision agreeing Community accession to the European Organisation for the Safety of Air Navigation (Eurocontrol), the pan-European body co-ordinating air traffic management. The agreement is subject to Parliamentary scrutiny reservations being lifted.

There were Presidency Conclusions noting the large degree of support among Member States for the Single European Sky and the agreement of Member States to make progress by 2004 in line with the Conclusions of the Barcelona European Council. The Conclusions also noted the importance of Eurocontrol in the process.

The Council unanimously adopted a common position on a Directive on occurrence reporting in civil aviation, establishing a common framework for dealing with safety-related incidents. There was agreement on a draft Regulation requiring Member States to provide aviation statistical returns.

The Commission presented a proposal on subsidy and unfair pricing by third country airlines, noting that some third countries had offered substantial financial support to their airlines, which had an impact on Community carriers.

The Presidency reported on discussions over lunch about aviation war-risk insurance. The Council believed that State intervention should be limited, to avoid market restriction, but that possible mutualisation schemes should be examined.

The Council reached agreement on a Directive tightening existing Community legislation on seat belt wearing. A compromise was reached on an exemption for school buses, which will last for five years. We have some concern at the lack of respect for subsidiarity in this proposal and this was made clear to the Council. In our view, it is appropriate to have a broad framework at EU level, leaving details of implementation to Member States.

The Council did not reach agreement on a regulation on ecopoints for the transit of HGVs through Austria. This would have allowed extension of the ecopoint system beyond the current expiry date of 31 December 2003, but not beyond 2006, pending the forthcoming adoption of legislation on EU-wide infrastructure charging. The Commission concluded that in 2004 the Ecopoint system would finish. The Presidency hoped that imminent high level discussions among key Member States would lead to a solution of the problem of Alpine transit.

No formal votes were taken at this Council.

Freight Transport

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has for promoting the shift of freight transport from road to rail in the West Midlands to Manchester Midman Transport Corridor. [63160]

Mr. Spellar: The West Midlands to North West Conurbation (MIDMAN) Multi Modal study has considered the shift of freight from road to rail. The Study Final Report was published on 3 May 2002. Both the West Midlands Local Government Association and North West Regional Assembly are currently considering the Report and will make recommendations to the Secretary of State in due course. As with all rail aspects of this study, they will need to take account of the ongoing discussions on the West Coast Main Line.

Channel Tunnel (Rail Freight)

Mr. Joyce: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the outcome of the meeting held on 30 May between the UK Government, French Government and European Commission to discuss the disruption of rail freight services through the Channel Tunnel. [63379]

Mr. Spellar: The Government thanked the Commission for its previous initiatives under the Free Movement of Goods Regulation. At the meeting, the French Government provided a timetable for improved security measures, to be completed in November. The UK Government pressed the French to look carefully at how they could accelerate it.

We have expressed our willingness in principle to help in any way we can. In particular we are willing to provide specialist detection equipment. Close bilateral contacts between UK and France continue.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will seek compensation in respect of the cancellation of EWS services through the channel tunnel; and if he will make a statement. [63186]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 20 June 2002]:* It would not be appropriate to seek compensation from the European Union for disruptions to EWS services caused by restrictions imposed by SNCF. Freight operators can seek to enforce EU law on the free movement of goods in the French courts, and this could include a claim for losses caused by the breach of that law.

We continue to press the French Government to consider carefully how the programme of further security improvements at Fréthun, due to be completed in November, might be accelerated.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects EWS services to be restarted in the Channel Tunnel. [63187]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 20 June 2002]:* EWS services through the Channel Tunnel have continued to run, albeit at a greatly reduced level. The French authorities have put in hand a programme of further security improvements, which are due to be completed in November. We are pressing the French to consider carefully how this might be accelerated. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport has asked the Chairman of the Strategic Rail Authority to discuss urgently with the chairman of SNCF how the earliest possible return to normal train services could be achieved.

Mr. Joyce: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent discussions he has had with the French Government in respect of restoring the free movement of exports by rail through the Channel Tunnel. [63663]

Mr. Spellar: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport and I have written to the new French Transport Minister and Transport Secretary emphasising the need to ensure a rapid restoration of full rail freight services through the Channel Tunnel. I met the French Transport Minister, Gilles de Robien, on 17 June and discussed this issue with him. The French authorities have put in hand a programme of further security improvements, which are due to be completed in November. We are pressing the French to consider carefully how this might be accelerated.

Rural Transport Network

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to improve the rural transport network by providing extra funding. [63530]

Mr. Spellar: The Rural White Paper published in November 2000 announced that £239 million will be specifically made available for rural transport in England for the three year period 2001–02 to 2003–04, a 54 per cent. increase in funding relative to the previous three year period 1998–99 to 2000–01. Funding levels for future years beyond 2003–04 will be decided following the outcome of the 2002 Spending Review.

Railtrack

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects Railtrack to come out of administration; and if he will make a statement. [61155]

Mr. Spellar: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Mr. Grayling) on 15 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 678W.

National Insurance

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the cost to *(a)* the rail industry and *(b)* the bus industry of the planned one per cent. increase in employers' national insurance contributions. [63767]

Mr. Spellar: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury to the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Andrew Turner) on Monday 29 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 544W.

International Maritime Organisation

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made in the discussions since 15 May in the International Maritime Organisation regarding maritime security. [63109]

Mr. Spellar: The Maritime Safety Committee of the International Maritime Organisation in its meeting from 15 to 24 May defined the draft text of binding amendments to the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) Convention. These provide for a coherent basis of security planning for international ships and ports, for approval and inspection arrangements, and for the installation of ship-tracking equipment. The drafts will be submitted for agreement at the Diplomatic Conference announced for December 2002, for which preparations continue at the international and European level.

The Committee also approved proposals for co-operation between the International Maritime Organisation and other international organisations to progress related improvements in maritime security.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

India and Pakistan

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much aid has been given to *(a)* India and *(b)* Pakistan in the last 12 months. [62710]

Clare Short *[holding answer 19 June 2002]:* DFID's bilateral disbursements to India and Pakistan for financial year 2001–02 (the most recent period for which figures are available) totalled £180 million and £43 million respectively. These figures do not include significant UK contributions through multilateral agencies. Comprehensive UK figures will be published in the autumn.

Kashmir

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what food supplies have recently been sent to Kashmir. [62707]

Clare Short *[holding answer 19 June 2002]:* We continue to closely monitor the situation in Kashmir. State Governments continue to provide food and other assistance to vulnerable groups. To date, there has been no request for assistance to Kashmir, although we stand ready to respond as a need arises.

Debt Cancellation

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on progress towards accelerating the debt cancellation programme under the HIPC process. [62960]

Clare Short: So far, 26 countries have qualified for relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative. Relief of more than US$62 billion will be provided to these countries, reducing their debts by more than two thirds on average. Of the 26 countries, 21 have reached Decision Point and are receiving interim debt relief on their "flow" of payment, and five have completed the HIPC process, and have received an irrevocable reduction in their stock of debt. We expect Cote d'Ivoire to reach Decision Point soon and hope that more countries will reach their Completion Point this year. The prospects of the remaining 10 countries with unsustainable debt are not good. Most of them are in conflict and cannot gain debt relief until they make peace, and the remainder have governance problems.

Air Traffic Control System (Tanzania)

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether she has received a copy of the International Civil Aviation Organisation's full report on the suitability of the air traffic control system that BAE Systems has sold to the Tanzanian Government; and if she will place a copy in the Library. [63687]

Clare Short: I have seen a copy of the report but it is the property of the Government of Tanzania and thus it is not appropriate for me to copy it to others.

Afghanistan

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what proportion of moneys are channelled through *(a)* her Department's projects, *(b)* NGO projects, *(c)* UN projects and *(d)* the interim administration for the reconstruction of Afghanistan. [61760]

Clare Short: Of the moneys disbursed since 11 September on humanitarian, recovery and reconstruction activities, about 6 per cent. has been channelled through DFID's programme of quick-impact projects; about 23 per cent. through international organisations and NGOs; and about 63 per cent. through UN agencies. No money has been directly channelled through the Interim Administration, but about 8 per cent. has been contributed to the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund, which has been set up to fund the recurrent costs of the Transitional Administration as well as investment programmes.

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the performance of donor countries which attended the UN Conference in Tokyo in January has been in terms of meeting individual financial pledges and the corresponding levels of financial investment to Afghanistan reconstruction projects. [61759]

Clare Short: Contributions are now starting to arrive in the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund, which has been set up to fund investment programmes and the recurrent costs of the Transitional Administration. The UK was the first to contribute. In all, the World Bank expects to receive $100 million from donors in the first wave of donations.

A number of reconstruction programmes have been approved. We do not have an exhaustive list, but the World Bank alone has recently approved a $10 million Emergency Public Administration Project, a $15 million Emergency Education Rehabilitation and Development Project, and a $42 million Emergency Community Empowerment and Public Works Project. EC projects include support to the Interim Authority (€20 million), urban infrastructure (€7 million), rural development (€28 million), demining (€10 million) and refugee reintegration and community support (€22 million). The Asian Development Bank has approved a $14.5 million programme of technical assistance to build capacity for reconstruction and development. Other programmes are in the pipeline.

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development with regard to education programmes in Afghanistan, what moneys *(a)* her Department has pledged, *(b)* her Department has delivered, *(c)* other G8 countries have pledged and *(d)* other G8 countries have delivered. [61763]

Clare Short: At the Tokyo Conference in January, international donors pledged funds for the overall reconstruction of Afghanistan, including humanitarian programmes. Pledges were not broken down by sector. The UK pledge was to commit £200 million over five years, on top of the £60 million already committed since September 2001.

The UK strategy in Afghanistan is to contribute directly to UN agencies and NGOs and to channel assistance via the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF), which has been established to allow donor to finance investment programmes in all sectors, including education. We have made an initial contribution of £5 million to the ARTF. Since September 2001, my Department has also contributed £8 million to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), £2 million of which was specifically for the Back-to-School Campaign in Afghanistan. My Department also continues to support UNICEF and other humanitarian agencies to provide education services to Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Iran. We are currently considering what further support to provide in the education sector.

G8 nations have not pledged specific amounts for the education sector, but are currently thinking through their strategies in all areas (including education). A multi-donor mission, led by the Asian Development Bank, has scoped the requirements for a framework of assistance to the sector, but work is still at the design rather than the delivery stage.

TREASURY

Spending Review

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will announce the date of the Spending Review. [62020]

Mr. Boateng: The conclusions of the 2002 Spending Review will be announced before the House rises for the summer recess.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on what date he will *(a)* announce the result of the Spending Review 2002 and *(b)* publish his Department's Annual report; and if he will make a statement. [59676]

Mr. Boateng: The conclusions of the 2002 Spending Review will be announced before the House rises for the summer recess. The Treasury's Departmental Report was published on 10 June.

Marginal Deduction Rates

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 1 May 2002, *Official Report,* columns 882–83W, on the Budget Red Book, if he will provide comparable marginal deduction rate figures for individuals. [56466]

Dawn Primarolo: The table below shows estimates of the number of individuals facing marginal deduction rates (MDRs) in excess of 40 per cent.

Cumulative number of individuals facing MDRs in excess of 40 per cent.

Figures in thousands

Marginal Deduction Rate	*Before Budget 1998*	*2002–03 system of tax and benefits*	*After the introduction of NTCs*
Over 100%	10	0	0
Over 90%	190	90	90
Over 80%	450	340	290
Over 70%	1,140	390	390
Over 60%	1,180	1,140	1,750
Over 50%	1,180	1,825	2,000
Over 40%	1,240	1,875	2,275

The figures in the table cover the number of individuals in households in receipt of either income-related benefits or the Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC), or new tax credits from April 2003, where at least one person works 16 hours or more. The effects of income tax and National Insurance Contributions, and the withdrawal of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit have also been included.

The effect of tax and benefit changes introduced since Budget 1998, including WFTC, reduced the number of individuals in households facing MDRs in excess of 70 per cent. by around three-quarters of a million. As WFTC is more generous than the Family Credit that it replaced, more individuals in households benefit from it, hence the larger numbers facing MDRs over 40 and 50 per cent. in 2002–03.

Building on the success of WFTC, the Government will be introducing the Child and Working Tax Credits from April 2003. As the new tax credits will be more generous and inclusive than the current system of support, significantly more households will be eligible, and those currently eligible will receive more, hence a greater number will face MDRs over 40 and 50 per cent. from 2003–04.

Public Service Monitoring

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place the underlying data used for the scorecard approach to monitoring public services value for money in Table 3.16 of HM Treasury's Annual report, (Cm 5425) in the Library. [63211]

Mr. Boateng: The scorecard is based on departmental progress against value for money PSA targets. Departments report progress against their PSA targets in their departmental reports, copies of which are placed in the Library.

Wanless Report

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 12 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 5437W, on the recommendations of the Wanless report, which passages of the Chancellor's Budget Statement of 17 April addressed the recommendation of the Wanless report on the need for a study of the trends affecting social care. [63378]

Mr. Boateng: The Chancellor's Budget Statement and the Economic and Fiscal Strategy Report made a number of announcements in relation to health and social services which addressed the recommendations of the Wanless Report. The Government do not plan to commission a further study.

EU Economy

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his assessment is of the extent to which *(a)* each EU Government have made their labour markets more successful at adapting to structural economic change and *(b)* the EU economy has improved its ability to create jobs and respond to structural change. [63368]

Ruth Kelly: The progress of reform of EU labour, product and capital markets to increase employment and raise sustainable growth is examined in the Government's White Paper "Releasing Europe's Potential—Economic Reform in Europe", published in February of this year.

Pension Liabilities

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 22 April 2002, to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollock (Mr. Davidson), *Official Report*, column 92W, on pension liabilities, if he will list the liabilities of the UK Government to unfunded public service pension schemes broken down by pension scheme; and what assessment he has made of the proportion of the rise in liabilities in recent years due to *(a)* wage inflation, *(b)* longevity, *(c)* extension of the rights of part time workers and *(d)* other factors; and if he will make a statement. [63205]

Mr. Boateng: For the main unfunded schemes' liabilities as at 31 March 2001 I refer the hon. Gentleman to my answer of 12 June, *Official Report*, columns 1290–91W. There is an underlying increase in the cash values of about 13 per cent. since March 1998. Precise figures are not available for the proportion of the overall rise which is due to the factors specified, but well over half is the result of inflation and most of the rest is due to earnings growth.

National Savings Investments Chief Executive

Barbara Follett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what arrangements are being made for appointing a new National Savings Investment Chief Executive. [64441]

Ruth Kelly: Following an open competition, Alan Cook has been selected as the new Agency Chief Executive. Mr Cook is currently Chief Operating Officer at Prudential. This appointment is subject to the usual pre-appointment checks.

Financial Services Act

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many cases were referred by the London Stock

Exchange or other agencies for possible action under section 177 of the Financial Services Act 1986 in each year from 1995–96; in how many cases inspectors were appointed; in how many cases inspectors reported; how many convictions were achieved; and how many acquittals were made, in each year prior to the implementation of the Financial services and Markets Act 2000. [62025]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

The information about references from the London Stock Exchange, the number of inspections carried out and convictions obtained is set out in the Companies Annual Report which is published each year and it is hoped to be available before the summer recess.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Ministerial Salaries

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the annual cost was of ministerial salaries in her Department in *(a)* 1997–98 and *(b)* 2001–02. [60946]

Mr. Caborn: The total cost of ministerial salaries in 1997–98 (excluding severance payments) was £134,236. This reflects the changes made to the ministerial team at the then Department for National Heritage following the 1997 General Election, which were:

April 1997

Secretary of State

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Lords)

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Commons)

May 1997

Secretary of State

Minister of State (Commons)

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Commons)

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Commons)

For 2001–02 the salary cost of Ministers (excluding severance payments) was £219,772. Again, this reflects the changes made to the DCMS ministerial team folowing the 2001 General Election, which were:

May 2001

Secretary of State

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Commons)

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Commons)

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Commons)

June 2001

Secretary of State

Minister of State (Lords)

Minister of State (Commons)

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Commons)

Bilateral Ministerial Meetings

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when Ministers in her Department have held meetings with Ministers and officials of the Irish Government since 1 June 2000; when and where each meeting took place; which ministers were involved in each meeting; which Irish Government departments were involved in each meeting; and which Ministers and officials from the Irish Government attended each meeting. [63068]

Mr. Caborn: DCMS Ministers regularly meet their Irish counterparts at EU Ministerial meetings and EU Culture and Audiovisual Council Meetings.

In addition, my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) attended a lunch at the British Council in honour of the Irish President on 30 November 2000 and my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for the Arts met the Irish Prime Minister at the Parliamentary Buildings in Dublin on 3 December 2001 to discuss the 2002 Irish Special Olympics.

Community Arts (Stroud)

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the help available for community arts in the Stroud area. [62993]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 19 June 2002]:* Funding for the arts is a matter for the Arts Council of England and its regional offices. South West Arts, which incorporates Stroud, currently distributes over £9 million a year to help support the arts and increase opportunities for audiences across the region. It also works with local authorities in the development and delivery of arts and cultural activity at a community level and support for community arts is available through both revenue and lottery funds subject to certain criteria being met.

Olympic Games

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the cost was of producing Arup's report on a possible UK bid for the 2012 Olympic Games. [63349]

Mr. Caborn: We do not yet know the final cost of Arup's work. As soon as this information is known I will write to the hon. Member, placing copies of my letter in the Libraries of both Houses.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when her Department will publish Arup's report on a possible UK bid for the 2012 Olympic Games. [63350]

Mr. Caborn: My Department, together with other key stakeholders, is considering the implications of the Arup cost-benefit analysis of bidding for the 2012 Olympic Games in London. We aim to publish the report in the Autumn.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Export Credits

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will republish the table in the *Official Report,* 12 June 2000, column 464W, to include data for 2000–01 and 2001–02. [60410]

Ms Hewitt: The following table details Claims Paid, Premium Earned and Claims Recovered in respect of ECGD's support for defence related business in each of the last eleven Financial Years. The cost of interest rate support has been estimated on the proportion of ECGD credit business constituted by defence related business.

Information on amounts received through Paris Club rescheduling agreements has not been included as it is not held on a sectoral basis and this cannot be readily determined. It is likely that taking account of these amounts would improve the position in respect of defense business cashflow.

The data for 2001–2002 are currently being audited. I will arrange for the Chief Executive of ECGD to write to my hon. Friend as soon as these figures become available.

Year	*Premium Earned £ million*	*Claims Paid £ million*	*Estimate of Interest Rate Support £ million*	*Claims Recovered £ million*
1990–91	16	79	81	3
1991–92	11	79	2	24
1992–93	44	94	26	21
1993–94	38	83	-7	9
1994–95	16	92	-1	17
1995–96	23	90	2	28
1996–97	8	50	1	2
1997–98	12	39	4	3
1998–99	18	31	3	6
1999–2000	27	152	1	9
2000–01	38	181	4	0

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the Government's policy on the provision of export credits for military equipment. [62706]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 19 June 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to my answer given to him on 4 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 145W.

Furniture Safety

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to review the Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) Regulations 1988. [60783]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Over the last year the Department has consulted with a wide range of interested parties about the effectiveness of the Regulations. I have looked carefully at the results of the consultation.

The most important point to emerge is that more needs to be done to stop potentially dangerous items of furniture being placed on the UK market.

Overall, the Regulations are well-established and fit for purpose and set the high safety requirements that are needed to protect consumers. They have saved hundreds of lives since they were introduced.

I have therefore concluded that although a revision of the Regulations might bring about some small technical improvements, it is not the most effective way of maintaining the necessary high level of consumer protection. Instead, I want to focus on improving the enforcement of the Regulations. I will therefore be meeting with the enforcement authorities, industry representatives and others shortly to agree what action is needed and to identify what the department can do to help.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what estimate she has made of the number of incidences of pieces of furniture being sold in the UK which are non-compliant under the Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) Regulations 1988; [60784]

(2) what action she is taking to remove the potential harm presented by the supply of furniture that is in non-compliance with the Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) Regulations 1988 (as amended). [60782]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Records of instances of sales of non-compliant furniture under the Regulations are not held centrally.

However, I am concerned at recent reports that non-compliant furniture is being sold in the UK. I will shortly be meeting with representatives of Trading Standards Departments, the furniture industry and other interested parties to discuss the identified problems with non-compliance and to consider what needs to be done in order to ensure that consumers are properly protected and that all those who market furniture in the UK are competing on a level playing field.

Arms Exports

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much in export credit guarantees has been made available in support of military exports; and how much aid has been given to African countries, since June 2001. [62161]

Ms Hewitt: Since June 2001, ECGD has provided support with a value of £7.2 million in respect of one defence related case in Africa.

Figures for aid are produced by the Department for International Development. The information for the financial year 2001–02 is currently being audited and will appear in the 2002 edition of Statistics on International Development which is due for publication this Autumn.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the total is of export credit guarantees granted for defence-related sales to *(a)* Pakistan and *(b)* India in each of the last five years. [62035]

Ms Hewitt: No ECGD support for defence exports to Pakistan was provided in the last five years. One defence related guarantee was provided to India in 1998, with a value of £14 million.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what export licences have been granted since 2 May 1997 for the export of technical packages or upgrade packages for the production of sub-machine guns to *(a)* Pakistan, *(b)* Turkey, *(c)* Switzerland, *(d)* Iran and *(e)* Saudi Arabia. [62018]

Nigel Griffiths: The export of technical packages and upgrade packages for the production of sub-machine guns is controlled under entries ML1, ML16, ML18, ML21, ML22 and PL5017 in the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994 as amended.

Details of all export licences issued since 2 May 1997, including any for technical packages and upgrade packages for the production of sub-machine guns, are published by destination in the Government's Annual Reports on Strategic Export Controls. Copies of the 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2000 Annual Reports are available from the Libraries of the House. The 2001 Annual Report will be published soon.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on how the Government intend to address offshore arms trading through the mechanisms of the Export Control Bill. [62556]

Nigel Griffiths: The Government have stated that they will use the new powers in the Export Control Bill to introduce extra-territorial controls on trade in controlled goods to embargoed destinations, trade in equipment the export of which has already been banned because of evidence of its use in torture, and trade in long-range missiles.

Minimum Wage

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she takes to monitor and collate information on the pay of 16 and 17 year olds in Scotland. [62154]

Alan Johnson: Information on the pay and hours of 16 and 17-year-olds in Scotland is available form the annual New Earnings Survey. The latest data available, obtained from the Office for National Statistics for April 2001, show that gross average weekly pay for 16–17 year old full-time employees in Scotland was £156.20.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on evidence she has collated of substitution of employees for 16 and 17-year-olds following introduction of the national minimum wage in Scotland. [62153]

Alan Johnson: There is no evidence to suggest that there has been substitution of 16–17-year-olds for adults following the introduction of the national minimum wage in Scotland.

According to the Labour Force Survey, published by the Office for National Statistics, the employment of 16–17-year-olds actually fell during a time when overall employment rose. The employment of 16–17-year-olds as a percentage of all in employment fell from 2.9 per cent. in spring 1998 to 2.4 per cent. in spring 2000.

Coal Mining Industry

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much has been paid by the Government for the handling agreement for compensation claims from the coal mining industry. [62355]

Mr. Wilson: As of 21 June 2002, the Department has paid out over £870 million to claimants under the respiratory disease and vibration white figure compensation schemes.

End of Life Vehicles

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to introduce a last owner pays system for end of life vehicles; and if she will make a statement. [62045]

Mr. Wilson: We have consistently made clear our intention to implement the End of Life Vehicles Directive with a light regulatory touch and without disrupting the existing legitimate vehicle dismantling, shredding and recycling market.

We will require vehicle manufacturers and importers to meet the costs of take-back and treatment of vehicles sold after 1 July 2002, as soon as regulations to that effect can be introduced. From 1 January 2007, vehicle manufacturers and importers will similarly become responsible for such costs for vehicles sold before 1 July 2002, in accordance with the terms of the Directive. This will ensure that a broadly level playing field is maintained with other main car-producing EU countries, such as France and Germany.

The Directive require treatment facilities to meet new environmental standards when depolluting and dismantling ELVs. We intend to introduce these standards during 2003. The cost of depolluting and dismantling an ELV will offset, and may exceed, its scrap value, but this will depend upon a number of factors, including the age, marque, model and condition of the ELV, the prevailing value of scrap ferrous and non-ferrous metals and other materials at the time, and the efficiency of the treatment facility. Until 2007, and the introduction of producer responsibility for vehicles sold before 1 July 2002, "last owners" will continue to be responsible for the disposal of their vehicles, and will be free to negotiate their end-values with treatment facilities. Some ELVs will retain a positive value, and we would expect that new depollution and dismantling costs to be reflected in the market value of second-hand vehicles.

Additional costs incurred by local authorities as a consequence of the transposition and implementation of the Directive would, under the "New Burdens" arrangements, fall to be met by the Department of Trade and Industry.

Competitive Tendering

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on how many occasions in the last 12 months the requirement to engage in a competitive tendering process has been waived by her Department due to national security obligations under paragraph 6(h) of the supply regulations. [62822]

Ms Hewitt: There have not been any such occasions.

Post Office

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 31 October 2001, on Post Office cash accounts, if she will make a statement on targets for accounts being operational. [62937]

Mr. Timms: Our operational assumption is that around 3 million benefit and tax credit recipients will open a card account at the Post Office, but there will be no cap on numbers on eligibility criteria for these accounts.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the forecast profit or loss for 2003 by the Post Office is, including extraordinary items. [63343]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 20 June 2002]:* Consignia indicated on 13 June that they expected trading losses to continue into 2002–03 at a similar level to 2001–02, with further exceptional items of around £500 million in the first half of the year.

Rural Network Advisers

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many rural network advisers there were for the Post Office on 31 March; and how many there are now. [62695]

Mr. Timms: I am informed by Post Office Limited that on 31 March 2002 there were 31 Rural Transfer Advisers, and that is the number now.

Secondments

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many people form organisations outside her Department have been seconded to start work in her Department since 1 January. [63094]

Ms Hewitt: Centrally held records show that 44 inward secondments have started between 1 January 2002 and 17 July 2002.

Energy/Industry Council

Dr. Ladyman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the outcome of the Energy/Industry Council of 6 and 7 June. [64324]

Mr. Wilson: My hon. Friend the Minister of State for Employment, Industry and the Regions represented the UK at the EU Industry Council held in Luxembourg on 6 June. I represented the UK at the EU Energy Council held on 7 June.

Industry

The Council held a round table debate on competitiveness and enterprise policy in the EU. This followed a Commission presentation of its Communication "Productivity: the key to competitiveness". All Member States agreed on the need for further steps to promote productivity, particularly in services, in order to meet the targets set in the Lisbon strategy. The important role of enterprise policy was noted, in particular: improving the regulatory environment, promoting entrepreneurship and enhancing competitiveness. The UK identified the key obstacles in services as being productivity underperformance by the sector, the lack of a true single market in services, the slow pace of technology diffusion, and rigidities in the labour markets.

Council Conclusions were adopted on Competitiveness and on the e-Economy. The latter build on the Commission Communication "The Impact of the e-Economy on European Enterprises" aiming to lay foundations for a more strategic approach to EU policies and initiatives for e-business. The Presidency gave a short presentation about the Charter for Small and Medium sized Enterprises, underlining its importance as an area for the Council to focus on, and noting both the Barcelona Council Conclusions on the subject and the full discussion that had taken place at the informal Council of Ministers for Small and Medium sized Enterprises in Aranjuez in February.

The Commission set out progress on the strategy for chemicals. The first phase of a business impact study was completed, and had been largely endorsed at a conference at the end of May. Costs for business would vary a great deal depending on the details of implementation. This led into a wider Council discussion on the contribution of sustainable development to enterprise policy, on which conclusions were adopted. All Member States saw a role for the Industry Council in looking at environmental dossiers with a big impact on competitiveness. The UK pointed to environmental liability and fluorinated gases as two important current examples. Effective co-ordination between industry and environment Departments in Member States was also important.

The Commission reported on the action underway relating to the expiry of the ECSC Treaty and on the position in the steel market following the US safeguard action.

The Presidency noted the progress towards the modernisation of competition law, and wished Denmark well in completing work during 2002, as agreed at the Barcelona Council. The Commission presented its thirty-first report on competition policy noting that 2001 had been a busy year for the Commission. A record 1.8 billion euro fines had been imposed on members of cartels.

The Commission also presented the new state aid scoreboard, published on 23 May, to the Council. The document would help all concerned pursue the agreed objectives of reducing the re-orientating state aid.

The Council adopted procedural conclusions on continuing work on Biotechnology with a view to adopting a roadmap of practical actions in due course.

The Presidency reported the outcome of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership Conference of Industry Ministers in Malaga on 9 and 10 April. This had focussed on a range of measures to open up and develop trade in the region with longer-term objective of establishing a Mediterranean Free Trade Area.

The Commission presented the report from the G10 High-Level Working Party on medicinal products. This was the first such report to bring together public health and industry issues. It had sparked a number of public debates. The UK spoke in favour of the report. This was an important sector and the report's recommendations aimed at enhancing competitiveness needed to be actioned. Swedish and Spanish Ministers also spoke in support.

The Council held an informal discussion over lunch on the new Block Exemption Proposal for motor vehicle sales and servicing.

Possible changes were explored to the Commission's longstanding proposals to allow some state aid for shipbuilding contracts in areas where there is held to be unfair competition from Korea. The Commission remained of the view that this was needed to bolster the proposed WTO action against Korea, which all Member States support. The revised Commission proposal had reduced subsidy rates but over a longer time frame, and allowed for inclusion of Liquid Natural Gas carriers if market data for 2002 justified this. The UK and a number of other Member States maintained their opposition to a subsidy scheme and there was no qualified majority in support. The matter was referred back to the Committee of Permanent Representatives.

Energy

The Council considered several matters of interest to the United Kingdom. Energy liberalisation, a new coal state aid regulation and a Biofuels directive formed the main issues of discussion.

The key point to emerge from discussion of coal state aid was the agreement reached on a new coal state aid regulation to replace the rules in force under the ECSC Treaty, which expires at the end of July. The regulation agreement would allow for operating, closure, investment and "exceptional cost" aid to phase out gradually by 2010, and provides for simple degressivity of the total volume of operating, closure and investment aid combined in each Member State, with an end date of 2007 for closure aid and 2010 for operating and investment aid. An investment aid provision sought by the UK has been included in the agreed text. Some Member States, regretting that the level of aid would not reduce significantly and continuously, asked the Commission to ensure that the Treaty's state aid articles were respected by Member States. The Commission will enter a declaration undertaking to ensure maximum vigilance in respect of those articles.

No Presidency or Council conclusions were agreed on energy liberalisation. Member States maintained their positions on the key areas of public service obligations, unbundling, market opening and the rules governing market regulation. There was general agreement on the importance of the principle of public service obligations, particularly in respect of electricity, but disagreement on the details. Some Member States favoured a wide coverage applying to all final customers. Others, including the UK, preferred a narrower definition limited to households. Most Member States supported the inclusion of some form of labelling showing the sources from which electricity had been generated. A majority favoured legal unbundling of transmission and distribution from supply and production, though most also supported a rather high *de minimis* level. There was widespread support for the separation of the accounts of eligible from non-eligible customers. Most Member States expressed support for the list of duties of national regulators set out in Article 22 of the Presidency text. A progress report on cross-border exchanges in electricity was noted without discussion.

On biofuels, the majority of Member States reiterated their opposition to mandatory targets. It was, however, agreed that the reference to possible proposals for mandatory targets in the review clause could stand, on the basis that a number of Member States supported the UK's declaration that they would not be bound to accept any such proposals. A few Member States expressed regret that the Council was rejecting the Commission's proposals for mandatory targets for use of fuels of agricultural origin for transport purposes, and that targets would now be indicative.

General orientation on Trans-European Energy Networks (TENS) was agreed on the basis of a Presidency text. The UK lifted its reserve on the Commission's proposals to amend the energy TENS guidelines—all other reserves had been lifted previously. All Member States welcomed the proposal, but some questioned its financing aspects and in particular the raising of the Community's permissible financial contribution from 10 per cent. to 20 per cent. of total project costs.

The Commission reported briefly on its recent efforts to persuade Russia to ratify the Energy Charter Treaty.

The Commission introduced its new energy programme, "Intelligent Energy Programme for Europe", as a refocused version of the existing energy framework programme, which promotes more efficient and cleaner energy use. They said that the intention was to link the new programme to security of supply and the development of the single market. There would also be emphasis on environmental projects.

The Commission emphasised the importance of security of energy supply and said that a paper for the Seville Council was almost finalised. The Commission argued that Member State responses to the Green Paper had shown the need for demand side measures and for a new approach to oil and gas stocks. The Commission paper would also address the need to double the proportion of electricity generated from renewable sources. The Commission argued that nuclear power was also important, providing the only possible option for meeting Kyoto targets; that a rational approach was needed which would include a fresh look at safety and waste management, particularly in the context of enlargement; and that it was a matter of great concern that the *acquis* did not currently cover nuclear safety standards. Several Member States expressed clear anti-nuclear views; others either remained non-committal or expressed support. The UK agreed on the need to start working on the follow up to the Commission's Green Paper, but expressed scepticism about the Commission's ideas on oil and gas stocks.

The Commission made a presentation on the current state of play in the EU/Russia Energy Dialogue. The Commission agreed to Member State requests for greater transparency in the process including participation at meetings.

Finally, there was brief discussion of the issue of candidatures for the post of Executive Director of the International Energy Agency.

DEFENCE

Medical Treatment

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many armed forces personnel by regiment have had medical treatment in *(a)* 2000, *(b)* 2001 and *(c)* 2002 to date under contracts with private sector providers; and if he will make a statement. [54132]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 7 May 2002]:* The information requested is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost. I am able, however, to provide figures on treatment provided under the Army Training and Recruiting Agency secondary healthcare initiative, the Waiting List Initiative, the Rapid Treatment Initiative and psychiatric care at Cygnet, Nuffield and Priory groups.

Year	*Army*	*RN*	*RAF*
2000	191	35	69
2001	1,447	136	377
2002 (to May)	1,046	52	201
Total	2,684	223	647

Service Accommodation

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 22 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 9W and 15 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 640W on service accommodation, and with reference to paragraph 5.14 of the Armed Forces Pay Review Body Thirty-First Report 2002; what information his Department holds centrally with regard to repeat repairs undertaken in *(a)* single living accommodation and *(b)* service family accommodation; what information held by his Department with regard to (i) the cost to his Department and (ii) the number of repeat repairs can be supplied at proportionate cost; and if he will make a statement. [58658]

Dr. Moonie: The term "repeat repairs" is not a recognised description. It could be used for example to cover repairs carried out over a long period pending the major refurbishment of a property, or an interim repair followed shortly by major maintenance work. Both would in a sense repeat work already carried out. In neither case is the information held centrally, nor is it held in a consistent form. A large number of branches would have to be consulted to prepare a reply. This research and the identification of the information would involve disproportionate cost. Nevertheless, if the hon. Member would care to write to me and outline his specific concerns, I shall be happy to look further into the matter and write to him.

Refurbishment

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the refurbishment projects that *(a)* are in progress and *(b)* will start within the next six months; and what action is being taken to ensure that these will procure certified timber. [59766]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence's Safety and Environment Policy launched in 2000 requires MOD to comply with the Environmental Protection Act 1990, the Environment Act 1995, and other relevant statutory provisions and any additional requirements arising from international treaties and protocols to which the UK is a signatory. In particular, this policy includes a commitment to comply with the Government's strategy for sustainable development.

Guidance has been issued to all MOD acquisition officials which details the implementation of this policy and states that all timber or timber products should be procured form sustainable sources. In addition, tropical hardwood should be independently verified as sourced from forests and plantations which are managed to sustain their biodiversity, productivity and vitality, and to prevent harm to other ecosystems and any indigenous or forest dependent people. Where practicable, the use of reclaimed timber or timber products should be considered. All procurements must comply with international agreements such as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) where applicable.

Given the size of my Department's property holdings a large number of small scale refurbishment projects are underway at any given time, many as part of larger Works Services Management contracts. It is not possible to identify all of these individually without disproportionate effort. To ensure that certified timber is used in property construction, we have a standard contract clause which states that:

> "Projects are to avoid the use of the consumption of products associated with the destruction of tropical rain forests or threatened animal species."

The major project of this kind currently underway is that to refurbish the MOD Main building in Whitehall. All timber used in the redevelopment will be from certified sustainable sources.

For the future, I anticipate that refurbishment work undertaken as part of Prime Contracts will comply with all current Government and departmental policy which would include procurement of certified materials.

Computers

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many computers were replaced in his Department in each of the past three years; how the replaced units were disposed of and by which companies; and at what cost. [60740]

Dr. Moonie: Details of the number of computers replaced annually in the Ministry of Defence are not held centrally. Since 1999 the Department has had a policy of redeploying surplus equipment wherever possible within the organisation. Once equipment is deemed to have no further use it is declared to the MOD Disposal Services Agency (DSA) for disposal. The number of computers disposed of by the DSA over the past three years is as follows:

Year	*Number of Computers Disposed*
1999	32,000
2000	13,900
2001	6,600

The companies used by DSA up until April 2002 were Compaq and Sartek. Following re-competition the present contractors are Silver Lining and Re-Commit.

The disposals processed by DSA have provided a small net annual return to the Department amounting to some £30,000 over the three-year period.

Members of Parliament (Personal Data)

Mr. Forth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information is held by his Department on each hon. Member in relation to *(a)* personal relationships, both current and past, *(b)* financial status and dealings, *(c)* connections with companies and interest groups, *(d)* connections with Governments and *(e)* published works; and what was held in January 2002. [61832]

Mr. Hoon: Ministers and officials in this Department have access to published reference sources, as well as to the information about hon. Members made publicly available by the House authorities, for the purpose of parliamentary business.

Tornado

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when ASRAAM will be operational on Tornado F3; and what progress has been made on the integration of the weapon onto that aircraft. [62235]

Dr. Moonie: Integration of the Advanced Short-Range Air-to-Air Missile (ASRAAM) on Tornado F3 has been completed. We expect associated safety, training and other evaluation activities to complete in time to enable operational deployment of ASRAAM later this year. However, as my response to the hon. Member on 26 February, *Official Report*, column 1139W made clear, the missile has been available for operational use, if needed, for some time.

Civil Emergencies

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent assessment has been made of the possible use of Armed Services Reserves for supporting civilian authorities in major civil emergencies; and if he will make a statement. [63064]

Mr. Hoon: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 12 June, *Official Report*, columns 1259–60W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough (Mr. Reed).

Secondments

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people form organisations outside his Department have been seconded to start work in his Department since 1 January 1999. [63072]

Dr. Moonie: 47 individuals have been seconded to the Ministry of Defence since 1 January 1999.

Porton Down

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 1 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 789W, on Porton Down, if he will place in the Library a copy of the protocol drawn by the chemical defence establishment for the experiment which was recorded in 1985 in the report, "Evaluation of pyrodostigmine bromide as a pre-treatment for nerve agent poisoning in man"; when the ethics committee overseeing the human experiments at the chemical defence establishment scrutinised this experiment; and if he will place in the Library copies of the papers of the committee which relate to the discussion of this experiment. [63044]

Dr. Moonie: The 1985 report summarises the results of several distinct trials, each of which was covered by a separate experimental protocol. I will make arrangements to have these placed in the Library of the House. The protocols describe a variety of pharmokinetic and pharmodynamic studies necessary to provide the information required for the product licence application, as submitted to the DHSS.

Scrutiny of these research protocols is detailed in the minutes of the meetings of the Committee on Safety of Human Experiments and the Defence Scientific Advisory Council Medical Committee between June 1979 and February 1982. I am withholding copies of the minutes under Exemption 2b of the Code of Practice to Access to Government Information, relating to internal advice and discussion.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library copies of the documents held by his Department relating to a meeting on 16 January of representatives from his Department and the Medical Research Council Physiological Medicine and Infections Board regarding the epidemiological study into the health of service personnel who took part in experiments at the chemical defence establishment, Porton Down. [63071]

Dr. Moonie: The meeting held on 16 January 2002 was not a meeting between members of the Ministry of Defence staff and the Physiological Medicine and Infections Board (PMIB). The PMIB is a Medical Research Council (MRC) body which met on 16 January 2002 to assess the scientific merits of proposals from four research teams for an epidemiological study of the Porton Down Volunteers, as well as to discuss many other scientific issues unrelated to Porton Down. One member of MOD staff attended the Porton Down discussion in an observational capacity only.

Requests for information relating to the MRC's consideration of the proposals should be addressed to the MRC. MOD has produced no documents relating to this meeting.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when between 1 January 1994 and 1 January 1997 the Independent Ethics Committee overseeing human experiments at the chemical defence establishment discussed the question of the possible long-term effects of *(a)* nerve gas, *(b)* mustard gas and *(c)* pepper gas on humans. [63070]

Dr. Moonie: The Independent Ethics Committee overseeing the conduct of the Service Volunteer Programme at Dstl Porton Down did not discuss the possible long term effects of exposure to nerve gas, mustard gas or pepper gas during its meetings between 1 January 1994 and 1 January 1997.

Atomic Weapons Establishments

Mr. Salter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library the documents pertaining to future development of the atomic weapons establishments from the time the current management took over to date. [63450]

Dr. Moonie: Yes.

Mr. Salter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if employees *(a)* of the atomic weapons establishments and *(b)* from his Department (i) have had involvement in, (ii) are involved in and (iii) are intended to be involved in the advanced warhead concept teams being established by the US nuclear weapons laboratories. [63454]

Dr. Moonie: Exchanges of information between the United Kingdom and US on nuclear weapon matters take place only under the auspices of the 1958 Mutual Defence Agreement. In particular, employees of the Ministry of Defence and AWE Management Ltd. Participate in the Joint UK/US Working Groups that meet regularly to discuss and exchange technical information. Details of their discussions are withheld under Exemption 1 (Defence, Security and International Relations) of the Code of Practice on access to Government Information.

Mr. Salter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list construction and engineering projects at the atomic weapons establishments scheduled to begin over the next 12 months, with their estimated cost. [63455]

Dr. Moonie: With the exception of routine minor works in support of operations (at a cost of around £10 million a year), no construction and engineering projects are currently expected to progress beyond project requirement definition in the next 12 months. My hon. Friend may wish to note in this context that the widely publicised high performance computer, which AWE have purchase to support the science-based programme, is being commissioned in an existing building.

Mr. Salter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list construction and engineering projects under way at AWE Aldermaston and Burghfield, and their estimated cost. [63449]

Dr. Moonie: With the exception of routine minor works in support of operations (at a cost of around £10 million a year), no construction and engineering projects are currently underway at these sites.

Psychiatric Services

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with representatives of Prior Healthcare regarding the provision of psychiatric services for armed forces personnel; what agreements have been reached; what they will cost; and if he will make a statement. [63188]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 20 June 2002]:* The Ministry of Defence has no formal agreements with the Priory Group but uses their services on an ad hoc basis for the treatment of a small number of armed forces personnel.

F680 Procedure

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how a favourable judgment under the F680 Procedure is communicated to the applicant for that export licence; and how many export licences have been refused in each of the last five years following a favourable judgment upon them under the F680 procedure. [63689]

Dr. Moonie: The Government provides companies with marketing advice under the F680 procedure through issue of a standard letter. It is routinely made clear in such letters that the advice given does not constitute an export licence, nor does it prejudge a decision on the eventual consideration of an export licence application.

It is not possible to correlate F680 advice with export licensing decisions, as the processes are quite separate. For example, F680s may be seeking advice in general terms about marketing prospects which may relate partially to the export that is eventually licensed.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many applications have been made for advice under the F680 procedure in each of the last five years. [63688]

Dr. Moonie: The total number of F680 applications received by the Ministry of Defence requesting marketing advice and release of classified information is shown in the table below:

Year (1 January–31 December)	*Number of Applications*
1997	2,219
1998	2,325
1999	2,092
2000	1,892
2001	1,732

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Household Waste (Composting)

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will publish quality standards for the composting of household waste. [51415]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 19 April 2002]:* There is currently a fully developed industry standard, produced by the Composting Association (CA), that is available to compost producers. The high quality of this standard is more likely to be met by source-separated organic waste (commercial or household), rather than by mixed household waste.

The Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) are working with the CA and the British Standards Institute (BSI) to convert the existing industry standard into the fast track version (Publicly Available Specification) of a full national British Standard. They anticipate this will be available in the Autumn of this year. The CA, WRAP and BSI are considering options regarding certification schemes that could be linked with the PAS to encourage users of compost to demand a product that meets this standard;

this in turn will encourage producers to make the investment necessary to achieve the standard in their production process.

Rural Economy

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the average wage was in rural communities in the last 10 years, broken down by constituency. [60864]

Alun Michael: Information on the average gross weekly earnings of employees in rural wards in 57 constituencies in England is contained in the table below. The sample sizes in the New Earnings Survey do not permit information to be generated for the other 243 constituencies that contain at least one rural ward.

	Average gross weekly earnings of employees in rural wards within the constituency	
Constituency	*1996*	*2001*
Bassetlaw	—	331.2
Beverley and Holderness	282.7	331.5
Boston and Skegness	244.0	—
Bosworth	—	314.3
Brigg and Goole	—	327.1
Bury St Edmunds	239.1	316.8
Canterbury	266.4	—
Chichester	223.9	307.4
Congleton	262.2	—
Copeland	384.5	480.8
Cotswold	272.9	—
Crewe and Nantwich	—	314.5
Daventry	—	353.3
Devizes	237.0	—
Falmouth and Camborne	239.1	262.2
Fareham	252.3	370.8
Fylde	315.6	418.1
Isle of Wight	—	282.7
Lincoln	—	305.3
Louth and Horncastle	245.6	—
Mid Norfolk	—	280.5
Mid Worcestershire	259.8	—
North Dorset	—	301.1
North East Bedfordshire	289.3	—
North East Cambridgeshire	273.1	301.0
North Norfolk	226.9	289.7
North Shropshire	248.9	—
North West Hampshire	274.6	358.9
North West Norfolk	265.9	326.5
Northavon	292.0	333.6
Norwich North	—	370.9
Ribble Valley	268.2	—
Romsey	246.9	—
Ryedale	—	304.9
Selby	—	338.1
South East Cambridgeshire	293.5	—
South Holland and the Deepings	—	308.3
South West Norfolk	—	272.3
Stratford-on-Avon	—	366.2
Stroud	253.1	—
Suffolk Coastal	291.0	358.4
Taunton	257.6	269.5
Teignbridge	—	283.6
Tewkesbury	329.9	382.7
Tiverton and Honiton	223.2	280.3
Torridge and West Devon	200.3	—
Totnes	199.8	—
Truro and St Austell	245.4	290.6
Wantage	—	432.2
Wealden	249.3	—
West Derbyshire	249.2	309.0
West Dorset	—	288.3
West Lancashire	282.7	—
West Suffolk	—	283.1
Westmorland and Lonsdale	—	292.2
Woodspring	305.6	—
Yeovil	298.6	353.0

Notes:

— Suppressed due to sample size and resultant imprecision.

1. Information is only readily available for 1996 and 2001.
2. Includes employees whose pay for the survey pay period was unaffected by absence.
3. Includes both full-time and part-time employees, but excludes those in self-employment.
4. Based on 1998 ward and constituency boundaries.

Sources:

Figures for average gross pay come from the New Earnings Survey, Office for National Statistics.

Classification of rural wards made by the Countryside Agency.

GM Crops

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to commission an economic assessment of the costs and benefits of GM crops. [62321]

Mr. Meacher: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 31 May that the Government are commissioning an economic assessment of the costs and benefits of GM crops. This will consider conventional and organic farming interests that might be affected by the commercialisation of GM crops, other commercial interests and the international dimension. The assessment will contribute to a full and informed public debate on GM issues.

Greenhouse Gases

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the United Kingdom greenhouse gas emissions, expressed in terms of million tonnes of carbon, were in *(a)* 1990 and *(b)* 2001; and if she will make a statement on whether the United Kingdom is on course to meet its emissions reduction targets under the Kyoto Protocol. [63185]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 20 June 2002]:* The UK is still on course to achieve its Kyoto Protocol target of a 12.5 per cent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions below 1990 levels by 2008–12.

In 1990, the UK's emissions of the six greenhouse gases covered by the Kyoto Protocol were 204.9 million tonnes of carbon (MtC). The emissions data for 2001 are still being collected and analysed. My Department plans to publish it in April next year. In 2000, the UK's total greenhouse gas emissions were 177.9 MtC, which is about 13.2 per cent below 1990 levels.

A provisional estimate for CO_2 emissions alone in 2001, based on energy use, was published by the DTI in March in its Energy Trends Publication. That estimate of 154 MtC, which would be a slight increase on the previous year, caused by higher emissions from power stations due to increased coal burn and colder outside temperatures, is about 5 per cent below the level of the UK's CO_2 emissions in 1990 of 161.6 MtC.

Recycling

Mr. Cameron: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to publish guidance to local authorities on the best means of collecting and recycling *(a)* plastic bottles and *(b)* cardboard boxes; and if she will make a statement. [62272]

Mr. Morley: We have no plans to publish guidance to local authorities on the best means for collecting and recycling plastic bottles or cardboard boxes. It is for individual local authorities to decide how best to deliver recycling in their area, taking account of local circumstances and the contractual arrangements for the recyclate.

However, WRAP (the Waste and Resources Action Programme) is in the initial stages of producing Best Practice Guidance, on collection methods, for local authorities.

Fuel Poverty

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what research she has commissioned in order to ascertain the effectiveness of the Warm Front Scheme in *(a)* delivering health benefits to recipients, *(b)* reaching people who are defined to be living in fuel poverty, *(c)* reducing levels of fuel poverty and *(d)* reducing excess winter deaths. [63118]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 20 June 2002]:* We will carry out a review of Warm Front during this financial year to look how its delivery has been, the issues faced, solutions found, examples of best practice and future priorities. This will include consideration of the impact of Warm Front on reducing the number of vulnerable fuel poor households and benefits to those assisted.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she plans to consult on her proposed revisions to the Fuel Poverty Strategy; and if she will make a statement. [60713]

Mr. Meacher: We plan to consult shortly on a clarificatory statement to the UK Fuel Poverty Strategy.

Committee Mandates

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the EU Committee for the adaptation to scientific and technical progress of the Directive on bathing water is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; when it is next due to meet; what the United Kingdom representation on it is; whether experts nominated by the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [62919]

Mr. Meacher: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow), on 21 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 184W. No date has been set for the next meeting. UK representation can vary according to the agenda for each meeting and may include members of the Scottish Executive and other devolved Administrations where there are items of sufficient interest. A member of the Scottish Executive has attended both the meetings held over the past 12 months.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the EU Committee on the Directive on packaging and packaging waste is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; when it is next due to meet; what the United Kingdom representation on it is; whether experts nominated by the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [62917]

Mr. Meacher: The mandate of the Committee on the Directive on Packaging and Packaging Waste (94/62/EC) is advisory in the terms laid down in Article 21 of the Directive as follows:

> The Commission shall be assisted by a committee composed of the representatives of the Member States and chaired by the representative of the Commission.
>
> The representative of the Commission shall submit to the committee a draft of the measures to be taken. The committee shall deliver its opinion on the draft within a time limit which the chairman may lay down according to the urgent of the matter. The opinion shall be delivered by the majority laid down in Article 148 (2) of the Treaty in the case of decisions which the Council is required to adopt on a proposal from the Commission. The votes of the representatives of the Member States within the committee shall be weighted in the manner set out in that Article. The chairman shall not vote.
>
> *(a)* The Commission shall adopt the measures envisaged if they are in accordance with the opinion of the committee.
>
> If the measures envisaged are not in accordance with the opinion of the committee, or if not opinion is delivered, the Commission shall, without delay, submit to the Council a proposal relating to the measures to be taken. The Council shall act by a qualified majority.

If, on the expiry of a period which may in no case exceed three months from the date of referral to the Council, the Council has not acted, the proposed measures shall be adopted by the Commission.

The Article 21 Committee has met four times over the last 12 months and is next due to meet on 10 July 2002. The DTI has lead responsibility for representatives, along with DEFRA, and officials from both Departments are present at most meetings. All the devolved Administrations are kept fully informed of the work of the Committee and may send experts to the meetings if they wish.

Noise Forum

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to make publicly available the publications issued by the Government and on behalf of the Government which were distributed at the United Kingdom Noise Forum's inaugural conference on 20 May. [62570]

Mr. Meacher: These were placed on the DEFRA website http://defraweb/environment/noise/research.htm on 20 May 2002.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for what reason the press was excluded from the United Kingdom Noise Forum's inaugural conference. [62572]

Mr. Meacher: Attendance at the Conference was by invitation only. The Conference held three separate workshops in the afternoon, which sought to generate ideas and solutions, which could assist Government in considering different ways in which to tackle the different problems noise cause. It was felt that it would be inappropriate for the press to be present during these sessions as this might have prevented fully frank and open discussions. However, the press attended the Conference at 4.00pm both to listen to my statement to the Conference and the summaries that arose from the workshops.

Packaging Waste

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps her Department is taking to ensure a swift conclusion to the debate in Europe on the review of the Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive (94/62/EC); and if she will introduce interim targets for recovery and recycling over the next three years in advance of new EU targets. [62362]

Mr. Meacher: The Government are fully involved in the negotiations in Europe on the review of the EC Directive on packaging and packaging waste. It has always been the UK Government's policy in these negotiations to urge a swift conclusion to the debate on the targets for the next 5-year period.

It is my intention to consult this year on interim business recovery and recycling targets for 2003 and 2004.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures the Government intends to take to ensure that the requirements of the Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations 1997 are uniformly enforced across the UK. [62364]

Mr. Meacher: I will be looking, with my colleagues in the devolved Administrations, at the Regulations to see whether there are any amendments needed to ensure the most effective functioning of the UK's packaging waste recovery system. Any changes the Government propose to make will be included in a consultation paper to be issued this summer.

World Summit on Sustainable Development

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the matters discussed, decisions taken and commitments made at the preparatory meeting for the World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in Bali in June; and if she will place in the Library copies of submissions made *(a)* by the United Kingdom and *(b)* by other countries which are specifically relevant to the UK. [62162]

Mr. Meacher: The Fourth Preparatory Committee meeting for the World Summit on Sustainable Development discussed the documents which will be finalised at Johannesburg. Progress was made on a Programme of Action, which includes the importance of sanitation in eradicating poverty and meeting the Millennium Development Goal of safe drinking water. Broad agreement was also reached on key issues such as the urgent need to restore fish stocks and address illegal fishing, and on the important role non-governmental actors can play in achieving sustainable development. The meeting also recognised the need for a strong focus on Africa. In addition, preliminary discussions took place on elements for a Political Declaration at Johannesburg. The Programme of Action as it currently stands can be found at www.johannesburgsummit.org

No written submissions were made by either the UK or the EU, as the conference was a negotiating session based on positions outlined in earlier meetings and submissions.

End of Life Vehicles

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is she will make a statement on the cost of disposing of end-of-life vehicles; who has responsibility for dealing with end-of-life vehicles; and if she will make a statement. [62559]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle earlier today at column 592W.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Special Schools

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average funding per pupil was for children in special schools in each of the last five years, broken down by local education authority. [58927]

Mr. Miliband: The table below sets out the information requested in respect of the financial years 1999-2000, 2000–01 and 2001–02. Information for the financial year 1998–99 is not held electronically and not, therefore, readily available. Information for 2002–03 is not yet available.

Real Terms (2000–01 prices) Special Schools: Funding per pupil

	1999–2000	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
201 City of London	n/a	n/a	n/a
202 Camden	24,920	22,580	25,680
203 Greenwich	14,670	16,130	18,260
204 Hackney	16,310	16,890	17,050
205 Hammersmith and Fulham	17,930	19,200	19,550
206 Islington	20,140	24,840	21,390
207 Kensington and Chelsea	42,300	45,760	41,000
208 Lambeth	14,710	15,390	15,530
209 Lewisham	14,690	15,690	16,340
210 Southwark	18,350	18,760	19,600
211 Tower Hamlets	18,450	19,960	24,100
212 Wandsworth	17,000	17,520	18,400
213 Westminster	29,770	31,140	37,750
301 Barking and Dagenham	18,270	19,320	20,000
302 Barnet	18,700	21,450	22,460
303 Bexley	11,940	12,660	13,660
304 Brent	18,810	17,600	21,850
305 Bromley	14,950	15,510	16,540

Real Terms (2000–01 prices) Special Schools: Funding per pupil

	1999–2000	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
306 Croydon	14,850	15,670	16,170
307 Ealing	18,230	18,590	21,230
308 Enfield	16,100	17,920	19,630
309 Haringey	20,020	19,950	23,230
310 Harrow	15,250	16,430	19,830
311 Havering	12,790	13,720	14,840
312 Hillingdon	14,230	16,040	17,890
313 Hounslow	15,200	16,110	17,560
314 Kingston upon Thames	12,800	13,110	18,110
315 Merton	9,850	10,340	10,050
316 Newham	40,280	45,060	56,970
317 Redbridge	17,320	18,440	24,860
318 Richmond upon Thames	17,740	19,400	19,770
319 Sutton	13,330	15,060	15,930
320 Waltham Forest	15,310	15,740	23,450
330 Birmingham	13,960	14,770	15,890
331 Coventry	13,460	12,790	14,020
332 Dudley	8,930	9,220	9,890
333 Sandwell	13,870	15,940	18,160
334 Solihull	10,010	12,660	12,890
335 Walsall	12,260	14,210	15,200
336 Wolverhampton	8,280	11,110	11,670
340 Knowsley	10,370	11,160	12,380
341 Liverpool	10,850	12,520	13,480
342 St. Helens	10,650	12,020	13,700
343 Sefton	13,160	15,110	15,470
344 Wirral	11,580	11,650	12,670
350 Bolton	11,610	12,330	13,120
351 Bury	15,380	15,790	15,800
352 Manchester	13,220	13,220	15,460
353 Oldham	13,630	14,730	15,460
354 Rochdale	9,620	10,650	11,770
355 Salford	15,180	14,160	16,910
356 Stockport	10,710	11,370	12,300
357 Tameside	11,370	12,730	14,730
358 Trafford	11,450	12,680	12,060
359 Wigan	12,180	10,840	13,380
370 Barnsley	13,670	15,720	16,710
371 Doncaster	8,840	9,230	9,970
372 Rotherham	8,870	9,760	10,150
373 Sheffield	16,250	18,040	18,350
380 Bradford	11,210	12,160	11,820
381 Calderdale	15,390	17,060	19,330
382 Kirklees	11,520	12,770	12,900
383 Leeds	11,020	11,610	12,370
384 Wakefield	11,760	13,020	15,040
390 Gateshead	12,140	13,450	14,360
391 Newcastle upon Tyne	12,420	19,190	14,420
392 North Tyneside	9,300	9,480	11,000
393 South Tyneside	7,970	9,520	9,560
394 Sunderland	9,140	9,710	10,770
420 Isles of Scilly	n/a	n/a	n/a
800 Bath & North East Somerset	12,930	13,520	13,710
801 City of Bristol	12,940	14,580	16,470
802 North Somerset	13,460	13,240	12,230
803 South Gloucestershire	12,630	14,190	14,410
805 Hartlepool	10,970	13,950	16,130
806 Middlesbrough	10,000	9,970	10,810
807 Redcar and Cleveland	8,800	9,490	11,770
808 Stockton-on-Tees	10,480	11,520	11,880
810 City of Kingston Upon Hull	12,870	13,900	14,460
811 East Riding of Yorkshire	17,660	18,520	20,910
812 North East Lincolnshire	8,270	8,550	8,710
813 North Lincolnshire	12,960	14,440	15,390
815 North Yorkshire	15,160	16,080	17,450
816 York	10,690	11,640	12,300
820 Bedfordshire	11,020	12,370	13,310
821 Luton	12,330	16,610	17,960
825 Buckinghamshire	11,670	13,890	15,610
826 Milton Keynes	11,490	12,080	12,760
830 Derbyshire	14,370	15,040	16,090
831 Derby	12,060	12,700	13,990
835 Dorset	11,850	13,440	14,880
836 Poole	10,590	12,150	14,270
837 Bournemouth	14,170	14,340	14,910
840 Durham	10,880	11,940	12,180
841 Darlington	9,550	10,760	11,650
845 East Sussex	14,250	15,130	16,390
846 Brighton and Hove	11,790	12,740	15,120
850 Hampshire	12,460	13,580	14,350
851 Portsmouth	11,320	12,620	12,940
852 Southampton	12,290	14,690	16,920
855 Leicestershire	22,860	22,570	17,590
856 Leicester	11,370	15,630	16,080
857 Rutland	22,670	22,790	23,870
860 Sta[illegible]ordshire	10,100	10,970	11,530
861 Stok[illegible]-Trent	9,190	9,560	9,610
865 Wiltsh[illegible]	23,400	21,980	21,830
866 Swindon	11,780	15,070	14,940
867 Bracknell Fo[illegible]	14,970	17,540	17,850
868 Windsor and M[illegible]head	13,230	13,870	17,910
869 West Berkshire	11,190	11,560	12,730
870 Reading	11,730	15,940	14,410
871 Slough	13,680	14,700	15,750
872 Wokingham	14,520	16,160	18,740
873 Cambridgeshire	13,000	13,820	14,550
874 Peterborough	17,740	15,970	16,770
875 Cheshire	15,230	15,730	17,200
876 Halton	12,910	13,190	12,940
877 Warrington	14,260	14,240	14,830
878 Devon	14,680	15,910	15,610
879 Plymouth	9,090	10,740	10,200
880 Torbay	6,610	9,190	10,240
881 Essex	13,680	14,370	14,740
882 Southend-on-Sea	11,080	12,220	12,740
883 Thurrock	10,330	11,030	13,210
884 Herefordshire	17,930	22,090	19,010
885 Worcestershire	10,910	11,590	12,260
886 Kent	12,780	13,430	14,410
887 Medway	14,360	16,770	13,320
888 Lancashire	13,570	14,110	13,970
889 Blackburn with Darwen	12,600	11,690	12,550
890 Blackpool	10,150	10,000	12,650
891 Nottinghamshire	14,370	14,520	14,450
892 Nottingham	15,130	15,050	15,670
893 Shropshire	22,180	17,210	19,520
894 Telford & Wrekin	8,620	11,170	11,690
908 Cornwall	13,110	14,720	15,240
909 Cumbria	15,640	15,350	15,880
916 Gloucestershire	12,160	13,340	14,310
919 Hertfordshire	14,500	14,990	15,500
921 Isle of Wight	8,420	9,520	10,420
925 Lincolnshire	13,650	14,280	15,920
926 Norfolk	16,020	16,200	16,180
928 Northamptonshire	10,410	11,520	11,230
929 Northumberland	9,330	11,130	12,510
931 Oxfordshire	14,860	15,780	16,950
933 Somerset	13,480	14,070	16,570
935 Suffolk	9,960	10,500	10,010
936 Surrey	14,970	14,460	15,700
937 Warwickshire	11,800	12,8[illegible]0	12,900
938 West Sussex	16,630	12,[illegible]	13,590

Notes:

1. Funding figures are based on LEAs Section 52 Budget Statements (1999–2000, 2000–01 and 2001–02) as returned to the DfES).

2. The figures cover the special schools element of the Individual Schools Budget (ISB), and Devolved Standards Fund for special schools (these are estimated for 1999–2000 as devolved Standards Funds were not separately identified on the 1999–2000 returns), related central expenditure on educational psychologists, statementing, SEN support services and home to school transport.

3. The figures are gross of income.

4. Pupil numbers are financial year averages, based on Jan Annual School Census data.

5. Real terms figures are quoted in 2000–01 prices, and have been calculated using Budget (April) 2002 GDP deflators.

6. Figures are quoted to the nearest £10.

Teachers (Leeds)

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many whole-time equivalent teachers were employed in Leeds schools in January. [58885]

Mr. Miliband: There were 6,280 full-time equivalent[1] teachers in service in the maintained schools sector in Leeds in January 2001. Data for January 2002 are not yet available at local education authority level. Information on teachers in service in January 2002 by local education authority will be published in the Teachers in England statistical volume in December 2002.

[1] Part-time teachers have been converted to an estimate of their full-time equivalence and added to full-time numbers.

Primary Schools

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average cost of constructing a new one-form-of-entry 4–11 primary school has been in the last three years. [59361]

Margaret Hodge: The average cost of constructing a new 1FE 4–11 primary school over the last three years has been approximately £1.35 million. Land acquisition costs are additional to this figure.

Capital Projects

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent speeches she has made on design quality within her Department's capital building programme. [59832]

Margaret Hodge: In her opening speech at the British Education and Training Technology (BETT) Show in January, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State set out the Government's vision of how schools would be in the future, including aspects of their design. She also announced that the Department would be publishing a design guide, "Schools for the Future", which looks at ways of designing inspiring buildings that can adapt to educational and technological change. This was published in February 2002, following the publication the previous year of "Inclusive School Design—accommodating pupils with special educational needs and disabilities in mainstream schools."

Baroness Ashton is the Department's Ministerial Design Champion. She gave a speech on achieving design quality in PFI schools at a conference organised by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) last October.

CABE helped the Department run the Neighbourhood Nurseries Design Competition. I launched this in May 2001 and its aim was to ensure that all new buildings created are of high design quality, providing imaginative and stimulating places in which young children can learn and play. The competition was successfully completed in June 2002 and the work of the winners is being used to influence design across the early years and childcare sector.

Medical Education

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the funding of grades below 5* in medical education. [61438]

Margaret Hodge: The 2001 Research Assessment Exercise showed a strong increase in top quality research, with more 5* departments than ever before. The Higher Education Funding Council for England decided to protect funding levels for top rated departments, and my Department added £30 million to HEFCE funding for next year. The RAE is designed to determine relative quality. It is not designed to determine the quantum of money spent on research. That is a matter for the Spending Reviews.

Child Care

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many registered *(a)* day nurseries, *(b)* childminders, *(c)* playgroups and *(d)* out-of-school clubs there were in England at 31 March. [62152]

Margaret Hodge: The information requested is shown in the table.

Number of daycare providers by type[1]

England: Position at 31 March 2001

	Number
Day nurseries	7,800
Registered childminders	72,300
Playgroups and pre-schools	14,000
Out of school clubs	4,900

[1] Figures have been rounded to the nearest hundred.

Latest figures on Day Care facilities in England were published by the Department in the Statistical Bulletin "Children's Day Care facilities at 31 March 2001 (08/01)" in October 2001, a copy of which is available from the Library. An electronic copy of this publication is also available on the Department's web-site (www.dfes.gov.uk/ statistics).

University Funding

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what the Government financial revenue support has been to each university in England and Wales over the present spending review three year period, with an estimate for the current year, in *(a)* cash, *(b)* real and *(c)* real spending per whole time student terms; [62029]

(2) what the *(a)* funding and *(b)* average resources per full-time student have been in each university in the Government Office North East region in each year since 1996 in (i) cash and (ii) real terms, together with the allocation for 2002–03; and what the average for England is. [62022]

Margaret Hodge: Public funding for higher education institutions in England is allocated by the Higher Education Funding Council for England. The annual allocations of recurrent grant to higher education institutions and to further education colleges delivering higher education are publicised each year by the Funding Council. Copies are at http://www.hefce.ac.uk/Pubs/

Information on publicly planned funding per full time equivalent student by institution is not available. For England as a whole, the data are shown in the table:

Funding per Student

	Cash Terms	*Real Terms*
1996–97	4,330	5,010
1997–98	4,580	4,910
1998–99	4,690	4,900
1999–00	4,780	4,900
2000–01	4,860	4,860
2001–02	5,010	4,880
2002–03	5,150	4,900

The funding of institutions in Wales is a matter for the devolved administration.

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the *(a)* cost and *(b)* saving has been from the Department's pursuit of Service Delivery Agreement targets in each year since they were introduced. [61645]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The Department's Public Service Agreement sets out the key outcomes it is committed to deliver with the resources provided, and its Service Delivery Agreement sets out the key steps towards delivery of those targets. Every year the Department publishes performance against its targets—including on value for money—and the resources it has used, in its departmental report.

Arts Education

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent representations she has received on the impact of abolition of intermediate GNVQs on arts education in secondary schools. [63041]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received one letter from Aldercar Community Language College, Nottingham, on the effect of the loss of the intermediate GNVQ in Performing Arts.

CABINET OFFICE

Civil Emergencies

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what measures have been taken by the Civil Contingencies Secretariat to improve co-ordination between departments following 11 September 2001; and if he will make a statement. [63067]

Mr. Alexander: Since 11 September, the Civil Contingencies Secretariat (CCS) has worked systematically with other government departments, the emergency services, local authorities and the Devolved Administrations. This work includes regular liaison meetings to discuss and resolve significant issues. In this way, CCS is in a position to advise Ministers of issues that require central leadership or facilitation. CCS has arranged, taken part in or observed a number of exercises to test and improve current arrangements.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what assessment has been made of the system of sharing information across departments in major civil emergencies after 11 September 2001; and if he will make a statement. [63065]

Mr. Alexander: Following 11 September, the Civil Contingencies Committee, chaired by the Home Secretary, has reviewed the Government's plans and arrangements for handling civil emergencies, all of which require the effective sharing of information across relevant departments.

Information and Communication Service

Mr. Collins: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what the expenditure of the Government's Information and Communication Service's operations within the Cabinet Office was *(a)* in the latest available year and *(b)* in 1996–97; and if he will make a statement. [63582]

Mr. Alexander: In 2001–02, the Government Information and Communication Service's centre in the Cabinet Office spent £750,000 on its operations to support recruitment, promotion and career development, and the provision of advice on propriety and professional matters. The equivalent for its predecessor, the Information Officer Management Unit, in 1996-97 was £607,000.

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what the mandate of the Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunity for Women and Men is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [61726]

Ms Hewitt: I have been asked to reply.

I have nothing to add to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green on 23 May, *Official Report*, columns 557-58W.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Staff Numbers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many staff were employed by her Department on *(a)* 2 May 1997 and *(b)* 31 May 2002. [60925]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by the Minister of State for the Cabinet Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, South (Mr. Alexander), on 13 June 2002, (Official Report, column 1402W).

Strelley Social Club

Mr. Allen: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department with reference to the letter of 13 February from the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, Central (Ms Winterton) to the hon.

Member for Nottingham, North, when he expects the Official Solicitor to have traced the members of the Strelley Social Club in order to distribute the income of the club to the surviving members; and if he will make a statement. [63457]

Ms Rosie Winterton: This question concerns the resolution of a long-outstanding dispute as to the funds of a defunct private social club. The Official Solicitor became involved in 1999, following some 14 years of litigation, which has now been settled. It is his responsibility to carry into effect the terms of the settlement, in accordance with a High Court Order. In doing so he will be acting under the supervision of the Court, and this is not a matter upon which I can intervene.

Advertising

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how much was spent on press and advertising campaigns in 2001–02; and what the planned expenditure is for 2002–03. [60905]

Ms Rosie Winterton: My Department did not conduct any press and advertising campaigns in the financial year 2001–02 and has not at present planned any such campaigns for 2002–03.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what budget provision has been made to implement the provisions of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill. [62701]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 18 June 2002]:* Financial implication of provisions in the Nationality and Asylum Bill, were set out in the "Financial effects of the Bill" in the Explanatory Notes to the Bill, as introduced in to the House of Commons.

Spending plans and priorities for all immigration and nationality areas are under discussion with Treasury as part of the Spending Review 2002.

Dungavel Detention Centre

Annabell Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the cost of converting Dungavel Detention Centre into a removal centre is to be met from his Department's budget. [62700]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 18 June 2002]:* The refurbishment cost of Dungavel Removal Centre was met from the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) budget.

Inquiry Costs

Mr. NcNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the cost of the *(a)* Inquiry into the Bradford City Football Club fire in May 1985, *(b)* Hillsborough Stadium disaster in 1989 and *(c)* Shipman Inquiry was. [48030]

Mr. Denham: I understand from West Yorkshire Police that it is no longer possible to identify the costs of the Police Inquiry into the Bradford City Football Club fire in 1985. Financial arrangements for West Yorkshire Police Authority in 1985 were made through the former West Yorkshire Metropolitan County Council, which was replaced in 1986. This information can only be retrieved at disproportionate cost.

I understand from West Midlands Police that the cost of the Police Inquiry into the Hillsborough Stadium disaster totalled £3.8 million.

I understand from Greater Manchester Police that the costs of the Shipman Police Inquiry totalled £1.65 million.

Policing (Cheltenham)

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what effect the Budget will have on policing in Cheltenham. [52938]

Mr. Denham: Police forces in the south-west and Wales have received extra funding to make communities safer. Avon and Somerset Police received a cash boost to step up operations against street offenders and all forces in the south-west and Wales, including Gloucestershire, received funding allocations based on careful assessments of their current requirements and commitments to provide an enhanced counter-terrorist capability. The overall level of funding allocated following the Budget, to police forces in the south-west and Wales for counter terrorism purposes, £1.8 million, has been made public. To break this down further in public could compromise security.

Special Constables

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average length of service of a special constable is in working in *(a)* Jarrow, *(b)* South Tyneside and *(c)* the UK. [61488]

Mr. Denham: I am informed by the Chief Commandant of Northumbria Police Special Constabulary that the average length of service for special constables in Jarrow and South Tyneside is three years.

Complete data concerning the average length of service are not available centrally. The most recent available Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) returns regarding specials in post were for March 2000, and these asked how long specials had been in post within bands of less than six months, six months to two years, two to five years, five to 10 years, and over 10 years. These figures show that most specials in England and Wales fell within the band of length of service of between two and five years at that time.

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the Department plans to introduce incentives to encourage people to become career special constables. [61489]

Mr. Denham: The police reform process is an opportunity to achieve a stronger, increasingly professional special constabulary. We are introducing a range of measures to improve the recruitment and retention of specials. These include: a new headline role focusing on intelligence led patrolling and crime reduction initiatives; a new national foundation training package for special constables; joint Home Office/Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) good practice guidance covering recruitment, management and deployment of specials; new conditions of service and conduct regulations.

In January 2002 we ran a press campaign targeting Specials as part of the national recruitment campaign for the regular Police Service. We are also considering whether we can increase the opportunities for recognising the skills and experience specials acquire in forces and in their wider workplace. And as my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary (Mr. Blunkett) recently announced in his speech at the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), we will also be working with employers who are specials.

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many special constables have operated in the Jarrow constituency in each year since 1997. [61283]

Mr. Denham: I am informed by the Chief Constable of Northumbria Police that the number of specials is not collected at constituency level, but is collected within force at Area Command level. The Jarrow constituency falls within the South Tyneside Area Command. For the South Tyneside Area Command, figures are available for the previous three years as follows:

1 April 2000: 29
1 April 2001: 28
1 April 2002: 25

Rural Policing

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much was spent on rural policing in *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2000–01 and *(c)* 2001–02. [61129]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* The deployment of resources within a police force area is a matter for the Chief Officer who will assess local needs in line with operational priorities and the force policing plan, and allocate available resources accordingly. Records of the amount of spending on rural policing are not held centrally.

The funding formula for Police grant in England and Wales allocates 0.5 per cent (around £38 million) of total funding in relation to sparsity of population. In addition, in June 2000 we introduced the Rural Policing Fund that allocates additional resources to police forces to enhance policing in rural areas. The fund was £15 million for 2000–01 and £30 million for 2001–02 and 2002/03.

Policing in Scotland is a devolved issue and is a matter for the Scottish Executive.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures his Department is taking to maintain a police presence in rural and remote areas of England and Wales. [62168]

Mr Denham *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* The deployment of resources, including police officers, within a police force area is a matter for the Chief Officer who will assess local needs in line with operational priorities and the force policing plan, and allocate available resources accordingly.

The funding formula for Police grant in England and Wales allocates 0.5 per cent (around £38 million) of total funding in relation to sparsity of population. In addition, in June 2000 we introduced the Rural Policing Fund that allocates additional resources to police forces to enhance policing in rural areas. The fund was £15 million for 2000–01 and £30 million for 2001–02 and 2002–03. The rural policing fund benefits 31 police forces. Devon and Cornwall constabulary receive the highest allocation from the fund, just over £3 million.

Firearms

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions his Department has had with the Metropolitan Police on the purchase of additional firearms in the last 12 months. [61847]

Mr. Denham: There have been no direct discussions between the Home Office and the Metropolitan Police on the purchase of additional firearms in the last 12 months.

Police Recruitment

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions he has had with the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis about the recruitment of more black and Asian officers. [62198]

Mr. Denham: The issue of recruitment and retention is discussed at the regular meetings I have with the Commissioner. Those discussions include issues affecting the employment of minority ethnic officers.

Crime Prevention

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what crime prevention projects in schools are funded by his Department. [62096]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* We have funded a number of schools based projects and diversionary schemes as part of the Home Office Crime Reduction Programme and through the Youth Justice Board's youth crime prevention programme.

These include, the Crime Reduction in Secondary Schools (CRISS) programme which comprises of 34 projects covering 105 schools at a cost of £12 million over three years, and the Youth Justice Board Youth Inclusion programme at a cost of over £8 million which include school based elements.

We are also supporting the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) led Police in Schools initiative which will deliver 100 police officers in schools in 34 identified London Education Authorities (LEAs) by September 2002.

Venture International Projects

Mr. Lepper: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reasons Venture International Projects did not secure a contract to provide accommodation services to the National Asylum Support Service; with reference to section 23 of the Public Services Contracts Regulations 1993. [57944]

Angela Eagle: Venture International Projects Ltd expressed an interest to the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) in providing accommodation services for destitute asylum seekers. Their offer was fully considered but they were not awarded a contract. For reasons of commercial confidentiality the details of this decision may not be disclosed.

ID Entitlement Card

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when his ID entitlement card provisions will be published. [59259]

Beverley Hughes: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary (Mr. Blunkett) gave my hon. Friend, the Member for Knowsley North and Sefton East (Mr. Howarth) on 5 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 872W, in which my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary stated that he intended to publish a consultation paper on the subject of entitlement cards by the summer. This remains his intention.

Civil Contingency Secretariat

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the remit of the Civil Contingency Secretariat is; and to whom they report. [60715]

Mr. Blunkett: The remit of the Civil Contingencies Secretariat is to make the United Kingdom more effective in planning for, dealing with, and learning lessons from emergencies and disasters.

The Secretariat services the Civil Contingencies Committee, which I chair and in addition as part of the Cabinet Office reports to my right hon. Friend, the Prime Minister (Mr. Blair) through the Cabinet Secretary (Sir Richard Wilson).

Telecoms Companies

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to require telecoms companies to retain records of calls made. [61152]

Beverley Hughes: We are discussing with Service Providers, the Information Commissioner and the Agencies concerned the voluntary Code of Practice provided for by part II of the Anti-Terrorism Crime and Security Act 2001. Following this process the draft Code will be placed before Parliament.

Cyclists

Mr. Salter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions there have been in each of the last five years of cyclists riding on pavements, broken down by police authority. [62146]

Mr. Denham: Information for 1996 to 2000 is shown in the table.

Statistics for 2001 will be available in the autumn.

Persons [1] proceeded against for riding a bicycle on the footway (pavement) by police force area, 1996–2000

England and Wales *Number of persons*

Police force area	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Avon and Somerset	6	6	5	6	3
Bedfordshire	—	—	—	1	—
Cambridgeshire	37	7	3	4	—
Cheshire	—	—	2	1	1
Cleveland	—	2	—	1	3
Cumbria	26	39	39	28	16
Derbyshire	4	10	9	3	3
Devon and Cornwall	6	7	11	9	2
Dorset	2	2	4	2	6
Durham	—	1	—	2	1
Essex	55	127	241	51	23
Gloucestershire	4	1	5	—	3
Greater Manchester	10	4	20	10	9
Hampshire	92	194	496	95	29
Hertfordshire	2	4	21	4	—
Humberside	3	93	36	6	16
Kent	4	—	8	3	2
Lancashire	4	10	7	1	3
Leicestershire	3	6	1	1	2
Lincolnshire	37	14	8	15	4
London, City of	17	31	13	2	—
Merseyside	13	9	8	3	2
Metropolitan Police	40	19	54	40	10
Norfolk	14	1	14	1	2
Northamptonshire	2	—	1	—	4
Northumbria	1	4	10	20	19
North Yorkshire	1	2	2	27	12
Nottinghamshire	2	1	2	2	5
South Yorkshire	—	—	—	—	1
Staffordshire[2]	1	—	2	3	—
Suffolk	6	10	2	3	2
Surrey	2	—	—	—	—
Sussex	15	7	1	9	—
Thames Valley	2	2	—	1	4
Warwickshire	—	1	2	3	1
West Mercia	4	21	18	4	7
West Midlands	4	3	2	3	10
West Yorkshire	2	1	1	6	16
Wiltshire	2	3	3	4	1
Dyfed-Powys	—	—	—	1	1
Gwent	—	1	—	—	—
North Wales	—	1	3	—	—
South Wales	—	4	1	1	—
England and Wales	423	648	1,055	376	223

[1] These data are on the principal basis.

[2] Staffordshire Police were only able to submit sample data for persons proceeded against and convicted in the magistrates' courts for the year 2000. Although sufficient to estimate higher orders of data, these data are not robust enough at a detailed level and have been excluded from the table.

Assaults

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* black and *(b)* white youths died as a result of *(a)* knife attacks and *(b)* firearm attacks in (i) the Metropolitan Police district and (ii) England in 2001. [61850]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is given in the attached table. During 2000–01, there were eight black youth victims of sharp weapon homicide throughout England (seven of which occurred in the Metropolitan Police district). There were 11 white youth victims of sharp weapon homicide, two of which were within the Metropolitan Police district.

For firearm homicide, there were no black youth victims throughout 2000–01. There were four white youth victims, none of which occurred within the Metropolitan Police District.

Number of knife and firearm attacks on black and white youths, 2000–01

	Sharp Weapon Homicide		Firearm Homicide	
	Black youths	White youths	Black youths	White youths
Met Police	7	2	0	0
England	8	11	0	4

Notes:

'Youth' has been taken to mean aged 18 and under.

Data is based on financial year 2000–01.

Leave to Remain

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of people having been granted time-limited exceptional leave to remain in Britain have not left Britain when the permission expired in each of the last three years for which figures are available. [62366]

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many refusals of extensions of exceptional leave to remain in Britain there were in each of the last three years for which figures are available. [62293]

Beverley Hughes: The information requested is not available.

Afghanistan

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent assessment he has made of the numbers of UK citizens who *(a)* have been and *(b)* remain with al-Qaida and Taliban forces in Afghanistan. [58701]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* It is not possible for the Government to provide figures for the number of United Kingdom citizens who may be involved with terrorist or other groups in Afghanistan. British citizens are free to travel abroad and they are not obliged to inform United Kingdom authorities of their reasons for travelling.

The Government have put in place comprehensive measures to tackle terrorism whether committed in the United Kingdom or overseas. The police and the security services attach the highest priority to the investigation and prosecution of terrorist offences.

Football Supporters (Travel Bans)

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many football supporters resident in the West Mercia police authority area have been banned from travelling to the FIFA World Cup. [63377]

Mr. Denham: 1,049 individuals are currently subject to football banning orders preventing travel to the 2002 World Cup. Of these, 19 are resident in the West Mercia area.

Police Funding

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what changes the Budget of 17 April will make to policing in Herefordshire. [51650]

Mr. Denham: Police forces in the West Midlands have received extra funding to make communities safer. West Midlands Police received a cash boost to step up operations against street offenders and all forces in the West Midlands, including West Mercia Police, received funding allocations based on careful assessments of their current requirements and commitments to provide an enhanced counter-terrorist capability. The overall level of funding allocated following the Budget, to police forces in the West Midland region for counter terrorism purposes, £910,000, has been made public. To break this down further in public could compromise security.

Correspondence

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the hon. Member for Manchester, Central about the case of Mr. O. Z., reference Z90292/2. [62853]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 20 June 2002]:* I wrote to my hon. Friend the Member about this case on 17 June 2002.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will respond to the letter from the hon. Member for the Isle of Wight of 25 April, concerning immigration case G350999. [60579]

Beverley Hughes: I wrote to the hon. Member on 20 June. I apologise for the delay in replying.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter to him dated 22 April from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mrs. Parveen Akhtad. [61684]

Mr. Blunkett: A reply to my right hon. Friend was despatched on Thursday 13 June 2002.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Torbay of 9 April on behalf of Mr. Crossling of Torquay. [62069]

Mr. Denham: A reply was sent to the hon. Member on 11 June 2002.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on financial support for asylum seekers. [57265]

Beverley Hughes: Destitute asylum seekers can apply for support whilst their claim is being considered. The National Asylum Support Service (NASS) deals with applications for support. Asylum seekers requiring support can request subsistence and accommodation, subsistence only or accommodation only. Current levels of support are provided in the table. Where accommodation is requested this will normally be provided on a no choice basis in one of the dispersal areas. Accommodation is fully furnished and includes kitchen utensils. The costs of the accommodation including associated utility bills and council tax are met centrally.

Levels of Support with effect from 8 April 2002

	£
Qualifying couple	59.26
Lone parent aged 18 or over	37.77
Single person aged 25 or over	37.77
Single Person aged at least 18 but under 25	29.89
Person aged at least 16 but under 18 (except a member of a qualifying couple)	32.50
Person aged under 16	33.50

Some asylum seekers remain supported by local authorities under the interim provisions. Others are supported under income support arrangements.

The budget for National Asylum Support Service (NASS) in 2000–01 was £38 million*. This figure includes grants totalling £22 million* to the voluntary sector for the provision of services to asylum seekers and refugees. Total spending on asylum support in the year 1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001 was £751 million*. This includes grant payments of £580 million* to local authorities and the Scottish Executive for provision of accommodation and support for asylum seeking adults and families under the Interim Regulations and for unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC). A further £12 million* was paid to local authorities and the Scottish Executive directly by NASS under contracts to provide accommodation and related services for dispersed asylum seekers. £46 million* was paid directly by NASS to private sector accommodation providers for the provision of accommodation and related services to dispersed asylum seekers.

The budget for NASS for the last financial year, 2001–2002, was £40.0 million*. This figure included grants totalling £18.1 million* to the voluntary sector for the provision of services to asylum seekers and refugees. The budget for asylum support for 2001–2002 was £1,094 million*.

The NASS budget for 2002–2003 is £40.5 million*. This figure includes grants totalling £18.6 million* to the voluntary sector for the provision of services to asylum seekers. The current budget for support is £434 million.

* All figures rounded to nearest £ million.

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if asylum-seeking adults with dependent children who do not qualify for support will be allowed to work. [59994]

Beverley Hughes: Generally speaking asylum seekers are not allowed to work whilst their application for asylum is being considered. But under the terms of the employment concession an asylum seeker can apply for permission to work if, and only if, their application remains outstanding for longer than six months without a decision being made on it. There are no plans to amend the way the concession operates. The concession is applied across the board, to supported and unsupported asylum seekers alike.

An asylum seeker with dependant children who does not qualify for support is not automatically allowed to work.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects cash-only support for new asylum applicants to end. [62530]

Beverley Hughes: The White Paper, Secure Border Safe Haven, published 7 February 2002 made it clear that we are looking at the case for abolishing the "cash-only" option and the Bill currently being debated by Parliament does include a provision for an Order making power for the withdrawal of the cash only support option either wholly or in specified circumstances. However, no decisions have been taken about when and how the power, if agreed, will be exercised.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many languages are spoken among those whose claims for asylum are registered and undetermined. [62174]

Beverly Hughes *[holding answer 18 June 2002]:* The number of applicants who have applied for asylum and are currently awaiting an initial decision on their asylum application is not available by either language spoken or nationality, and would only be available at disproportionate cost by examination of individual case files.

HEALTH

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the letter to him dated 7 May from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to John and Maureen Wilson. [61687]

Mr. Milburn: A reply was sent on 21 June.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the letter to him dated 29 April from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Beryl Clark. [61688]

Mr. Milburn: A reply was sent on 20 June.

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the letter dated 2 May from the hon. and learned Member for Harborough about the Leicester Royal Infirmary and the Leicester Epilepsy Concerned Parents and Carers Group. [63950]

Mr. Lammy: A reply was sent on 19 June.

Sir Brian Mawhinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the letter from the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire of 16 January, on behalf of his constituent Mrs. A. Tremlett. [52480]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* A reply was sent on 19 June.

Hair Dyes (Cancer)

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the report by the European Commission concerning links between hair dyes with cancers. [51469]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

The document issued by the European Commission's Scientific Committee on Cosmetics and Non-Food Products (SCCNFP) on 27 February 2002, is a discussion paper on "Assessment Strategies for Hair Dyes".

The initial findings of the SCCNFP suggest that all 57 permanent hair dyes are suitable for use in consumer products. However, the UK, along with other member states, has some concerns about the scientific methodology the SCCNFP have used to reach their conclusions, and for the sake of public reassurance and business confidence we have asked them to re-evaluate their studies with more evidence-based methodology.

Radiation

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health by what means Her Majesty's Government intends to evaluate the relative importance of new evidence in respect of the effects of practices which give rise to exposure to ionising radiation as is required under Article 6 (iii) of the Basic Safety Standards Directive covering radiation exposures, Council Directive 96/29/Euratom, 13 May 1996. [61970]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply.

I believe this question is intended to refer to Article 6 (ii) of Directive 96/29/Euratom. The Department is preparing an administrative note describing the way that decisions will be taken by the responsible Secretaries of State under Articles 6 (i) and (ii) of the Directive. The note will be published in due course.

The responsible Secretary of State will, in accordance with Article 6 (ii) of the Directive, consider whether a review of an existing class or type of practice should be carried out whenever new and important evidence about its efficacy or consequences is acquired.

The responsible Secretary of State will assess very carefully any information which comes to his or her attention which suggests that a review of justification may be appropriate. If the responsible Secretary of State decides to undertake a review, interested bodies and members of the public will be invited to comment on the Secretary of State's initial assessment of whether the class or type of practice continues to be justified. Any representations made to the responsible Secretary of State either about the case for carrying out a review or about whether a class or type of practice continues to be justified will be very carefully considered before a final decision is reached.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Correspondence

Mr. Collins: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what the average response time was to departmental correspondence from Government departments to *(a)* members of the public and *(b)* hon. Members in the last 12 months; [62826]

(2) what percentage of letters from *(a)* members of the public and *(b)* hon. Members exceeded the average response time in each year since 1998; [62827]

(3) what the target response time is to departmental correspondence in Government departments; and what percentage of letters exceeded the target response time in each year since 1998; [62828]

(4) when he will publish the latest Government statistics on the volumes of and performance on departmental correspondence. [62829]

Mr. Douglas Alexander: I have been asked to reply.

Departments' handling of hon. Members' correspondence is published in the form of an annual report. For details of departmental performance in 2001, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley, on 24 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 674-76W. The handling of correspondence from members of the public forms one of the six service standards that focus on the performance of the main central government departments and agencies in dealing with the public. Details of Departmental performance against these standards has previously been published by the Cabinet Office in the form of an annual report. The last report covers the period 1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001 and was published at the end of July 2001. This and previous reports are available in the Library of the House.

In future, Departments and agencies will be required to report on their progress in improving handling of correspondence as part of their Service Delivery Agreements which will be published in departmental annual reports and on departmental websites.

Fire Services

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) of 12 June 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1296-98W, if he will express the Fire Service SSA figures as a sum per head of population in each Fire Service authority area. [63759]

Mr. Raynsford: Fire SSA figures as a sum per head of population in each fire authority area, for the six years ending 2002–03, are shown in the table:

Fire Standard Spending Assessment (£ per head)

Authority	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Avon	23.83	24.78	25.64	26.74	27.79	29.57
Bedfordshire and Luton	20.72	21.93	22.76	23.50	24.72	25.72
Buckinghamshire	20.13	21.13	21.91	22.29	23.73	24.52
Cambridgeshire and Peterborough	19.67	21.07	21.92	22.56	23.38	24.07
Cheshire	21.51	22.70	23.12	23.58	24.98	25.73
Cleveland	36.00	37.74	38.95	39.95	41.72	43.58
Cornwall	23.44	24.84	25.62	26.27	27.65	28.30
County Durham and Darlington	23.03	24.09	24.86	25.77	26.72	27.06

Fire Standard Spending Assessment (£ per head)

Authority	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Cumbria	23.40	24.72	25.74	26.02	27.11	28.26
Derbyshire	22.38	23.36	24.77	25.17	25.80	26.33
Devon	22.81	24.31	24.73	25.73	26.69	27.55
Dorset	21.20	22.14	23.09	23.69	24.62	25.26
East Sussex	24.03	25.38	26.35	27.31	28.70	29.66
Essex	22.26	23.22	24.01	24.58	26.15	26.90
Gloucestershire	19.58	20.05	20.78	21.76	21.86	22.68
Greater Manchester	28.37	29.91	30.65	31.55	32.86	33.49
Hampshire	20.49	21.70	22.39	23.32	24.43	25.65
Hereford and Worcester	18.48	19.15	20.54	21.12	21.54	22.52
Hertfordshire	21.77	22.84	23.11	24.91	25.66	26.48
Humberside	27.03	27.78	29.12	30.02	31.15	31.86
Isle of Wight	24.92	27.06	28.48	29.80	30.94	32.05
Isles of Scilly	147.34	155.06	158.44	160.90	161.53	165.15
Kent and Medway Towns	21.39	22.71	23.34	24.31	25.59	26.47
Lancashire	25.18	26.24	27.22	28.09	28.86	30.29
Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland	20.96	21.74	22.29	23.02	23.85	24.58
Lincolnshire	18.31	19.01	19.53	20.01	20.70	21.77
London	35.42	36.84	37.98	39.27	41.51	43.27
Merseyside	33.91	35.32	36.67	37.29	38.39	39.06
Norfolk	19.23	19.78	20.66	21.18	21.60	22.39
North Yorkshire	19.60	20.82	21.99	22.56	23.63	25.19
Northamptonshire	19.78	20.77	21.44	21.57	22.72	23.37
Northumberland	25.34	26.23	27.55	28.28	29.72	30.47
Nottinghamshire & City of Nottingham	22.25	23.57	24.13	24.72	25.70	26.22
Oxfordshire	20.73	21.82	22.18	23.02	24.13	25.18
Royal Berkshire	22.09	23.30	23.68	24.57	26.19	27.43
Shropshire	19.13	19.44	19.97	20.57	21.43	21.79
Somerset	18.90	19.79	20.98	21.44	22.54	23.14
South Yorkshire	24.78	26.11	27.36	27.94	28.78	29.77
Staffordshire Fire Authority	19.99	20.83	21.19	21.92	22.51	23.05
Suffolk	18.31	19.07	20.18	20.71	21.51	22.11
Surrey	22.34	23.25	23.91	24.69	25.92	26.96
Tyne and Wear	31.54	32.19	32.88	33.90	35.65	36.84
Warwickshire	20.74	22.13	22.43	23.03	23.87	24.50
West Midlands	27.42	28.63	29.79	30.71	31.73	32.87
West Sussex	21.67	23.28	23.04	24.78	25.80	26.97
West Yorkshire	27.21	28.26	29.04	29.46	30.85	31.23
Wiltshire and Swindon	17.71	18.61	19.70	19.96	20.83	21.37

* Current name of fire authority. A number of authorities were affected by local government reorganisation on 1 April 1997 and 1998 and (London) 3 July 2000

NB—In the case of combined fire authorities, for example, Kent & Medway Towns, the fire SSA is allocated to the constituent local unitary authorities.

Better Public Buildings Initiative

Ms Shipley: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what steps the Government Offices for the Regions are taking to deliver the Prime Minister's Better Public Buildings Initiative. [59831]

Mr. Raynsford: The management of the Government Offices' own buildings comes under the Estate Strategy for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. A good example of Government Offices responding to the Better Public Buildings initiative is the project for a new home for the Government Office for Yorkshire and the Humber. The scheme aims to be an exemplar of design excellence and sustainability.

The Government Offices also play an active role in encouraging better public buildings by working in partnership with other regional agents. For example, the Government Office for London procured City Hall, the new Headquarters for the Greater London Authority. This building, designed by the architects Foster and Partners, is due to be handed over to the Mayor on 24 June 2002.

Government Offices have responsibility, in conjunction with local partners, for the delivery of European Regional Development Funds (ERDF) which have supported many projects to develop public buildings. One example is the showcase Millennium Point building in Birmingham which received over £20 million ERDF.

Parish Councils

Norman Lamb: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) how many parish councillors in England and Wales have signed up to the new Parish Councils Code of Conduct; [63798]

(2) how many parish councillors in England and Wales have resigned since the introduction of the new Parish Councils Code of Conduct; [63799]

(3) if he will make a statement on the position of parish councillors in England and Wales who do not sign the Parish Councils Code of Conduct. [63800]

Mr. Raynsford: Over 4,300 parish councils in England have notified the Standards Board for England that they have adopted new codes of conduct. No central records are kept of the number of individual councillors who have given an undertaking to observe the code.

Parish councillors are under no obligation to inform the Government or the Standards Board if they choose to resign. Around 30 parish councillors have written informing us that they have resigned in response to the introduction of the code of conduct.

All parish councillors are now subject to the code. On election, new parish councillors must give a written undertaking to observe the code before taking office. When a council has adopted a code, its existing members must within two months give a written undertaking to observe the code, or cease to be councillors. In those councils which have not yet adopted a code, there is no obligation on existing councillors to give a written undertaking to observe a code, although all such councillors are subject to the provisions of the national code. In Wales, these matters are the responsibility of the National Assembly for Wales.

Health and Safety Directorate

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how the Fire Health and Safety Directorate will co-ordinate its work with the Health and Safety Directorate. [63683]

Mr. Raynsford: The Fire Health and Safety Directorate of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, and the Health and Safety Commission and Executive, now sponsored by the Department for Transport, are both working toward the goal of making homes and workplaces healthier, safer and better places to live and work. They continue to work very closely together.

Timber Products

Mr. Sheermen: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what measures his Department has taken to encourage local authorities to procure timber products from sustainable sources. [63060]

Mr. Raynsford: Local authorities are responsible in law for their own decisions on procurement. It is for them to decide whether or not to procure timber products from sustainable sources. In doing so they need to have regard to achieving Best Value and abide by relevant Procurement legislation.

My Department has not issued specific guidance on this issue. Central Government's timber procurement policy statement is widely available and can be adapted or adopted by local authorities if they wish. Officials from my Office, DEFRA and the OGC are working with local government through the Improvement and Development Agency to explore means by which local authorities can pursue sustainable development through their procurement activities.

Cheltenham Borough Council

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he expects to publish *(a)* his decision on the new electoral arrangements for Cheltenham Borough Council and *(b)* an order implementing his decision. [63640]

Mr. Raynsford: The Borough of Cheltenham (Electoral Changes) Order, made on 30 November 2001, implements these decisions.

WORK AND PENSIONS

New Deal

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people from ethnic minorities in *(a)* Hackney, *(b)* Newham and *(c)* Tower Hamlets have obtained jobs through the New Deal for Young People in each year since it was established. [56999]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The information is in the table.

	People from ethnic minorities moving into jobs through NDYP			
Unit of Delivery	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001—02* [1]
Hackney & City	375	626	636	342
Newham	312	426	403	404
Tower Hamlets	309	393	314	289

Note:

[1] Up to the end of January 2002.

Source:

New Deal Evaluation Database.

Mr. Tom Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many young people in Glasgow, Cathcart have found full-time work as a result of the New Deal; [58879]

(2) how many people in Glasgow, Cathcart have found full-time work as a result of the New Deal for the over-50s; [58880]

(3) how many people in Glasgow, Cathcart have found employment as a result of the New Deal for Lone Parents. [58881]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The available information is in the table:

Programme	*Number of people in the Glasgow Cathcart parliamentary constituency helped into jobs (at the end of March 2002)* [1]
New Deal for Young People	570
New Deal 50 plus	80
New Deal for Lone Parents	250

Note:

[1] A breakdown by full- and part-time jobs is not available.

Source:

New Deal Evaluation Database.

Mental Health

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what action he is taking to improve the job prospects of those with mental health problems. [60786]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We have a wide range of programmes that have proved successful in helping people with disabilities, including those with mental health problems, secure work where they are ready and able to do so.

Over 8,200 people were helped into work through the New Deal for Disabled People pilots and building on that success we have established a national network of Job Brokers. The New Deal enables those with a health condition or disability to find and move into work and to help themselves to become, and remain, independent. And from this April we have introduced new permitted work rules in Incapacity Benefit to make it easier for people to make the first moves into work.

People with mental health problems can also take part in all the main Jobcentre Plus programmes and have full access to its services. Disability Employment Advisers provide specialist support to disabled jobseekers, disabled employees and their employers. The roll-out of integrated Jobcentre Plus offices is providing disabled people with work-focused meetings with a personal adviser to ensure they are aware of all the help and opportunities available to them.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to reform housing benefit; and if he will make a statement. [61154]

Malcolm Wicks: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Hazel Grove on 15 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 695W.

Broadband

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the benefits of access to broadband services for the *(a)* Benefits Agency and *(b)* Employment Service; and if he will make a statement. [61799]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Department's Modernisation programme as a whole will deliver improved customer-facing services, reduce fraud and error and help it to operate more efficiently and flexibly. A new IT infrastructure, including broadband network services, is being installed to support the Modernisation programme and help achieve its benefits.

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what targets he has set for the roll out of broadband services in *(a)* benefits agencies and *(b)* Jobcentre Plus offices. [61800]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Broadband network services are being installed as part of the Department's new IT infrastructure to support its Modernisation programme. Almost all of the former Employment Service staff and over half of the staff in the rest of the Department already use broadband-class data networks. It is intended to complete the roll out of the Department's broadband network by the end of the 2002–03 financial year.

Carers Allowance

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many applications for carers allowance (formerly invalid care allowance) have been refused in *(a)* Angus and *(b)* Scotland in each of the last five years. [62387]

Maria Eagle: The information is not available in the format requested.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in *(a)* Angus and *(b)* Scotland were in receipt of (i) carers allowance (formerly invalid care allowance) and (ii) both carers allowance and income support in each of the last five years. [62391]

Maria Eagle: Information on the number of Invalid Care Allowance recipients, broken down by area, is available only from 2001. At 31 December 2001 there were about 37,100 recipients in Scotland and 465 in Angus. The numbers of Income Support recipients who also receive Invalid Care Allowance is in the table.

Numbers of Income Support recipients in Scotland and Angus who also receive Invalid Care Allowance[1,2]

	Angus Parliamentary Constituency[3]	*Scotland Government Office Region*
February 1998	200	17,900
February 1999	200	17,600
February 2000	200	18,800
February 2001	200	19,700
February 2002	300	20,600

Notes:

[1] Figures include cases where the partner of an Income Support recipient is in receipt of Invalid Care Allowance.

[2] Figures are based on a five per cent. sample, which is subject to sampling variation, and rounded to the nearest hundred. Those for Angus are based on a very small sample and provide only a general indication of the numbers of recipients in that area.

[3] Parliamentary constituencies are defined using the relevant ONS postcode directory and are based on the May 1997 boundaries.

Source:

Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiries, February 1998 to February 2002.

Benefits

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what recent assessment he has made of the incentives in the benefits system for young people *(a)* to marry at an early age and *(b)* to have children at an early age; and if he will make a statement. [62400]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 19 June 2002]*: There are no incentives within the benefits system for young people to marry or have children at an early age. In general, young people under the age of 18 are excluded from receiving income-related benefits. The majority of benefit recipients under the age of 25 are single with no dependents.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

East Timor

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) pursuant to his answer of 9 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 310W, on East Timor, why no information about the deaths of British citizens Malcolm Rennie and Brian Peters killed in East Timor in 1975 was passed by the British Government to their families between 1975 and 1994; [57023]

(2) for what reason no information about the deaths of Malcolm Rennie and Brian Peters was passed to their families between 1977 and 1994. [59326]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: In 1975–76 the British Government were in contact with the relatives of Brian Peters and Malcolm Rennie to pass on information about their deaths.

I am informed that from our archived files it does not appear that any new information came to light between 1977 and 1994 that would require passing on to the families. In 1994 the relatives resumed contact with the FCO.

We have begun to prepare these documents for release to the families. This process is likely to take around a couple of weeks. We will then need to clear the documents with the Australian Government, which will take another month. We expect to release the documents as soon as possible after that.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions his Department has had with the Australian Government concerning the UN investigation into the deaths at Balibo, East Timor in 1975. [59898]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding reply of 10 June 2002]:* Our diplomatic staff in Dili have maintained regular contact with their Australian colleagues on this issue.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when Her Majesty's Government were informed of Indonesia's plans for a full scale invasion of East Timor in 1975. [59900]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer of 10 June 2002]:* The British Government were of course aware of reports of Indonesian involvement in East Timor ahead of the invasion in 1975, but the situation was far from clear and reports were difficult to verify. In the absence of any British representation in the area, HMG had no independent means of doing so. The UK deplored the Indonesian invasion and never recognised the incorporation of East Timor into Indonesia.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he next plans to meet representatives of the Indonesian Government; and if he will raise the case of the deaths of Malcolm Rennie and Brian Peters in East Timor in 1975 at that meeting. [59897]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* The Government continue to take an active interest in this case and have raised and will continue to raise our concerns with the Indonesian authorities at every appropriate opportunity.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what role his Department has played in the UN investigation into the deaths at Balibo, East Timor in 1975. [59895]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* British diplomatic staff in Dili have remained in close contact with UN investigation team in East Timor.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make his Department's non-intelligence papers on the Balibo case available for study by the UN, the relatives and independent experts. [59896]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* We have begun to prepare these documents for release to the families. This process is likely to take around a couple of weeks. We will then need to clear the documents with the Australian Government, which will take another month. We expect to release the documents as soon as possible after that.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the status is of the UN investigation announced in September 2000 into the Balibo case, including the deaths of Malcolm Rennie and Brian Peters in East Timor in 1975; and if he will make a statement. [59894]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* Denis McNamara, the Deputy SRSG in East Timor, has confirmed that the UN investigation remains open. Our Ambassador in Dili will continue to monitor developments closely.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 9 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 310W, on East Timor, what further information regarding the deaths of Malcolm Rennie and Brian Peters he has received from the new investigation. [62592]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Denis McNamara, the Deputy SRSG in East Timor, has confirmed that the UN investigation into the death of the five journalists in 1975 remains open. The UN investigation team has submitted a request to the Office of the Attorney General of Indonesia to be allowed to interview possible witnesses in Indonesia. We will continue to maintain regular contact with the UN pending the outcome of the enquiry.

Kashmir

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with his European counterparts on the situation in Kashmir. [63084]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary discussed the current situation in Kashmir with his European Counterparts at the EU General Affairs Council in Luxembourg on 17 June. The topic was also on the agenda of the previous week's General Affairs Council, at which my right hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Peter Hain) represented the UK.

Government Information

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 9 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 306W, on Government information, how many internal reviews under the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information have been conducted by his

Department since 1 January 2000; and how many have been completed within the target time of 20 working days. [63045]

Mr. Macshane: Four and one.

Belarus

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of developments in the human rights situation in Belarus since September last year; and if he will make a statement. [63323]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Since the flawed Presidential elections in September last year, we have registered no improvement in the human rights situation in Belarus. Despite the release from prison of one prominent figure in March, political opponents of the regime, the independent media and human rights NGOs continue to suffer harassment. With our EU partners and others, the Government will continue to convey our concerns about these abuses to the Belarusian authorities.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on relations with Belarus. [63322]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Our relations with Belarus remain constrained by our concerns over human rights violations and lack of reform. We restrict senior-level contacts and confine our assistance to projects aimed at developing civil society and the NGO sector, as well as humanitarian aid for Chernobyl victims.

Lamassoure Report

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what Her Majesty's Government's policy is towards the Lamassoure Report approved by the European Parliament on 16 May. [63364]

Peter Hain: The Lamassoure Report is one of many contributions to the on-going debate about the future of Europe and, more specifically, the division of competences between the EU and Member States. My intervention to the European Convention on 15 April set out the Government's thinking on competences. A full transcript is available on http://european-convention.eu.int or www.fco.gov.uk.

EU Applicant Countries

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance the UK has given to each EU applicant country since 7 June 2001. [63443]

Peter Hain: The UK pays 19.6 per cent. of EU pre-accession assistance (the total figure for such assistance was €3,240 million in 2001 and €3,328 million in 2002).

Last financial year, the Department for International Development provided further assistance for the Candidate Countries through its bilateral programme of assistance. The amounts spent per country was; Baltic States (Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia) £1,595,765, Poland £2,526,998, Hungary £1,264,405, Slovakia £2,180,647, Czech Republic £725,416, Slovenia £82,800, Romania £5,430,728, Bulgaria £,760,117, Turkey £2,485,074. DFID did not provide any specific assistance for Cyprus and Malta.

The Department for International Development also provided £2,254,120 for Central and Eastern European Regional Projects.

The UK was the second largest contributor to the EU's TAIEX programme, which delivers technical assistance to Applicant Countries, including transposition of legislation in 2001 and is the leading Member State so far in 2002. Over 20 UK civil servants have been selected in the last year to work on new twinning projects in applicant country Ministries, making over 50 either in the countries or preparing to arrive. The UK won the second highest number of new twinning projects in 2001 (25) and has won involvement in eight more so far in 2002. The UK has now won its one hundredth such project and was the first Member State to become involved in projects in all 12 eligible countries.

Through bilateral Action Plans, the Foreign Office spent £1.8 million in the EU applicant countries during the last financial year. An additional £608,541 was spent from Command Programme Budget allowances devolved to the Embassies in the Candidate Countries. Further assistance has been provided through functional departments' budgets (e.g. Global Conflict Prevention Fund) but to provide the information requested would incur disproportionate costs.

UKREP

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many staff are employed at UKREP. [63444]

Mr. MacShane: The number of staff employed at the UKREP Office in Brussels is 152.

Arms Trade

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions his Department have had with the Iranian Government regarding unlicensed production in Iran of BAE Systems/Heckler & Koch's G3 rifles and MP5 submachine guns. [61984]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We have had no recent discussions with the Iranian Government in this regard. We are not aware of any such unlicensed production of the weapons in question.

UKvisas

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much it cost to rebrand the visa operation as UKvisas. [62785]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The direct cost of re-branding JECU to UKvisas was £9,354.56. There were other related costs, all met from existing resources and staffing.

The decision to change to UKvisas was to project a clear, easily understood and up to date identity for the entry clearance operation.

Business Ambassadors

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the names of the business ambassadors, and how many business ambassadors he has appointed since 7 June 2002. [62786]

Mr. MacShane: The current Ambassadors for British Business and the date of their appointment are listed below.

Ambassadors for British Business

Name	*Date appointed*
Sir David Alliance CBE	November 1997
Sir David Brown	November 1997
Lord Browne of Madingley	November 1997
Sir Trevor Chinn CVO	November 1997
Iain Dale CBE	November 1997
Sir Patrick Gillam	November 1997
Allan Gormly CBE	November 1997
Sir Ronald Hampel	November 1997
Lord Haskins	November 1997
Sir David John KCMG	November 1997
Lord Marshall of Knightsbridge	November 1997
John M Neill CBE	November 1997
Lord Paul of Marylebone	November 1997
Tony Pedder	November 1997
Sir Ian Prosser	November 1997
Sir Ralph Robins DL	November 1997
Anita Roddick OBE	November 1997
Sir Nigel Rudd DL	November 1997
Lord Simpson of Dunkeld	November 1997
Sir Paul Smith CBE	November 1997
Sir Martin Sorrell	November 1997
Sir Richard Sykes	November 1997
Sir Robert Wilson KCMG	November 1997
Sir Peter Bonfield CBE	March 2000
Digby Jones	March 2000

Unpaid Advisers

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 63W, on unpaid advisers, if he will list the steps that were taken to ensure no conflicts of interest arose as a result of this appointment. [62971]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given him by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 19 June, *Official Report*, column 332W.

Iraq

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on relations with Iraq. [63076]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We have no diplomatic relations with Iraq. We have limited official-level contacts. We use them to urge Iraq to comply with all relevant Security Council resolutions, including on weapons inspections, so allowing Iraq's reintegration into the international community.

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what happens to the funds raised by the sales of impounded Iraqi oil form ships stopped by coalition forces; and how such funds have been used over the last five years. [63173]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Under UN Security resolution 778 (1992), the proceeds, less expenses, of the sale of seized illegal Iraqi oil are paid into the UN escrow account which funds the UN "Oil for Food" humanitarian programme.

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many ships were stopped by coalition forces with Iraqi oil on board in contravention of UN sanctions in each of the last five years. [63172]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The number of ships diverted by the Maritime Interception Force (MIF) is:

1997—26;
1998—40;
1999—19;
2000—82; and
2001—115.

The figure for 2002, up until 18 June, is 89.

Western Sahara

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met officials from *(a)* the UN and *(b)* the EU to discuss the status of the Western Sahara. [63326]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: UK Officials are in regular contact with UN and EU officials. We continue to support the efforts of the UN in trying to find a just and durable resolution to the Western Sahara dispute.

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last discussed the status of the Western Sahara with the Moroccan Government. [63327]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We regularly discuss the issue of Western Sahara with the Government of the Kingdom of Morocco. My predecessor my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr. Ben Bradshaw) raised the issue during his visit to Morocco in September 2001 and when he met with Mohammed Benaissa the Moroccan Foreign Minister during his visit to London in March 2002. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary also discussed the subject with Mohammed Benaissa during his visit to London in February 2002.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 24 June 2002

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Crime (Young People)

12. **Clive Efford:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps her Department is taking to contribute to the Government's strategy to reduce crime among young people. [61229]

Tessa Jowell: My Department is playing a full part in the Government's drive to tackle street crime, the vast majority of which is committed by young people. My officials are working closely with colleagues at the Youth Justice Board to develop a programme of summer activities in the 10 police areas targeted by the street crime initiative. This will provide at least 48,000 places, for children and young people aged nine to 17 at risk of offending, in quality sports and arts provision. We hope to be able to announce the exact locations of all of the individual schemes shortly.

22. **Siobhain McDonagh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what research she has commissioned on the role of sports and arts provision for young people in crime prevention. [61239]

Tessa Jowell: There is already an increasing body of evidence that engagement in sports and arts activity can have an important role in crime reduction. However, we are keen to build on this. The comprehensive programme of Splash Extra schemes being developed jointly by my Department and the Youth Justice Board in the street crime areas will provide an important opportunity in this respect. We will ensure that the impact of these new schemes on local crime levels is evaluated as fully as possible.

Arts, Sport and Tourism (Regional Input)

13. **Ian Stewart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to strengthen the regional input into the development of arts, sport and tourism policies. [61230]

Mr. Caborn: Steps have already been taken to restructure the Arts Council to provide a more effective structure for delivering national priorities for the arts while enhancing regional input to arts policy. The Performance and Innovation Unit is currently undertaking a review of sports policy in England and is looking at the regional dimension building on the findings of the Quinquennial review of Sport England. While the preliminary findings of a review of tourism have identified the need for the Regional Development Agencies, and in the longer term Elected Regional Assemblies, to have a stronger role in tourism development.

Performing Arts (Rural Areas)

14. **Mr. Blizzard:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to support the development of performing arts in rural areas. [61231]

Tessa Jowell: The Arts Council's new Regional Councils are working with Local Authorities to develop the infrastructure for the performing arts in rural areas, this is in addition to support through the New Audience Programme and Lottery funding. Rural areas including Norfolk and Cornwall have also been included in Creative Partnerships, a £40 million programme to bring creative professionals, teachers and young people together to work on sustained and innovative projects.

Gambling Review

15. **Mr. Gordon Marsden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what progress she has made in implementing the recommendations of the gambling review. [61232]

Mr. Caborn: Two recommendations have already been implemented; and we are on course to implement a further six before the Recess. The majority will, however, need primary legislation. We are now working with interested parties on the preparation of a Bill.

Media Regulation

16. **Mr. Soley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent meetings she has had with the Press Complaints Commission to discuss media regulation. [61233]

Dr. Howells: While my right hon. Friend has not met the Press Complaints Commission (PCC) recently, the Department continues to monitor closely the effectiveness of the newspaper industry's self regulatory system, and my Ministerial colleagues and I have no hesitation in suggesting improvements to the PCC and the industry, as and when appropriate.

National Lottery Funding

17. **Mr. Lazarowicz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps she is taking to ensure an equitable distribution of funds raised by the national lottery. [61234]

Mr. Caborn: The Government would like all parts of the country to experience the positive effects of Lottery funding. Reforms introduced under the National Lottery Act 1998 and targeted programmes introduced by Lottery distributors are designed to tackle inequity. We shall seek public views on what further steps might be taken in a consultation paper to be published shortly.

Sports Facilities

18. **Dr. Naysmith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what measures her Department is taking to encourage greater co-operation between schools and community sports clubs, particularly in respect of the provision of facilities. [61235]

Tessa Jowell: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport, in partnership with the Department for Education and Skills, is keen to promote greater co-operation between schools and community clubs through a number of schemes and programmes that they, along with Sport England and other interested bodies, are running. These include the NOF PE and Sport Programme, where an ability to demonstrate community access to new facilities is one of the criteria that schools have to meet when bidding to LEAs for funding allocated to them by NOF, and the School Sport Co-ordinator Scheme, where Co-ordinators are responsible for—among other things—developing community outreach programmes.

Sport (Young People)

19. **Mr. Edwards:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on Government plans to develop sport for young people of school age. [61236]

Mr. Caborn: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport and Department for Education and Skills are working closely with the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit on a comprehensive plan to improve access to, and the quality of, PE, school sport and club links for 5 to 16-year-olds. Key activities associated with the plan will include; the expansion of the specialist sport college network and school sport co-ordinator programme; training for primary and special school PE co-ordinators and secondary school directors of sport; further incentives to encourage extra-curricular activities; and "Step into Sport", a leadership and volunteering programme.

International Sporting Bodies

21. **Mr. Michael Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what action her Department is taking to increase UK representation on international sporting bodies. [61238]

Mr. Caborn: Part of UK Sport's responsibilities is to encourage and maintain UK influence within international sports federations. To support this objective they operate an international Representatives Grant Aid Programme. This programme offers financial support and advice to elect British postholders and, in addition, supports governing body delegates attending formal meetings of international sports bodies.

European Capital of Culture

23. **Mr. Kilfoyle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations she has received on the nomination of Liverpool as European Capital of Culture. [61240]

Tessa Jowell: My Department has received a number of representations about the Liverpool bid.

Tourism (World Heritage Sites)

24. **Jim Knight:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she will meet the English Tourist Council to discuss plans for the promotion of tourism along the south Dorset coast and other world heritage sites. [61241]

Dr. Howells: I am delighted that the Dorset and east Devon coast was awarded world heritage site status last December. I have no plans to meet the ETC specifically to discuss this issue. South West Tourism actively promotes south Dorset through its website, marketing campaigns and existing publications. The BTA also highlights the south Dorset coast in its Walking Britain brochure, and other BTA promotions.

British Museum

25. **Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent discussions she has had with the director and trustees of the British museum regarding the financial support which she gives to the museum. [61242]

Tessa Jowell: My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for the Arts (Baroness Blackstone) has had several discussions with British Museum trustees and officials on a number of issues including the current financial position at the Museum. Grant-in-Aid to the British Museum has increased each year since 1997–98 and in 2002–03 will amount to £36.5 million. In addition, since April 2001 the Museum has been able to recover VAT relating to its expenditure on free access, worth at least £750,000 per annum. Funding is being further reviewed in the Government's 2002 Spending Review.

Sport (National Lottery Funding)

26. **Mr. Francois:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she last met the chief executive of Sport England to discuss lottery funding for sports activities. [61243]

Mr. Caborn: My right hon. Friend, last met David Moffett, the Chief Executive of Sport England, on 8 May to discuss the restructuring of sport delivery. He also regularly attends the monthly interministerial sport policy meeting, the latest of which was on 16 May. The subjects discussed included Lottery funding for sports facilities.

School Sports

27. **Mr. Jenkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement about the progress being made in implementing the school sports co-ordinator programme. [61244]

Mr. Caborn: The Government are well on their way to meeting their target of 1,000 School Sport Co-ordinators by 2004, with 577 currently in place, benefiting 1.26 million pupils. Another 165 Co-ordinators have been designated, making a total of 742 in post by September, and increasing the total number of pupils benefiting to 1.8 million.

Tourism

28. **Dr. Julian Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she last met the chief executive of the Tourism Alliance to discuss tourism. [61245]

Dr. Howells: My officials have been in regular discussions with the Tourism Alliance, since its formation in October 2001, on aspects of the agenda for reform of the tourism industry.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State last met with Digby Jones, chair of the Tourism Alliance and Director General of the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) on 14 February 2002 formally to discuss tourism matters and in regard to the Tourism Alliance's paper on 'Tourism Spending Priorities', which was later published in April 2002.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what her policies are to assist tourism in southern England. [61227]

Dr. Howells: Through the English Tourism Council and the Southern Tourist Board, the Government have invested in a number of programmes to promote tourism in the area. The Southern Tourist Board is receiving £554,000 of Government support this year and £10,000 from the English Tourism Council has supported a regeneration at Sandown Bay.

BBC Online Services

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she will publish the terms of the agreement reached with the BBC on the provision of BBC Online services. [57935]

Dr. Howells: I am arranging for copies of the BBC Online service approval documents to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Computers

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what measures are *(a)* in place and *(b)* under discussion in her Department in order to ensure compliance with the WEE Directive. [60743]

Dr. Howells: The WEE Directive is still in draft and should be finalised this autumn. Work on implementation planning will commence at that time.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many people work in the parts of her Department responsible for *(a)* the Royal Parks Agency, *(b)* strategy and communications, *(c)* education, training, arts and sport, *(d)* museums, galleries, libraries and heritage, *(e)* creative industries, media and broadcasting, *(f)* regions, tourism, millennium and international and *(g)* corporate services; and for each what (i) their civil service grade and (ii) their role is. [60036]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 10 June 2002]*: Set out in the following table are the number of staff by individual responsibility.

	SCS	*A(U)*	*A*	*B*	*HEOD*	*C*	*D*
Strategy and communications	3	1	3	11	1	1	5
Education, training, arts and sport	6	3	12	21	3	26	16
Museums, galleries, libraries and heritage	4	3	12	22	2	27	30
Creative industries, media and broadcasting	4	3	11	15	2	18	16
Regions, tourism, millennium and international	4	1	19	18	1	14	10
Corporate services	4	5	9	31	2	14	18

The roles of these grades vary between directorate but the overall description of the roles are as follows:

Senior Civil Servants—head Divisions and Directorates across the Department.

Grade A/AU—they are the first level of senior management and are accountable for delivering specific parts of the departmental plan.

Grade B/HEOD—carry out a wide range of tasks in support to support the Department's policy and sponsorship objectives.

Grade C—first management level and will generally be responsible for providing a range of management support to senior officers and colleagues.

Grade D—carry out a range of work to support the functional areas of DCMS.

The figures relating to the Royal Parks Agency are as follows:

Grade	*Total*
Grade I	29
Grade II	29
Grade III	15
Grade IV	9
Inspector	7
Police Constable	132
Police Sergeant	16

The roles of these grades vary but the overall description of the roles with the Royal Parks Agency are as follows:

Grade IV—senior management within the RPA and are accountable for delivering specific objectives.

Grade III—carry out a wide range of tasks in support to support RPA objectives.

Grade II—first management level and will generally be responsible for providing a range of management support to senior officers and colleagues.

Grade I—carry out a range of work to support the functional areas including finance, procurement wildlife and estates.

Inspector/Police Constable/Police Sergeant—policing of the royal parks.

Communications Bill

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make it her policy in the forthcoming Communications Bill to place a duty upon *(a)* the Regulator, *(b)* Ofcom and *(c)* the media to promote good race relations in the performance of their functions; and if she will make a statement. [62305]

Dr. Howells: The existing regulatory bodies for communications (the Independent Television Commission, Radio Authority, Radiocommunications Agency, Oftel, the Broadcasting Standards Commission, the BBC and S4C) already have a duty under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, in respect of their public functions, to have regard to the need to eliminate unlawful racial discrimination and to promote equality of opportunity and good relations between persons of different racial groups. It is our intention that Ofcom should similarly be designated.

The draft Communications Bill, which is currently subject to consultation, also contains provisions placing a duty on Ofcom to take appropriate steps for promoting equality of opportunity in relation to employment in broadcasting services and training and retraining for such employment; and a requirement on Ofcom to include in broadcasting licences appropriate conditions requiring licensees to make arrangements for promoting equality of opportunity, including between persons of different racial groups, in relation to employment with the licence holder.

Concessionary TV Licences

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when the rules on concessionary TV licences for elderly people living in sheltered residential accommodation were last reviewed. [63587]

Dr. Howells: The last comprehensive review of the Accommodation for Residential Care concessionary television licence scheme was carried out in 1999, by the independent review panel on the future funding of the BBC. The panel recommended that the existing scheme be retained. The Government have since introduced free television licences for everyone aged 75 or over, the cost being met from public funds.

Carlton House Terrace

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what funding is given to organisations to meet the cost of property in Carlton House Terrace. [63487]

Dr. Howells: Funding for the arts is a matter for the Arts Council of England and its regional offices. In 2002–03 London Arts will provide revenue funding of £1,021,248 to the Institute for Contemporary Arts (ICA) in the Mall which is adjacent to Carlton House Terrace. The ICA is an independent organisation which may use this money for artistic activity as well as other costs such as property.

BBC

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what approval she is required to give before the BBC can *(a)* apply for and *(b)* operate a multiplex service licence. [63471]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 20 June 2002]:* Clause 2.4 of the agreement provides that

> "The Corporation may, subject to the prior agreement of the Secretary of State provide multiplex facilities for digital television and sound broadcasting frequencies"

but does not require her approval for the BBC to apply for a multiplex service licence.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the circumstances in which her approval is required by the BBC. [63472]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 20 June 2002]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's approval is required under the following articles of the BBC's Charter:

3(b)—ancillary services
3(c)—commercial services
3(c)—commercial services
3(i)—transmission
3(u)—joint ventures, partnerships, establishing companies and acquiring shares etc
3(w)(ii)—borrowing limit
17(i)—certain borrowings
18(i)—the appointment of auditors
24(i)—directions and approvals

and under the following clauses of the agreement:

2.2(d)—local sound programme services
2.3—the number and geographical coverage of national television and sound programme services
2.4—multiplex facilities
10.10—sponsorship and subscription
14—non assignment.

The Charter and agreement also provides that the Secretary of State can give directions to the BBC under certain circumstances and that some matters relating to the World Service require the separate approval of the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.

Community Sport Facilities

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to the oral answer of the Minister for Sport, of 13 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 493, what studies she is making of structural weaknesses, including facilities, in the provision of community sport facilities. [62102]

Mr. Caborn: My Department has announced our intention to establish an England-wide database of sports facilities. Information on sports facilities in England is currently held by a variety of organisations and a single database will enable more strategic Government investment in those areas and facilities which are most important.

My Department and Sport England have also been working closely together with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on the revision of Planning Policy Statement 17 for Open Spaces, Sport and Recreation to ensure that we adopt a comprehensive approach to planning for these important facilities.

Analogue Television

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the future availability of the analogue television signal. [61226]

Dr. Howells: The Government are committed to ensuring that terrestrial analogue broadcasting signals are maintained until everyone who can currently get the main public service broadcasting channels can receive them in digital form and switching to digital is an affordable option. As a target indicator of affordability, 95 per cent. of consumers should have access to digital receiving equipment.

Regional Theatres

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the impact which her policies have on theatre in the regions. [61218]

Dr. Howells: From 1 April the Arts Council is investing an additional £12 million in theatre throughout England as a consequence of its extensive review of the needs of regional theatre. From 2003–04 this will increase to an additional £25 million a year. Funding for the Stanwix Theatre in Carlisle will increase from £6,000 last year to £16,000 this year and 2003–04, an increase of 167 per cent.

Consultants

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much money her Department has spent on consultants in each financial year since 1997, giving *(a)* the project for which the consultant was employed, *(b)* the dates on which the consultant was employed, *(c)* the name of the consultant and *(d)* the tendering process used for hiring the consultant. [63375]

Dr. Howells: There is no central register of contracts held for procurement exercises undertaken outside of the central procurement team. Approval is required to proceed for any single tender action above £5,000.

There follows a list of contracts placed by the procurement team in the relevant periods. All followed competitive tender.

(a) Project	*(b) Dates*	*(c) Consultancy*
1996–97—£109,000		
Internal Audit Services	October 1997 to August 1998	Deloitte Touche
1997–98—£nil		
1998–99—£324,000		
Risk Management Systems	November 1998 to January 1999	KPMG
Efficiency Review	August-September 1998	Deloitte Touche
Recruitment of Chairman-NOF	August 1998	Capita
Recruitment of Chairman-NESTA	January 1999	Capita
Recruitment for BBC Appointments	March 1999	Capita
Royal Parks Consultancy	August 1998 to July 2001	WS Atkins
Royal Parks Consultancy	January-March 1999	WS Atkins
Royal Parks Consultancy	March 1999	WS Atkins
1999–2000—£33,000		
Royal Parks Consultancy	July 1999	WS Atkins
Royal Parks Consultancy	September 1999	WS Atkins
2000–01—£106,000		
Royal Parks Consultancy	July 2000	PWC
Economic Impact—Lottery	May 2000	AEA
Royal Armouries Consultancy	October 2000	PWC
2001–02—£122,000		
Risk Management—QUEST	May 2001	PWC
Recruitment Advisory Services	July 2001 to February 2002	Capita
Capital of Culture advisers	February-June 2002	Kingshurst Consulting

Note:
Includes Royal Parks Agency

Radio Frequencies

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the future of common radio microphones used in television and film production by musicians, and on stage concerning changes to frequencies allocated to them once the switchover to digital television is completed and the sale of frequencies allocated to the broadcast of analogue television is begun; and what meetings she has held to discuss the financial and practical implications of changes in frequency allocated to such equipment. [62058]

Mr. Timms: I have been asked to reply.

Wireless equipment such as radio microphones used by broadcasters, independent production companies and theatres/concert venues shares that part of the radio spectrum used also for analogue and digital television broadcasting. The Government appreciate fully the importance of the radio spectrum in underpinning this activity.

The recent joint DTI/DCMS consultation process (Digital Television: The Principles for Spectrum Planning) sought views on the basis on which we should plan the use of this spectrum for digital television and other services once the analogue signals can be switched off. The responses will inform decisions about the amount of spectrum that might be dedicated to programme-making use after switchover, and also the future arrangements for the way that the programme-makers will share spectrum within digital TV networks. We will ensure, through careful planning and consultation with programme makers, minimal disruption.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry meets with many organisations to hear and discuss their views. The programme-making community is also closely involved with Ministers and other stakeholders within the Digital Action Plan arrangements.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

All-postal Ballots

36. **Martin Linton:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission if he will ask the Electoral Commission to consider an all-postal ballot in referendums on *(a)* the euro and *(b)* the voting system. [61210]

Mr. Beith: The role of the commission in the conduct of any national or regional referendum is set out in the Political Parties, Referendums and Elections Act 2000. The Act does not give the Commission powers to determine the type of ballot used for a referendum. As part of its contingency planning for the conduct of referendums, the Commission will be considering a range of policy and practice issues and where appropriate may make recommendations to the Government.

Voting Age

37. **Vernon Coaker:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission what discussions the Commission has had about reducing the voting age to 16 years. [61211]

Mr. Beith: The Commission has indicated to the Government that it intends to look, in due course, at the minimum voting age as part of its programme of reviewing electoral law and practice. The Commission's consideration will take account of the final recommendations from the Children and Young People's Unit, whose "Why Vote? Why Not?" project is consulting young people about measures to encourage increased participation in elections. The unit intends to publish a report later this summer.

Local Elections Review

38. **Simon Hughes:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission what the timetable is for reviewing the implications of the local elections in 2002. [61212]

Mr. Beith: There is no statutory obligation for the Commission to report on the operation of local elections, but the Commission will be evaluating the electoral pilot schemes held in 30 local authority areas in May 2002. The Commission will submit its evaluation reports to the Deputy Prime Minister by 2 August, and the reports will be published.

Postal Voting

40. **Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission what research has been conducted into the impact of extended postal voting experiments on the secrecy of the ballot. [61214]

Mr. Beith: The Electoral Commission is currently preparing its evaluation of the postal voting pilot schemes which took place in May 2002. The evaluation, which will be published in (early) August, will consider the impact of the pilot schemes on the secrecy of the ballot. The Commission is also undertaking a wider review of the law and practice in relation to absent voting, which includes consideration of secrecy and related issues.

Euro Referendum

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the right hon. member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission what discussions he has had about preparations the Electoral Commission is making for a referendum on adoption of the euro. [61215]

Mr. Beith: In accordance with its statutory obligations, the Electoral Commission has begun to draw up contingency plans for the conduct of national and regional referendums. In February this year, the Speaker's Committee approved plans for the recruitment of a small team of staff and funding for consultancy on IT issues. The Commission's main objectives for this stream of work are set out in their Corporate Plan 2002–03 to 2006–07. Detailed project plans are in the process of being drawn up.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Cathedral Restoration

39. **Michael Fabricant:** To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, if the Commissioners plan to meet representatives of the National Heritage Lottery Fund to discuss the funding of cathedral restoration; and if he will make a statement. [61213]

Mr. Bell: No. The funding of cathedral repairs is a matter for individual cathedrals and for the body that represents them, the Association of English Cathedrals.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

New Direction in Agriculture

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if her Department will spend the match-funded money raised from the introduction of modulation under the New Direction in Agriculture package before the end of the present spending round. [60383]

Margaret Beckett: EC Regulations stipulate that the money raised from modulation has to be spent within three years of being raised. The first receipts were raised in July 2001; between then and the end of April 2002 nearly £28 million has been collected in England, and nearly £9 million has been spent. Modulation funds are used to secure valuable public benefits through agri-environment schemes, in particular the Countryside Stewardship Scheme and the Environmentally Sensitive

Areas scheme. Receipts will be used progressively as new agreements under the schemes are signed, and as old agreements come forward for renewal. I am confident that the funds will be spent before the deadline.

Agrimonetary System

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to bring forward new policy measures to address the problems faced by British farmers as a result of the expiry of the agrimonetary system. [61544]

Margaret Beckett: We acknowledge the problems facing British agriculture at the moment. We believe that sustainable agriculture can be achieved by encouraging a more market-oriented sector with reduced dependence on production-linked support. This is our aim for the forthcoming mid-term review of the CAP. Also, following publication of the report of the Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food, the Government are working with a range of stakeholders to chart a way ahead by developing a strategy for sustainable food and farming in England, by the autumn.

Tree Diseases

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she is taking to guard against the risk of sudden oak death in the United Kingdom. [61602]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 19 June 2002]:* "Phytophthora ramorum"—the causative organism of sudden oak death—is not established in the United Kingdom, but has recently been detected on plants of viburnum and rhododendron in a targeted survey by the Plant Health and Seeds Inspectorate. Research is in progress to establish whether the "Phytophthora ramorum" found in the United Kingdom exhibits the same pathogenicity as that causing such serious damage in the USA and whether European tree species are susceptible to either the European or North American isolates. This work is being carried out by the Central Science Laboratory and the Forestry Commission Research Agency.

Possible Community-wide measures are being considered and there has already been an exchange of information and some additional survey work by member states. In the meantime, on the basis of a pest risk assessment, precautionary measures have been introduced to prevent susceptible material being imported into the United Kingdom from affected areas of the USA and to allow plant health inspectors to track commercial movements of host plants of any origin. Current controls on imported oak wood from the USA are also being extended to include wood derived from all host trees originating in affected areas. Further information is available on the Forestry Commission and DEFRA websites at http://forestry.gov.uk/planthealth and http://defraweb/planth/ph.htm

Countryside

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps her Department is taking to implement the Government's commitment in the Rural White Paper to protect the countryside for its own sake. [63501]

Alun Michael: The Government set out measures for protecting the countryside in chapters 9 and 10 of the Rural White Paper "Our Countryside: the future—A fair deal for rural England". In December 2002, I reported our progress on implementing the Rural White Paper in "England's Rural Future". My answer to my hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd) of 12 December 2001, *Official Report,* column 920W, announced publication of this document.

An explanation of how all the commitments in the Rural White Paper are being taken forward is set out in the Rural White Paper Implementation Plan which is on the Department's website at: http://defraweb/wildlife/wildlife-countryside/index.htm. This plan will be amended from time to time to ensure it is up to date.

Beef Special Premium Scheme

Diana Organ: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what costs have been incurred by the Rural Payments Agency as a result of the extra information required of farmers in Section 1, No. 5, of the Beef Special Premium Scheme 2002. [63628]

Mr. Morley: When a Beef Special Premium Form is received at the Rural Payments Agency, the contents on the form are entered on to the RPA computer system by staff keying in the information shown. When Section 1 question 5 consists simply of one line of text, the time taken may be measured in seconds. Where more information is received, clearly, the time taken will be longer. However, the main cost to the RPA arises from cases where Section 1.5 is not completed appropriately, that is, information given is not clear, or is evidently incomplete. It is the processing of the cases which led the RPA to re-examine the wording of Section 1.5. It is not possible to calculate accurately the cost of dealing with these.

Diana Organ: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many farmers have fully completed Section 1, No. 5, on the Beef Special Premium Scheme 2002 claim form; and how many have not complied and are stating only the holding address. [63627]

Mr. Morley: All Beef Special Premium Scheme 2002 claim forms where the only anomaly concerns the completion of Section 1, question 5 are being accepted and lodged with the Rural Payments Agency.

To date, the Rural Payments Agency has received just under 39,000 Beef Special Premium Scheme 2002 claims. It estimates that the current proportion of the forms having either no, or incomplete, information entered at Section 1, question 5 is 35 per cent. The agency will seek the additional information from producers where required.

Diana Organ: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the need for the changes that the Rural Payments Agency have made to Section 1, No. 5 of the Beef Special Premium Scheme 2002. [63626]

Mr. Morley: Article 10 of Commission Regulation (EC) No.2419/2001, which came into effect on 1 January 2002, requires that a livestock aid application shall contain where applicable, an undertaking by the farmer to keep claimed animals on his holding during the retention period and information on the location or locations where the animals will be held including the period or periods concerned. This requirement has not changed from the relevant previous regulation.

For operational reasons, the level of detail and the method of collecting it was changed for scheme year 2002. Following representations from industry representatives the Rural Payments Agency is currently reviewing Section 1, No. 5 of the Beef Special Premium Scheme 2002 form.

Countryside Stewardship Schemes

Diana Organ: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to offer continuous advice to farmers for improvements to their countryside stewardship schemes. [63625]

Mr. Morley: Staff from DEFRA's Rural Development Service operate a programme of visits to farmers with land under Countryside Stewardship Scheme agreement to advise them on technical aspects of management. However, provision of this advice is resource intensive and any decision to increase these advisory visits would need to balance the increase in resource costs against any increased environmental value for money which might result.

Advice on preparing new or upgraded applications to the scheme is available from various organisations including the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group, local wildlife trusts, and National Park authorities in the relevant areas.

All aspects of the Countryside Stewardship Scheme are currently under review.

Diana Organ: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) when she will review the Countryside Stewardship Scheme; [63623]

(2) what plans she has to change the 10 year timeframe of the Countryside Stewardship Scheme. [63624]

Mr. Morley: Countryside Stewardship is currently being reviewed as part of a wider review of English agri-environment schemes. An initial public consultation exercise, inviting views on a number of strategic questions, closed on 27 May 2002. 119 responses have been received and are now being analysed. The results from this consultation exercise will be used to help develop a revised framework for English agri-environment schemes, working closely with stakeholders. Any changes to the schemes will need to be submitted to the European Commission as a proposed modification to the England Rural Development Programme.

All aspects of the current Countryside Stewardship Scheme are under consideration in this review, including the length of agreements.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Crown Prosecution Service

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General (1) what steps have been taken by each CPS authority to progress the Glidewell recommendations for reorganising its work into functional units collocated with police units; and where and when this collocation has been achieved; [60223]

(2) if she will make a statement on variations in the pace of progress between CPS areas noted by HMCPSI. [60211]

The Solicitor-General: It has been assumed that the question regarding the pace of progress refers to the establishment of criminal justice units and trial units.

All chief crown prosecutors and chief constables have submitted joint plans detailing their strategy to implement the Glidewell recommendations. These plans were reviewed by a joint CPS/police working group to ensure that they followed the agreed model for joint administration. The model aims to reduce duplication and delay; focus freed up resources towards the more serious casework; and improve the service to victims and witnesses. CPS areas and their police partners regularly review their plans, actively seeking opportunities to maximise use of the combined police/CPS buildings and provide regular updates to the centre as and when their plans have progressed.

All CPS areas not yet collocated have reorganised their front line operations into discrete units to deal separately with Crown court and magistrates court work, in order to deliver at least some of the benefits envisaged by Glidewell.

As at 31 March 2002, there were 42 collocated criminal justice units established in 20 areas and 54 trial units in 32 areas. The schedule shows the location and date of establishment of these units.

The pace with which areas have progressed the Glidewell recommendations has largely been influenced by the availability of either suitable CPS or police buildings.

Criminal justice units

Area/location	*Date established*
Avon and Somerset	
Bristol	June 2000
Taunton	June 2000
Bedfordshire	—
Cambridgeshire	
Huntingdon	January 2002
Parkside	December 2001
Thorpe Wood	January 2002
Cheshire	
Crewe	March 2001
Cleveland	
Middlesbrough	October 2000
Hartlepool	February 2002
Cumbria	—
Derbyshire	—
Devon and Cornwall	—
Dorset	—
Durham	—
Dyfed Powys	—

Criminal justice units

Area/location	*Date established*
Essex	
Colchester	September 2000
Harlow	December 2000
Southend	November 2000
Laindon	March 2001
Gloucestershire	
Gloucester	April 2001
Greater Manchester	—
Gwent	—
Hampshire	
Basingstoke	June 2001
Aldershot	March 2001
Isle of Wight	October 2000
Portsmouth	April 2001
Portswood	July 2001
Hertfordshire	
St. Albans	April 2001
Watford	April 2001
Hertford	January 2002
Humberside	
Grimsby	April 2001
Scunthorpe	April 2001
Hull	June 2001
Kent	
Folkestone	January 2001
Maidstone	January 2001
Canterbury	July 2001
Chatham	July 2001
Lancashire	
Preston	March 2001
Leicestershire	—
Lincolnshire	
Skegness	June 2001
Merseyside	—
Metropolitan and City	
Bishopsgate	September 2001
Norfolk	—
Northamptonshire	
Weston Favell	October 2001
Northumbria	—
North Wales	
Caenarfon	April 2001
Colwyn Bay	January 2002
North Yorkshire	—
Nottinghamshire	—
South Wales	
Rumney	January 2002
South Yorkshire	
Barnsley	May 2000
Doncaster	November 2001
Staffordshire	—
Suffolk	—
Surrey	—
Sussex	—
Thames Valley	—
Warwickshire	—
West Mercia	—
West Midlands	
Brierly Hill	March 2001
Halesowen	March 2001
West Bromich	November 2001
West Yorkshire	
Halifax	October 2000
Wiltshire	—

Trial units

Area/location	*Date established*
Avon and Somerset	
Bristol	June 2000
Bedfordshire	
Luton	October 1999
Cambridgeshire	
Huntingdon	January 2002
Cheshire	
Chester	March 2001
Warrington	March 2001
Cleveland	
Middlesbrough	October 2000
Cumbria	—
Derbyshire	
Derby	October 2000
Devon and Cornwall	
Exeter	December 2000
Plymouth	December 2000
Truro	December 2001
Dorset	—
Durham	
Durham	March 2001
Dyfed Powys	
Carmathan	March 2002
Essex	
Chelmsford	March 2001
Gloucestershire	
Gloucester	October 2001
Greater Manchester	—
Gwent	
Newport	January 2001
Hampshire	
Isle of Wight	October 2000
Eastleigh	April 2001
Portsmouth	April 2001
Hertfordshire	
St. Albans	January 2002
Humberside	
Grimsby	April 2001
Hull	March 2001
Kent	
Maidstone	January 2001
Canterbury	January 2001
Lancashire	
Preston	May 2001
Burnley	May 2001
Leicestershire	—
Lincolnshire	
Lincoln	January 2001
Merseyside	
Liverpool	December 2000
Crosby	December 2000
Metropolitan and City	
Old Bailey	February 2001
Harrow/Isleworth	March 2002
Snarsbrook	March 2002
Southwark/Middlesex	March 2002
ILCC/Youth	March 2002
Blackfrairs/Woolwich	March 2002
Wood Green	March 2002
Kingston	March 2002
Croydon	March 2002
Norfolk	
Norwich	June 2001

Trial units

Area/location	*Date established*
Northamptonshire	—
Northumbria	
Newcastle	June 2001
North Wales	
Wrexham	March 2001
Colwyn Bay	January 2002
North Yorkshire	—
Nottinghamshire	
Nottingham	May 2000
South Wales	—
South Yorkshire	
Sheffield	December 2001
Staffordshire	
Stafford	October 2000
Newcastle under Lyme	October 2000
Suffolk	
Ipswich	April 2000
Surrey	
Guildford	April 2000
Sussex	—
Thames Valley	
Abindon, Reading and Aylesbury	April 2001
Warwickshire	—
West Mercia	—
West Midlands	
Birmingham	January 2001
Coventry	April 2001
Wolverhampton	January 2001
West Yorkshire	
Leeds	October 2000
Bradford	October 2000
Wiltshire	
Wiltshire	September 1999

TRANSPORT

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the mandate of the Technical Adaptation Committee on the protection of workers from the risks related to exposure to chemical physical and biological agents at work is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [55230]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

No committee with the name given and covering chemical, physical and biological agents is known to exist.

PPP Contracts

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what improvements in frequency of tube services will be delivered in each of the first seven years of the PPP contracts for each of the three consortia; [56216]

(2) when, for each line of London Underground, new trains will be introduced under the terms of PPP; [56214]

(3) when, for each line of London Underground, new capacity will be introduced under the terms of PPP; and how much new capacity will be introduced for each line. [56215]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 14 May 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

The modernisation plans for London Underground require contractors to meet performance specifications. The contracts do not specify the details of each individual project. Instead, the performance regime has been designed to deliver faster, more reliable and more pleasant journeys for passengers, as quickly as possible.

The specifications include demanding targets for improvements in Journey Time Capability (JTC), an outcome measure which reflects passengers' experiences of a range of factors affecting how quickly they can travel through the underground system.

Improvements in JTC through line upgrades, as specified in the current contracts, are as follows:

- Jubilee line: 22 per cent. by 2008
- Northern line: 18 per cent. by 2010
- Piccadilly line: 19 per cent. by 2013
- Bakerloo line: 15 per cent. by 2019
- Central line: 6 per cent. by 2004
- Victoria line:
  - Interim upgrade—5 per cent. by 2004
  - Main upgrade—14 per cent. by 1 September 2012 *
- Waterloo and City line: 12 per cent. by 2005
- Northern Sub-Surface lines:
  - Interim upgrade—2 per cent. by 2010
  - Main upgrade—17 per cent. by 2013
- Southern Sub-Surface lines:
  - First interim upgrade—2 per cent. by 2010
  - Second interim upgrade—3 per cent. by 2013
  - Main upgrade—11 per cent. by 2016.

To meet these specifications, the contractors will need to deliver substantial improvements across the entire system infrastructure, including works to increase frequency and capacity, and the introduction of new trains. In addition, on all lines contractors will be incentivised to improve availability scores, which measure infrastructure reliability. This will help London Underground to deliver service improvements, such as increased train frequency, irrespective of the timing of line upgrades.

The contracts directly specify improvements to trains on all lines, which must be delivered by the dates are as listed:

- Jubilee line: 2016
- Northern line: 2016
- Piccadilly line: 2013
- Bakerloo line: 2019
- Central line: 2015
- Victoria line: 1 September 2012 *
- Waterloo and City line: 2015
- Metropolitan line: 2013
- District line: 2014
- Hammersmith and City/Circle line: 2013.

All dates listed (except *) refer to contract years (ie 2005 ends on 31 March 2006). These are the latest dates by which improvements must be delivered. In practice, the infrastructure companies will need to start work on the upgrades many years in advance to meet these dates. Therefore many improvements will be delivered well before the contractual end-dates. The exact details of how the private sector companies intend to meet their contractual obligations are matters for the companies concerned.

Rail Crash Investigations

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what *(a)* contracts and *(b)* technical support contracts were (i) awarded and (ii) used by the Health and Safety Executive as part of their investigation into the derailment at Potters Bar in May; and if he will make a statement. [58651]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

In addition to all the work undertaken by the Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) internal laboratory, HSE engaged the following contractors to support their investigations of the Potters Bar rail crash:

Contractor

AEA Technology Rail—assistance with investigations (contractual arrangements will be via the central HSE call-off contract).

The investigation continues and further contracts may be let. However, it should be noted that providing an exhaustive list of all contractors would entail disproportionate cost.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what *(a)* contracts and *(b)* technical support contracts were (i) awarded and (ii) used by the Health and Safety Executive as part of their investigation into the Southall rail crash in September 1997; and if he will make a statement. [58648]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

Providing details of contracts let to support the Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) investigation of the Southall rail crash would entail disproportionate cost because the methods of record keeping have changed since the Southall crash.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what *(a)* contracts and *(b)* technical support contracts were (i) awarded and (ii) used by the Health and Safety Executive as part of their investigation into the Ladbroke Grove rail crash in October 1999; and if he will make a statement. [58649]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

In addition to all the work undertaken by the Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) internal laboratory, HSE engaged the following contractors to support their investigations of the Ladbroke Grove rail crash:

Contractor	*Research*
Grant Fire Consultants	Review of existing fire standards and a review of the literature in respect of the behaviour of fires on porous ground
Intertek Testing	Testing of gas/oil samples
Forensic Science Services	Paint analysis
Astra Zeneca	Auto ignition temperature test of samples of gas/oil
University of Sheffield	ICP analysis
Garvic Development	Design advice related to fuel tank impact test
IC Consultants	Technical support in respect of the failure of fuel tanks and of the collision dynamics

However, it should be noted that providing an exhaustive list of contractors would entail disproportionate cost.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what *(a)* contracts and *(b)* technical support contracts were (i) awarded and (ii) used by the Health and Safety Executive as part of their investigation into the derailment at Hatfield in October 2000; and if he will make a statement. [58650]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

In addition to all the work undertaken by the Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) internal laboratory, HSE engaged the following contractors to support their investigations of the Hatfield derailment:

Contractor	*Research*
Trimac Ltd.	Specialist photographic support
AEA Technology Rail	Assistance with investigation including on-site derailment investigation, track profile measurements and examination of vehicles
AEA Consultancy	Advice on non-destructive testing
Serco Rail-test	Practical non-destructive testing of rails
Sheffield Testing Labs.	Chemical analysis of steel samples, and machine and tensile test of rails

However, it should be noted that providing an exhaustive list of contractors would entail disproportionate cost.

SPADS

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what *(a)* contracts and *(b)* technical support contracts were (i) awarded and (ii) used by the Health and Safety Executive as part of their process of monitoring and investigating signals passed at danger; and if he will make a statement. [58647]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

The information is as follows.

Contractor	*Research*
Railway Industry Training Council	Development of a standard for defensive driving
Railtrack procurement	Signals passed at danger: rate in relation to signal type
AEA Technology	Human factors in reliability
Vectra	Proposed framework for addressing human factors in signal boxes; and circumstances surrounding Ladbroke Grove crash

Railway Lines

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what representations he has received from *(a)* the Health and Safety Commission, *(b)* the Health and Safety Executive, *(c)* Railtrack, *(d)* train operating companies and *(e)* others regarding (i) trespass, (ii) vandalism and (iii) informed vandalism on railway lines; and if he will make a statement; [58197]

(2) what discussions he has had with *(a)* the Health and Safety Commission, *(b)* the Health and Safety Executive, *(c)* Railtrack, *(d)* train operating companies and *(e)* others regarding (i) trespass, (ii) vandalism and (iii) informed vandalism on railway lines; and if he will make a statement. [58198]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 22 June 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

The Government are pleased that all sections of the rail industry have come together in the National Route Crime Group to examine and promote ways of tackling trespass and vandalism on the railways. The group includes passenger and freight train operators, Railtrack, Railway Safety, the Health and Safety Executive, British Transport police, trade unions, infrastructure contractors, the Rail Passengers Council and the Strategic Rail Authority. The Government will continue to remain in touch with these organisations on their efforts to reduce the incidence of trespass and vandalism on the railways.

Departmental Land

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the land that his Department *(a)* is offering for sale and *(b)* plans to offer in the next 12 months, giving its (i) location and (ii) size. [59060]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

I have placed in the Libraries of the House a spreadsheet listing the land, which the Department's Highways Agency is *(a)* offering for sale and *(b)* plans to offer in the next 12 months, giving its (i) location and (ii) where available, size.

Health and Safety Commission

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on what dates he has *(a)* met, *(b)* written to and *(c)* communicated with the chair of the Health and Safety Commission in the last 12 months; what the subject was of each communication; and if he will make a statement. [60000]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

Ministers are in regular contact with the chair of the Health and Safety Commission and have frequent meetings, formal and informal, and correspondence with him throughout the year. The precise information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Computers

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many computers were replaced in his Department in each of the past three years; how the replaced units were disposed of and by which companies; and at what cost. [60748]

Mr. Jamieson: The information requested is not held centrally, or in a format which permits ready answer to the questions, and could therefore be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Age Discrimination

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies have a policy of not considering applications for employment by persons over a particular age. [59459]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* My Department, including its agencies, follows the Civil Service Management Code. In line with that code, all applications for employment from persons below the age of 65 are considered equally.

Public Consultations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the public consultations undertaken by his Department since June 2001, stating in each case the *(a)* number of respondents and *(b)* percentage of those specifically consulted who responded. [60146]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* According to central records the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions issued 70 consultation documents between 1 June 2001 and 29 May 2002. I have placed a full list in the Library. The Department does not, however, keep central records of the numbers of responses received to each consultation.

Staff Numbers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many staff were employed by his Department on *(a)* 2 May 1997 and *(b)* 31 May 2002. [60918]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office (Mr. Alexander) on 13 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 1402W.

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the *(a)* cost and *(b)* saving from the pursuit of the Department's Public Service Agreement targets in each year since they were introduced. [61050]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department's Public Service Agreement sets out the key outcomes it is committed to deliver with the resources provided, and its Service Delivery Agreement sets out the key steps towards delivery of those targets. Every year the Department publishes performance against its targets—including on value for money and the resources it has used, in its departmental report.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the *(a)* cost and *(b)* saving has been from the Department's pursuit of Service Delivery Agreement targets in each year since they were introduced. [61635]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department's Public Service Agreement sets out the key outcomes it is committed to deliver with the resources provided, and its Service Delivery Agreement sets out the key steps towards delivery of those targets. Every year the Department publishes performance against its targets—including on value for money and the resources it has used, in its departmental report.

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much and what proportion of the departmental expenditure limit for 2002–03 had been spent by 31 May; what the figures were for 2001–02; and if he will make a statement. [61007]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Boateng) on 17 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 130W.

Small Businesses

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many regulations which cause additional burdens for small businesses have been introduced in the field of health and safety in the last three years. [61143]

Mr. Jamieson: During the period June 1999 to June 2002, 55 statutory instruments containing regulations relating to health and safety have been introduced. Not all of these will affect all firms, of whatever size; much depends on the nature of the business and the risks it creates. Some new legislation may indeed reduce burdens on small firms by simplifying existing legal requirements.

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps his Department intend to take to reduce administrative burdens in the field of health and safety for small businesses; and if he will make a statement. [61142]

Mr. Jamieson: HSE has long recognised the special needs of smaller businesses and the importance of ensuring that administrative requirements placed on them in the field of health and safety are kept to the minimum, while ensuring that they recognise and act on their duties to protect the safety and health of their own workers and others.

HSE consults widely on proposed regulations and guidance, although it recognises the need to ensure that small businesses are properly involved in developing its policies and practices and is currently looking at a variety of ways that will make it easier for small businesses to communicate with them.

Many of the problems come from incorrect interpretation of regulations, companies often believing that they need to take more complicated action than is actually necessary or not understanding what needs to be done. HSE, therefore, produces extensive guidance on most of its regulations, much of it targeted towards small firms.

HSE also continually looks for innovative ways to broaden its support to small businesses. For example, a pilot grant scheme is due to be launched shortly to provide some financial assistance for small businesses to access health and safety mentoring and training.

Women at Work (Pregnancy)

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action Her Majesty's Government are taking to monitor and improve awareness of pregnancy complications among women at work. [58251]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* The Health and Safety Executive published "New and Expectant Mothers at Work—A guide for employer" in 1995. The guide highlights the hazards and risks in relation to chemical, biological and physical agents, and working conditions and advises employers of possible pregnancy complications. A revised version is due to be launched in autumn 2002. To support this, HSE is planning to produce two additional leaflets—one for new and expectant mothers who work and the other for their health professionals.

Health Promotion England has also published, on behalf of the Department of Health, the "Pregnancy Book" that is given (free) to all first time mothers. The book provides comprehensive guidance and information to women for a healthy pregnancy.

Members of Parliament (Personal Data)

Mr. Forth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information is held by his Department on each hon. Member in relation to *(a)* personal relationships, both current and past, *(b)* financial status and dealings, *(c)* connections with companies and interest groups, *(d)* connections with Governments and *(e)* published works; and what was held in January 2002. [61826]

Mr. Darling: Ministers and officials in the Department have access to published reference sources, as well as to the information about hon. Members made publicly available by the House authorities, for the purpose of parliamentary business.

Employees Injured at Work

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the number of British companies which have in place policies on rehabilitation for employees injured at work. [58053]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* Although HSE has recently commissioned two surveys which have addressed rehabilitation at work in varying ways, neither asked whether a company has a policy on rehabilitation specifically for employees injured at work.

One of these surveys has suggested that: approximately 25 per cent. of employers surveyed knew how to access rehabilitation support.

Emerging findings from the other suggest that: 1,759 of the 4,950 companies surveyed provide rehabilitation programmes after illness.

Departmental Grants

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which organisations and outside bodies which were in receipt of grant in 1997–98 are no longer; what the annual saving is *(a)* individually and *(b)* in aggregate; which organisations and outside bodies which were not in receipt of grant in 1997–98 now are; and what the annual cost is (i) individually and (ii) in aggregate. [62046]

Mr. Jamieson: The information requested can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Road Accidents

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many people were involved in road accidents while riving within one year of receiving their driving licence in each year since 1995. [62946]

Mr. Jamieson: Information on the length of time for which drivers have held a licence is not collected as part of national road accident statistics. However, we do know from research that as many as one in five newly qualified drivers have some sort of accident in the first year of driving.

Competitive Tendering

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on how many occasions in the last 12 months the requirement to engage in a competitive tendering process has been waived by his Department due to national security obligations under paragraph 6(h) of the supply regulations. [62823]

Mr. Jamieson: There have been no occasions.

Passive Smoking

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what advice he has received since 29 October 1999 from the Health and Safety Commission on its proposed Approved Code of Practice on Passive Smoking at Work; and when he intends to approve the Code of Practice. [62849]

Mr. Jamieson: The chair of the Health and Safety Commission wrote on 5 October 2000 to the Minister with responsibility for health and safety advising about the commission's decision to favour the introduction of an Approved Code of Practice (ACoP). The Government are giving careful consideration to the commission's proposals. As part of this process, the commission has been asked to consider further both the implications of an ACoP on the hospitality sector and small businesses generally, and the role the Public Places Charter could play. I have not yet been formally asked to give consent for the introduction of an ACoP as this work is still in hand.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the Health and Safety Executive revised the regulatory impact assessment which was contained in the Health and Safety Commission consultative document, "Proposals for an Approved Code of Practice on Passive Smoking at Work"; and if he will publish it. [62848]

Mr. Jamieson: The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) partially revised the draft regulatory impact assessment (RIA) in August 2000. It would be inappropriate to publish this version because the Health and Safety Commission (HSC) has been requested to carry out further work on the proposals that it underpins.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the Health and Safety Executive revised the draft Approved Code of Practice on Passive Smoking which was consulted on in the Health and Safety Commission consultative document, proposals for an Approved Code of Practice on Passive Smoking at Work; and if he will publish it. [62847]

Mr. Jamieson: The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) partially revised the text of the Approved Code of Practice (ACoP) in August 2000. It would be inappropriate to publish this version of the ACoP because the Health and Safety Commission (HSC) has been requested to carry out further work on the proposals.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish a summary of responses to the Health and Safety Commission consultative document, proposals for an Approved Code of Practice on Passive Smoking at Work. [62846]

Mr. Jamieson: A brief summary of responses was included in the press release issued by the Health and Safety Commission on 5 September 2000. Individual responses, subject to respondents' requests for confidentiality, are available for inspection at Health and Safety Executive (HSE) Information Centres.

Parliamentary Questions

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the oral statement of 25 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 586, what the number and/or column reference was of the written parliamentary question from the week of 18 to 24 March, to which the then Secretary of State refers to with regard to letters of comfort. [62294]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* My right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, was referring to the draft comfort letters for the London Underground that were reported to Parliament using the minute procedure on 20 March 2002. The minute was placed in the Libraries of the House and reported to the Transport Select Committee and to the Public Accounts Committee.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library a copy of his guidance for officials on answering parliamentary questions. [62575]

Mr. Darling: Answers to parliamentary questions are drafted in accordance with "Guidance to Officials on Drafting Answers to Parliamentary Questions" issued by the Cabinet Office. In addition, guidance is issued to officials within the Department on deadlines and format for the different types of parliamentary questions. A copy of that guidance (which will be updated to reflect the recent machinery of government changes) has been placed in the Library of the House.

Driving Lessons

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many responses he has received to the consultation document on, Introducing a More Structured Approach to Learning to Drive, broken down by category of respondents. [63110]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department has received over 300 responses to this consultation document. These have come from a wide range of interests including driving instructors and their trade associations, road safety and road user groups, other organisations and individuals with an interest in the issues raised in the document. Responses are still being received and they have not yet been broken down into categories.

Aviation Kerosene

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment the Government have made on the environmental benefits of a tax on aviation kerosene; and what plans he has to work towards an international agreement to impose such a duty. [63634]

Mr. Jamieson: Our assessment is that a tax on aviation kerosene would have worthwhile environmental benefits in reducing climate change impacts from aircraft emissions but only if it were imposed internationally. The International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) concluded at its assembly last October that alternative measures such as an open emissions trading scheme or an emissions charge could be equally if not more environmentally beneficial than such a tax. The UK is currently assisting ICAO in following up these possibilities.

Strategic Rail Authority

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has finalised agreement with the Strategic Rail Authority to introduce a standard three hour journey time between London and Plymouth. [63641]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 27 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1369W. This is not a matter that requires my agreement.

"The New Humber Pilotage Service"

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what consultation took place with Humber Pilots Limited on the time spent to complete an act of pilotage for the DTLR document, "The New Humber Pilotage Service"; and what the outcome of this consultation was; [62996]

(2) what the source of the statistic was that new very large ships pilots on the Humber have already done over 100 very large ships each on the DTLR document, "The New Humber Pilotage Service" (paragraph 3.21). [62997]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 21 June 2002]:* The information was obtained from detailed individual records maintained by the competent harbour authority, Associated British Ports.

Stena Gothica

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the Humber pilot in charge of the Stena Gothica on 2 April was authorised by Associated British Ports. [63620]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 21 June 2002]:* This incident is currently the subject of an investigation by the Marine Accident Investigation Branch. All the pilots now working on the Humber have been authorised (or in some cases re-authorised) by the competent harbour authority on or after 12 December 2001, when the former pilots went on strike.

Humber Pilots

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what percentage of Associated British Ports' new Humber pilots have an unlimited Foreign Going Master's Certificate or Class 1; [62998]

(2) what percentage of new Humber pilots have a United Kingdom/European Union Certificate of Competency. [62999]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 21 June 2002]:* This is a matter for the competent harbour authority which has the statutory responsibility for deciding what qualifications are required from applicants for authorisation. There is no rule requiring any particular seafaring qualification and practice varies.

Speed Limit (Motorways)

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to increase the speed limit on motorways. [64212]

Mr. Jamieson: There are no plans to increase the speed limit on motorways.

Consultation Exercises

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list each consultation exercise being carried out by his Department, including the start date, the date by which responses had to be returned and the expected date for reporting on the consultation. [63789]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 21 June 2002]:* According to central records the Department is currently carrying out nine consultation exercises. A full list of these consultation exercises, including start dates and dates by which responses must be returned, has been placed in the Library. Reports on consultations are published once all of the responses have been received, and the issues they raise, have been considered.

Railtrack

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what *(a)* discussions have taken place and *(b)* assessment he has made of the role of developing an asset register of Railtrack upon delay attribution; and if he will make a statement. [64147]

Mr. Spellar: None. There is no direct correlation between the development of an asset register and the process of delay attribution. The register will contain information on the condition, capability and capacity of Railtrack's assets.

Rail Safety

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many rail workers have been injured while working on rail lines, in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [60392]

Mr. Jamieson: The numbers of workers injured while working on rail lines in each year since 1997 is as follows:

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Major injuries	6	3	3	2
Minor injuries	18	7	12	4

The Railway Group Safety Plan for 2001–02 sets out a number of detailed targets for reducing risks to railway staff working on Railtrack's infrastructure.

Gillian Merron: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he plans to introduce legislation requiring rail network companies to introduce a specific type of safety mechanism onto rolling stock over a certain age; and if he will make a statement. [63695]

Mr. Spellar: There is no safety legislation relating specifically to the age of rolling stock. The Railway Safety Regulations 1999 require a form of automatic train protection where reasonably practical, for example the Train Protection and Warning System (TPWS), to be fitted on all trains and key signals throughout the rail network by the end of 2003.

Under the same regulations all Mark 1 rolling stock must be fitted with a safety modification (to prevent overriding in the event of two Mark 1 carriages colliding in an accident) by the end of 2002, in order to remain in service until the end of 2004 when they will finally be withdrawn from service. An exemption from the regulations can only be granted by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). The HSE is currently conducting a public consultation on an application for exemption to fit the safety modification received from the three Mark 1 train operating companies, South West Trains, Connex South Eastern and South Central. The HSE is expected to make a decision in the autumn.

Network Rail

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what internal investigations have been launched by his Department and by its predecessor into grey market share trading in Railtrack shares before the Network Rail bid was announced on 25 March. [63788]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 21 June 2002]:* None. Market surveillance is properly a matter for the Financial Services Authority.

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the mandate of the Committee on Experts on the Transit of Electricity through Grids is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [61709]

Ms Hewitt: I have been asked to reply.

The role of the committee is to mediate in disputes between network operators over conditions for the use of electricity transit lines, as set out in Article 3 of Council Directive 90/547/EEC of 29 October 1990 on the transit of electricity through transmission grids.

The committee has not met in the past 12 months. The UK representation is provided by the National Grid Group plc. There is no UK public funding of this committee. There are no items currently under consideration by the committee.

The Commission's current proposals for liberalising the European energy market would repeal Directive 90/547/EEC and so remove the legal base for this committee.

There are no plans to increase accountability and transparency as it is about to be dissolved.

Mobile Phone Masts

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps the Department has taken to monitor the mobile phone industry's adherence to its 10 voluntary commitments on siting and erection of mobile phone masts. [59633]

Mr. McNulty: I have been asked to reply.

The then Minister for Housing, Planning and Regeneration met representatives of the five mobile phone network operators on 8 May 2002 to discuss their progress in meeting their commitments and to discuss the audit arrangements that they have put in place to assess continuing compliance with the commitments.

Work currently under way to revise the Code of Best Practice on Mobile Phone Masts is building on the commitments and on our guidance in Planning Policy Guidance Note 8 (Telecommunications) to improve consultation on mast proposals with local communities and local planning authorities. The Working Group established to take that work forward will monitor the operation of the revised Code and effectiveness of the commitments themselves.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

International Baccalaureate

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what funding is available for scholarship support relating to International Baccalaureate study at the United World college. [63183]

Mr. Miliband: The Department has no direct involvement in and does not fund any scholarship programmes relating to the International Baccalaureate.

Infant Classes

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the *(a)* average infant class size was in each year since 1997 and *(b)* total number of infants in classes in each of these years was. [62855]

Mr. Miliband: The requested information is shown in the table.

Average size of infant classes[1,2] in England

	Number of classes	Number of pupils	Average class size
2002[3]	61,527	1,548,947	25.2
2001	62,480	1,575,160	25.2
2000	62,651	1,614,641	25.8
1999	61,597	1,629,716	26.5
1998	61,142	1,654,287	27.1
1997	61,107	1,646,660	26.9

[1] One teacher classes

[2] Position in January each year

[3] Provisional

Source:

Annual Schools Census

Music and Ballet Assisted Places

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many pupils were educated on the music and ballet assisted places scheme in each academic year since 1997; and at what cost in each year. [62782]

Mr. Miliband: The music and ballet scheme has been renamed the music and dance scheme. The information requested is given in the following table:

Academic year	*Number of aided pupils*	*Total cost (AY) £ million*
1997–98	659	9.4
1998–99	693	10.0
1999–2000	710	10.6
2000–01	749	11.2
2001–02[1]	771	12.2

[1] Estimate

Connexions Card (Proof of Age)

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans he has to use the connexions card as the basis for a national proof-of-age scheme for young people. [63213]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The primary purpose of the connexions card is to encourage young people to continue in learning, after the age of 16. However, the features of the card mean that it can be used for proof-of-age purposes by young people, if they wish.

Medical Students

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many students in absolute numbers and as a percentage of the total were admitted to study medicine in UK medical schools from *(a)* independent schools, *(b)* public sector schools and *(c)* abroad, broken down by medical school in each year since 1997. [59776]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* The information requested has been placed in the Libraries.

Medical Degrees

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to the answer of 29 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 581W, on medical degrees, how many medical degree places were offered by higher education institutions; and how many of these places were taken up by pre-clinical medical students, in each year since 1997. [59552]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* The latest information is shown in the table.

Students accepted to pre-clinical medical courses in the UK

	Planned intake	Accepted applicants[1]
1997	5,020	5,029
1998	5,062	5,119
1999	5,165	5,312
2000	5,595	5,714
2001	5,928	6,240

[1] Home and overseas domiciled students accepted via the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS).

Aberdeen Bacterial Culture Collection

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what support is being given to the maintenance and development of the bacterial culture collection in Aberdeen; and whether the level of that support will increase in the current year. [62028]

Ms Hewitt: I have been asked to reply.

Support from the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) for the bacteria culture collection—the National Industrial and Environmental Culture Collections (NIECC)—in Aberdeen totalled £197,000 over the 12 month period to 31 July 2002. BBSRC is currently reviewing future funding for the collection in the light of a significant decrease in demand for cultures from UK industry and academic centres over the last three years.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Pensions

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what changes there have been in *(a)* cash and *(b)* real terms in the state pension between 1998–99 an 2002–03. [44030]

Mr. McCartney: Between 1998–99 and 2002–03 Basic State Pension has increased from £64.70 to £75.50. This is an increase of £10.80 in cash terms.

If the Basic State Pension had been uprated in line with prices, the value in 2002–03 would have been £70.95. There has been a real increase of £4.55 in Basic State Pension between 1998–99 and 2002–03.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many cases have arisen in the past two years in which persons approaching pensionable age have been incorrectly advised in writing by the Benefits Agency that their additional pension will be nil. [60485]

Mr. McCartney: The information requested is not available.

Winter Fuel

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the winter fuel payments advertising campaign. [46471]

Mr. McCartney: This year's Winter Fuel Payment advertising campaign has closely mirrored campaigns from previous years which gave people two routes for claiming; a Helpline and a claim form on press adverts. During the press advertising the Department gathered information from people who rang the Winter Fuel Payment Helpline to find out where they had found out about the Helpline.

As of 15 March 2002, 278,643 claim forms had been issued from the Helpline of which 217,678 had been returned along with 4,494 internet forms. The Helpline had also received 22,915 coupons in response to national press advertising.

Targeting Fraud Website

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many hits the Targeting Fraud website has received; how many cases of suspected fraud have been reported to the website; how many of these suspected cases have been investigated; how many of them have led to a successful prosecution; and how many of them have led to a custodial sentence. [56418]

Malcolm Wicks: The website is only one part of the Targeting Fraud advertising campaign, just as prosecution is only one way of punishing fraudsters. The campaign is succeeding in raising awareness of benefit fraud and reinforcing the message that committing fraud is wrong.

The available information is in the table.

Targeting fraud website from 7 May 2000 to 31 March 2002

Number of hits	[1]1,653,514
Number of cases of suspected fraud reported	11,802
Number of cases accepted for action by investigation staff	2,734
Number of resulting investigations completed	673
Number of resulting benefit rate changes	[2]180
Number of prosecutions so far	4
Number of resulting custodial sentences	[3]n/a

[1] The figure is for the number of hits to 30 March 2002. The number of hits is recorded on a weekly basis and cannot be broken down further.

[2] Figures include increases and decreases and can relate either to fraud, client error or official error.

[3] Information is not collated centrally on the number of custodial sentences arising from investigations as a direct result of the Targeting Fraud Website.

Source:

Internet Team, DWP Communications and Fraud Information By Sector system.

Rent Service

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 7 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 79W, on the Rent Service, if he will call for a report from the Rent Service on the basis of its estimate of the likely increase in the number of localities following the Court of Appeal judgment on local reference rent restrictions in Stockport; and if he will publish the report. [56540]

Malcolm Wicks: To commission a report would place an unnecessary administrative burden on the Rent Service.

Grants

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions which organisations and outside bodies which were in receipt of grant in 1997–98 are no longer; what the annual saving is *(a)* individually and *(b)* in aggregate; which organisations and outside bodies which were not in receipt of grant in 1997–98 now are; and what the annual cost is (i) individually and (ii) in aggregate. [62044]

Mr. McCartney: The organisations and outside bodies currently receiving grants from the Department for Work and Pensions are the same as those receiving grants from the constituent parts of the Department during 1997–98.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he *(a)* suspended and *(b)* plans to reinstate the CSA deferred debt scheme; and if he will make a statement. [61999]

Malcolm Wicks: Section 27(5) of the Child Support, Pensions and Social Security Act 2000 means that no new Temporary Compensation Payment agreements may be entered into after 31 March 2002. Regulations under section 27(9) of the Act to revive the scheme have been laid before the House today.

Gillian Merron: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether he plans to allow the Child Support Agency the power of surveillance in tackling fraud; and if he will make a statement. [63693]

Malcolm Wicks: The Child Support Agency has wide information gathering powers, including being able to require that employers and accountants provide them with relevant information.

These powers have been buttressed by the creation, in section 13 of the Child Support, Pensions and Social Security Act 2000, of two new criminal offences, of failing to give information and of knowingly giving false information. These offences carry fines of up to £1,000. The provision has been in force since January 2001.

Ministers have therefore taken the view that the Child Support Agency need not use the powers granted to the Department by its inclusion, as a relevant public authority for the purposes of sections 28 and 29 of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000, in Schedule 1 of that Act. An important additional factor in that decision is that surveillance is intensely resource-intensive and diversion of resources into such activity cannot be justified when the Agency's focus must be on implementation of the new child support scheme. The position on the use of surveillance is kept under review.

Entertainment Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the cost was of the Department's 2001 staff Christmas party; and how many people attended. [61666]

Mr. McCartney: The Department for Work and Pensions does not hold an official staff Christmas party, nor does it provide funding for individual staff Christmas parties within its organisation.

Second State Pension

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he has taken to publicise the second state pension to carers. [62385]

Mr. McCartney: Most people will automatically benefit from the state second pension without having to do anything new or different. Our publicity activity therefore focuses on the groups who may not automatically start building up state second pension and may need to take appropriate action, primarily carers and parents.

We have produced information both on our website and as a leaflet to inform these two groups about the state second pension and to outline any action they may need to take to build up entitlement. We are also currently conducting promotional activity for carers and parents about state second pension, which includes press advertising in national and local press and relevant magazines and direct mail to relevant advisory organisations.

We anticipate carrying out further promotional activity in the future to continue to ensure that people are aware of the action they need to take to benefit from the availability of the state second pension.

Vaccine Damage Payments

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the target date is for the implementation of the new rules on vaccine damage payments. [62605]

Maria Eagle: The Regulatory Reform (Vaccine Damage Payments Act 1979) Order 2002, which introduces the new rules on Vaccine Damage Payments, came into force on 16 June 2002.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the average time taken by each local authority in England and Scotland to process new housing benefit applications was in the most recent year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [63692]

Malcolm Wicks: Under Best Value, we have set a range of performance indicators for Housing Benefit which are designed to ensure that authorities provide their communities with a faster, more accurate service which is more secure against fraud, and which provides value for money and takes account of the views and needs of clients. Authorities are required to set challenging local targets against the indicators and, from April 2002, have been set aspirational targets for speed of processing.

The first full year in which data was collected on the performance of local authorities against Best Value performance indicators was 2000–01. Information on the average time taken by each local authority in England to process new Housing Benefit claims for 2000–01 has been placed in the Library.

Information on the average time taken by each local authority in Scotland to process new Housing Benefit claims for 2000–01 is in the Accounts Commission publication "Performance Indicators 2000–01: Benefits, Finance and Corporate Issues", a copy of which is available in the Library.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Afghanistan

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what financial aid she estimates infrastructure reconstruction projects in Afghanistan still require. [61761]

Clare Short: The preliminary needs assessment that was prepared for the Tokyo conference estimated, under a low case scenario, that Afghanistan's funding requirements over the next five years would be $8.3 billion, excluding humanitarian inputs. It is doubtful whether Afghanistan will have the capacity to absorb this amount in the short term: our estimate is that a total of $1 billion per annum will be required for a combination of humanitarian, recovery and reconstruction activities. Provided donors deliver on the pledges made at Tokyo, sufficient funds should be available.

Southern Africa

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether she has discussed the famine in southern Africa with CDC Capital Partners. [62425]

Clare Short: CDC is not involved in famine relief.

Urban Slums

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent projects her Department has undertaken to reduce the number of people living in urban slums in developing countries. [63512]

Clare Short: Increasingly we are providing assistance to developing countries through Direct Budget Support to enable developing country Governments to take forward their own priorities under their Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) agreed with the international community. All PRSPs include a section on addressing urban poverty issues.

In addition in India, for example, we have supported the Government of Andhra Pradesh in their programme for urban services for the poor. This programme works at a policy level with the 32 class 1 municipalities in the state, and provides support to encourage investments in upgrading slum areas. This experience has also been taken into account with new work on urban poverty reduction in Kolkata (Calcutta) and in Kenya and Jamaica where DFID has supported work to help local organisation of the urban poor initiate improvements in the living conditions of the urban poor.

In addition, we are directly supporting the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) in their work to provide guidance and best practice advice to developing countries in reducing the numbers of people living in slum conditions and are working with the collaborative UN Urban Management Programme. The latter provides working examples of improved practice at the local government level.

We are also collaborating globally with 17 other partners, including all G7 members, in the Cities Alliance which has the overall objective of "Cities Without Slums". In practical terms, we have helped them develop the Community-led Infrastructure Finance Facility which will provide better access of local community groups to local bank funding of their own projects. This is seen as a long-term process for people to take command of their own improvements in living conditions.

Water Conservation

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent projects her Department has undertaken to support water conservation projects in developing countries. [63510]

Clare Short: The term water conservation may refer to increasing storage of water resources, greater efficiency in the use of water resources, or to the conservation of valuable aquatic ecosystems. DFID has supported a substantial number of activities seeking to address all of these. The number is too great to list here, but the projects and programmes set out give an illustration of the type of engagement DFID are undertaking:

Increasing storage of water resources

Current projects include:

Sustainable management of West Bank and Gaza aquifers

Augmenting groundwater resources by artificial recharge

Community management of groundwater resources

Guidelines for implementing environmental flows.

Greater efficiency in the use of water

DFID has funded many research projects looking at ways in which the water efficiency in irrigation can be improved and has encouraged Governments to take up the results. These include:

Raising irrigation productivity and releasing water for intersectoral needs.

Improving community spate irrigation systems

Improved irrigation in peri-urban areas.

Conservation of aquatic ecosystems

Examples of DFID support include the Uganda Lake Management project and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Water and Nature Initiative, particularly the elements looking at wetland economics and ecosystem based livelihoods.

DFID is also directly supporting developing countries in preparing and implementing comprehensive policies and strategies for integrated water resource management. To have these strategies in the process of implementation by 2005 is one of the internationally agreed targets to which DFID is committed.

DFID is also supporting a number of global initiatives that are promoting water conservation in all its interpretations. These include the Global Water Partnership, the International Hydrological Programme, the World Commission for Dams (and the subsequent Dams for Development Unit), Water for Food and Nature Dialogue and the International Programme for Technology and Research in Irrigation and Drainage.

Monitoring of water conservation activities and consequences is also supported through agencies such as the World Water Assessment Programme and the Joint Monitoring Programme of WHO and Unicef, both of which DFID contribute to.

Agricultural Irrigation

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her policy is on the subsidy of freshwater extraction for use in agricultural irrigation. [63511]

Clare Short: For all water uses, the Department for International Development is fully committed to the Dublin Principles (from the International Conference on Water and the Environment in Dublin in 1992) that (i) fresh water is a finite and vulnerable resource, essential to sustain life, development and the environment, and (ii) water has an economic value in all its competing uses and should be regarded as an economic good. DFID are also committed to Agenda 21 (which was prepared at the Earth summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992) which provides that water resources must be managed for sustainable food production and development.

Experience shows that management autonomy, adequate financial resources and tariffs that provide an acceptable return are all important for success improving efficiency in water use and in sustainable management of water resources.

DFID policy is that water users should pay the full economic cost of providing water, while at the same time ensuring that there is equity in access to water. Users should pay for the level of service provided, but with scope for subsidies to lower volume users.

DEFENCE

ISAF (Afghanistan)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what financial support will be given to Turkey in taking over the leadership of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan; and if he will make a statement. [43007]

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what financial support the Turkish Government will receive in respect of their leadership of ISAF; what proportion of this cost will be borne by the UK Government; and which Government Department will bear the cost. [50052]

Mr. Hoon: The US Administration has submitted a request to Congress for a significant amount of funding for Turkey's leadership of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). Approval is still awaited for this. Any questions on this subject should be directed to the US themselves. The United Kingdom will not be giving any financial assistance, but has agreed to leave in Afghanistan for use by ISAF some computer and communications equipment and a fire engine.

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date the UK will relinquish the leadership of the International Security Assistance Force. [43529]

Mr. Ingram: The United Kingdom formally relinquished the leadership of the International Security Assistance Force on 20 June 2002.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what date has been set for the transfer of the leadership of ISAF from the UK to Turkey; how many UK forces will stay in Afghanistan after this transfer; and if he will make a statement. [62895]

Mr. Hoon: I refer the hon. Member to the statement on operations in Afghanistan that I made in the House on 20 June 2002, *Official Report*, columns 407–21.

Monthly Manning State

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place a copy of the latest Monthly Manning State in the Library; and if he will make it his policy to place each new edition in the Library immediately it is printed each month. [57636]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to Tri-Service Publication 1: UK Regular Forces Strengths and Changes and Tri-Service Publication 3: UK Armed Forces Strengths and Requirements. These are both available in the Library of the House and are updated on a monthly basis.

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much and what proportion of the departmental expenditure limit for 2002–03 will be accounted for by staff costs; what the figures were for 2001–02; and if he will make a statement. [61021]

Mr. Ingram: In 2002–03 staff for service and civilian personnel costs are planned to be £9.777 billion. This is some 40 per cent. of the budgeted Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL) of £24.597 billion provided for in the Main Supply Estimates (Cm 5510).

In 2001–02 the provisional outturn is £9.377 billion which represents some 38 per cent. of the DEL agreed at Spring Supplementary Estimates of £24.690 billion. In Main Estimates 2001–02 (Cm 5109) staff costs were planned to be £9.533 billion within a total of £23.770 billion, some 40 per cent.

Ethnic Monitoring

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what ethnic monitoring is conducted by the Army. [63199]

Mr. Ingram: The Army monitors its equal opportunities climate through the use of both quantitative and qualitative data. It is currently looking at recruitment progress of ethnic minority personnel in relation to their non-ethnic counterparts and the representation of ethnic minorities in the Army. In addition, the armed forces are currently undertaking a full re-survey of the ethnic origin of all personnel in line with the revised categories contained in the 2001 census.

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of soldiers in each of the guards regiments are members of an ethnic minority. [63214]

Mr. Ingram: The data detailed represents the proportion of soldiers, trained and untrained, in each of the Guards Regiments that have been recorded as members of an ethnic minority. Due to the current ethnic re-categorisation survey being undertaken within the Ministry of Defence the figures are as at 1 October 2001, which is the latest available data.

Regiments	*Percentage*
Grenadier Guards	3.0
Coldstream Guards	0.8
Scots Guard	1.3
Irish Guards	3.3
Welsh Guards	1.3
Total	1.9

The figure does not include those with unspecified ethnic origin. Guards in an unspecified regiment have not been included.

Colchester Garrison

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the original estimate was for *(a)* the gross cost and *(b)* the consequent annual rental in respect of the redevelopment of the Colchester Garrison; and what his latest estimate is in each case. [63351]

Mr. Ingram: The detailed figures are commercial in confidence, and at this stage I am therefore withholding the information under Exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set out the key milestones for the public finance initiative in respect of the re-development of the Colchester Garrison, stating the *(a)* given, *(b)* 90 per cent. and *(c)* 50 per cent. probable timetable in each case. [63352]

Mr. Ingram: On current plans, the project should reach financial close by October 2004. A risk programme with percentages is still subject to negotiation with RMPA Services.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many soldiers are living in temporary accommodation at Colchester Garrison; and when new single living accommodation will be available to replace the temporary accommodation. [63353]

Mr. Ingram: There are some 130 soldiers living in temporary accommodation in Colchester Garrison. Under the private finance initiative, some single living accommodation would be available, on current plans, in mid-2007, and the remainder in 2009. We are investigating whether there is any scope for bringing forward these dates.

Sikhs

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Sikhs are serving in the armed forces. [63614]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 21 June 2002]:* There are currently 63 regular armed forces personnel who have recorded their religion as Sikh.

Ordnance (Kenya)

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the answer of 24 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 263W, on ordnance (Kenya), when he expects the information described to be made available. [63758]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 21 June 2002]:* I hope to be in a position to provide the information before the summer recess.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Scottish HQs

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many global companies have headquarters in Scotland. [59377]

Mr. Wilson: It is not possible to provide this information from the Register of Companies.

All limited companies with a registered office in Scotland are registered at Companies House in Edinburgh. The register does not hold separate information on the global or national nature of the company. Companies who are not protected by limited liability do not have to register at all.

Arms Exports

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what level of debt to the Export Credits Guarantee Department as a result of arms sales *(a)* was created in each of the last five years and *(b)* remains unpaid for each of the last five years. [62039]

Ms Hewitt: The table indicates ECGD claims payments in respect of exports of defence equipment in the last five years for which audited figures are available. Most of these claims have been rescheduled through the Paris Club, thus deferring the debtor country's obligations.

Year/market	*Claims payments (£000)*	*Recovery status*
1996		
Algeria	28,295	Rescheduled in Paris Club
Egypt	6,565	Rescheduled in Paris Club
Jordan	14,865	Rescheduled in Paris Club
Kenya	2	Rescheduled in Paris Club
1997		
Algeria	12,585	Rescheduled in Paris Club
Egypt	1,402	Rescheduled in Paris Club
Jordan	24,742	Rescheduled in Paris Club
Kenya	48	Rescheduled in Paris Club
1998		
Indonesia	20,899	Rescheduled in Paris Club
Jordan	10,141	Rescheduled in Paris Club
Kenya	14	Rescheduled in Paris Club
1999		
Indonesia	151,216	Rescheduled in Paris Club
Zimbabwe	973	Recovered in full
2000		
Indonesia	180,169	Rescheduled in Paris Club
Zimbabwe	890	Awaiting recovery

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the level was of export credit guarantee coverage for arms sales in each of the last five years. [62038]

Ms Hewitt: According to ECGD's last five published annual report and accounts, guarantees in support of exports of defence equipment were provided for the following amounts:

Year	*£ billion*
1996–97	0.37
1997–98	0.76
1998–99	1.7
1999–2000	1.58
2000–01	2.73

Sub-post Offices

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what criteria are used in the granting of the right to sub-post offices to issue vehicle licences where there is strong local demand. [62797]

Mr. Timms: Acting as an agent, Post Office Ltd. is dependent on the level of service required through post offices by the Driver Vehicle Licensing Agency. I am informed by Post Office Ltd. that criteria used to place the motor vehicle licensing (MVL) facility include availability of office space, car parking, local customer demand and the need to maintain a geographical spread. Currently 4,091 offices offer MVL services.

Current figures also indicate that 90 per cent. of people are within one mile of a post office which offers these MVL services.

Architectural Businesses

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what help is provided to small and medium sized architectural businesses to facilitate their involvement in *(a)* Government funded building projects and *(b)* urban regeneration projects; [62789]

(2) what assistance is given to small and medium sized architectural businesses to enable them to make successful bids for urban regeneration funded projects. [62788]

Mr. Wilson: The Department of Trade and Industry is working with the construction industry (including architects) to promote and embed the principles of rethinking construction. This initiative emphasises the need to integrate the construction team (including suppliers, contractors, professional advisers and clients) in order to deliver a high quality product that adds value to the client's activities. As part of this initiative, the Department has helped to fund the development of Design Quality Indicators which provide a means to assess the quality of a design as seen by architects, suppliers, clients and end users. These indicators will be launched jointly by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) and the Construction Industry Council on 8 July. I, along with my Ministerial Design Champion colleagues, have also committed to the production of action plans to ensure that construction projects taken forward by this Department adhere to the principles of rethinking construction and take fully into account the need for high quality design.

The Department is also working very closely with CABE to promote understanding within both the public and private sector of how fundamental good design is both to the delivery of value for money and to the delivery of buildings which add to the quality of life of those using the building or living in the community around it. CABE undertakes a wide range of activities to encourage and facilitate improved design that are aimed at architects, suppliers and clients. These include: grants to develop and maintain architecture centres throughout the UK which provide a source of expertise and advice for both architects and clients; provision of training for both architects and clients to improve skills and improve understanding by clients of the sort of service they need from architects; design competitions to encourage small and new practices to develop projects and to showcase their skills; and the development of a digital website to showcase regeneration projects and projects covering a variety of different types of public buildings both to provide advice on how to deliver a good project and also to showcase the talents of architects.

The Office of Government Commerce, with CABE, has met with the Royal Institute of British Architects to discuss the issue of access of small and medium sized architectural firms to Government contracts. This dialogue is ongoing. In addition, CABE is working with individual Government Departments to promote a diversity of design firms on specific projects, most recently with the Department for Education and Skills on Neighbourhood Nurseries and SureStart.

Broadband Access

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what financial assistance has been provided to *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* regional development agencies to encourage internet service providers to roll out broadband internet facilities to villages and small towns throughout the United Kingdom; [62100]

(2) what incentives are offered by her Department to encourage internet service providers to roll out broadband technology facilities to villages and small towns throughout the United Kingdom. [62099]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 18 June 2002]:* The Government have made available a £30 million fund to help the Regional Development Agencies and devolved Administrations develop innovative schemes to extend broadband networks.

The Government's broadband strategy was set out in the UK Online annual report, and included measures to maximise competition in the broadband market and facilitate easy access to broadband services.

Structural Funds can also be used for broadband access projects provided they meet the criteria set out in the Single Programming Documents agreed with the Commission for each English region and the devolved Administrations.

Export Finance (Energy Production)

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answer of 10 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 978W, on export finance, if she will list *(a)* the project name, *(b)* the country location, *(c)* the capacity in MW, *(d)* the estimated carbon emissions and *(e)* the value of the loan guaranteed for the seven coal-fired power stations for which the ECGD has provided Overseas Investment Insurance and other insurance. [63324]

Ms Hewitt: It is ECGD policy not to publish details of cases involving Overseas Investment Insurance or other insurance facilities. This is to protect ECGD's own operations as there is a risk that knowledge by the buyer of the presence of export related insurance may increase the risk of action that may lead to a claim being paid. Details of insurance are also commercially sensitive on the part of the UK exporter or investor, as the presence of investment or export related insurance may harm their relationship with their buyer, local partner or the host Government. The same sensitivities do not apply so much to ECGD's guarantee or finance facilities as by nature these are usually more complex products and all parties will generally be aware of the presence of ECGD support. This approach is consistent with that adopted by export credit agencies in other countries.

According to information already published the insurance cases in respect of seven coal-fired power stations involved a total capacity of 4,960 MW and annual CO_2 emissions of approximately 17.9 million tonnes per year.

Coal Plant (Philippines)

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether the ECGD has received *(a)* an application for support and *(b)* an expression of interest from UK firms for possible ECGD support regarding the proposed coal plant at Pulupandan in Negros Occidental, the Philippines. [63197]

Ms Hewitt: ECGD has no record of any applications for support or any expressions of interest from UK firms in relation to this project.

Energy Consumption

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the estimated level of energy consumption was per square metre within the UK in *(a)* commercial, *(b)* retail and *(c)* Government offices in each year since 1997. [63374]

Mr. Wilson: Figures are as shown in the table.

Gigajoules per square metre per year

Energy consumption	*1997*	*2000*
Commercial offices	0.88	0.91
Retail sector	1.00	0.98
Government sector	1.09	1.05

These figures are from the Building Research Establishment (BRE). Figures for 2000 were published in BRE's Report "Carbon Dioxide Emissions from non-Domestic Buildings: 2000 and beyond". Comparable figures are not available for 1998 and 1999.

World Trade

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 26 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1129W, on the WTO, if she will make a statement on progress with measures to make the WTO more transparent and open and its rules easier to understand, including details of measures proposed by the UK Government. [63440]

Ms Hewitt: On 14 May 2002—after four years of negotiation—WTO members agreed improved procedures for the circulation and derestriction of WTO documents. This marks an important step forward in making its operations more transparent.

The UK Government supported moves towards even greater relaxation of the rules on restricting documents, but some other WTO members, not least from developing countries, remain concerned about the implications for their negotiating positions within the organisation and the practicalities for smaller delegations.

The UK Government believes that greater transparency and openness both within the WTO and with Civil Society—while preserving the Inter-governmental nature of the organisation—can only bring benefits in strengthening and explaining the system of multi-lateral trade rules.

The UK also actively supports measures to improve the ability of developing countries to participate fully in the WTO negotiations and, more generally their capacity to understand and implement WTO rules. The 2000 White Paper on International Development "Eliminating World Poverty—Making Globalisation Work for the Poor", commits the UK to providing £45 million of support to Trade Related Technical Assistance and Capacity Building in 1998–2003. To date £37.8 million of this has been formally committed.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the annual cost to developing countries of TRIPS. [63426]

Ms Hewitt: My Department has made no specific assessment of the annual cost of developing countries of TRIPS.

Telecommunications Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the outcome was of the Telecommunications Council held on 18 June; what the Government's stance was on the issues discussed, including their voting record; and if she will make a statement. [63600]

Mr. Timms: I represented the UK at the Telecommunications Council in Luxembourg on 18 June.

There was a policy debate on the Commission's eEurope 2005 Action Plan. The presidency forwarded conclusions to the Seville European Council on 21–22 June. The Commission emphasised the potential economic and social benefits of widespread access to interactive information society services, and the adaptability of the Action Plan to the needs of an enlarged EU in due course. The Commission also stressed the importance of content development, and parallel work to make the information society accessible to the disabled. I spoke in support of the Action Plan's dual focus on markets for broadband access, as well as on the demand for applications, content and service provision, and asked the council to signal its full commitment to the Action Plan.

On the reform of ICANN, the private sector company based in the United States that manages the internet domain name system, there was unanimous agreement among member states that ICANN's role should be limited to core technical functions and that the role of the Government Advisory Committee (GAC) should be strengthened and internationalised to ensure that public policy issues remain the concern primarily of the GAC rather than ICANN. The negotiating remit agreed by member states earlier this month under COREPER's mandate from the March Telecommunications Council will be used by the Commission in the continuing ICANN reform negotiations at Bucharest later this month and in Shanghai in October.

The council reached political agreements on two proposed Decisions on the Interchange of Data between Administrations (IDA) and adopted a Decision on telecoms Trans European Networks (TENs) without the need for a vote. There was also an agreement on a general approach to the extension of the Safer Internet Action Plan, now known as eSafe, on which the presidency will now try to pursue a first reading deal with the European Parliament. The council also agreed conclusions on the new internet protocol IPv6.

The Commission gave a presentation on the state of play on the Commission instruments needed to complete the new communications package: significant market power (SMP) guidelines are likely to be adopted in June; a public consultation on the Commission's recommendation on relevant markets has been launched, and is expected to be adopted in September; decisions establishing a European Regulators Group and Radio Spectrum Policy Group are expected in June; a Commission directive on competition in telecoms markets is expected before the summer.

There were presentations from the Commission on its proposal for a directive on the re-use and commercial exploitation of public sector information, and on its 11 June 2002 communication on the roll-out of third generation mobile access and services. The Commission also gave short presentations on the Eutelsat privatisation process, and on open platforms for digital television and 3G mobile on which a Communication is expected at the end of this year.

Pension Transfers

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on her Department's policy on pension transfers from the public sector with specific reference to the ECJ Beckmann case. [62995]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 20 June 2002]:* The Government are currently giving consideration to the decision in the case of Katia Beckman and Dynamco Whicheloe Macfarlane Ltd. delivered by the ECJ on 4 June 2002 in the context of other revisions to the TUPE Regulations following the consultation exercise undertaken at the end of last year.

The outcome of the consultation and decisions taken in the light of the responses received will be announced in due course.

Industrial Diseases Compensation

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the progress being made by the coal health claim with claims for compensation for *(a)* pneumoconiosis and *(b)* other non-smoking-related respiratory diseases. [64220]

Mr. Wilson: Claims for pneumoconiosis are made under a British Coal scheme which commenced in 1974, for which the Department assumed responsibility in April 1998. Under the scheme nearly 87,000 claims have been received. The majority of claims have been settled by way of one-off payments. In some cases, where a claimant is in receipt of reduced earnings allowance and/or incapacity benefit from the DWP, claimants also receive a weekly loss of earnings payment.

With regards to other non-smoking-related respiratory diseases, such as asbestosis, these claims are handled on a claim by claim personal injury basis by the Department's claims handling agents, IRISC.

Military Exports

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what military supplies have been delivered to *(a)* India and *(b)* Pakistan in the last two months. [63344]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 20 June 2002]:* I refer the right hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) of 18 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 54W.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what applications for export licences for arms to *(a)* India and *(b)* Pakistan have been turned down in the last two months. [63345]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 20 June 2002]:* Between 1 April 2002 and 31 May 2002 the Department of Trade and Industry's Export Control Organisation (ECO) refused two Standard Individual Export Licence (SIEL) applications to end users in India, and four SIEL applications to end users in Pakistan covering items on the Military List.

Energy Strategy Unit

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which advisory experts from the engineering and scientific community are attached to the Energy Strategy Unit. [60048]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave on 17 June 2002, *Official Report,* column 27W.

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the EU Scientific Committee on cosmetic products and non-food products intended for consumers is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the United Kingdom representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [63638]

Ms Hewitt: The EU Scientific Committee on Cosmetic Products and Non-Food Products intended for Consumers (SCCNFP) was set up to consider scientific and technical questions concerning consumer health relating to cosmetic products and non-food products intended for the consumer, especially substances used in the preparation of these products, their composition and use, as well as their types of packaging. The UK is represented on the committee by Ian White, Consultant Dermatologist at St. Thomas' Hospital, London. The SCCNFP met approximately 30 times in the last year and the European Commission funds their work. The main focus of the committee's work of late has been consideration of the use of ingredients in cosmetics particularly hair dye ingredients.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Scientific Committee for Occupational Exposure Limits to Chemical Agents is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [61724]

Mr. Darling: I have been asked to reply.

The purpose of the Scientific Committee on Occupational Exposure Limits (SCOEL) is to provide scientific advice to the European Commission (EC) to underpin regulatory proposals on exposure limits for chemicals in the work place, within the framework of the Chemical Agents Directive 98/24/EC (CAD) or the Carcinogens at Work Directive 90/394/EEC. Its mandate is to examine available information on toxicological and other relevant properties of chemical agents, evaluate the relationship between the health effects of the agents and the level of occupational exposure, and where possible recommended values for occupational exposure limits which it believes will protect workers from chemical risks.

SCOEL has met four times in the past year.

The EC invites the UK Government to nominate two members for the Committee. All SCOEL members act as independent scientific experts, not as representatives of their national Governments. The current UK nominees are a Senior Toxicologist at the Medical Research Council Institute for Environment and Health, and the head of the Industrial Chemicals Unit, Health and Safety Executive.

Travel and subsistence costs incurred by SCOEL members are met by the EC. The estimated annual costs for staff time attending meetings and preparatory work are £20,000.

There are 32 chemical substances currently under consideration by SCOEL. These are:

acetic acid
acrylaldehyde
acrylonitrile
1,3-butadiene
2(2-butoxyethoxy)ethanol

carbon disulphide
chlorobenzene
chromium, hexavalant
cresols
crystalline silica
cyanamide
cyclohexane
diethylamine
lead
man-made mineral fibres
mercury and its inorganic divalent compounds
2(2-methoxyethoxy)ethanol
methyenedianiline
naphthalene
nickel and nickel compounds
nitrobenzene
nitrogen monoxide
nonylphenol
phenol
picric acid
pyridine
pyrethrum
sulphuric acid
tin compounds
vinyl chloride
white spirit
wood dusts.

The work of SCOEL is reported regularly to the Working Group on European Exposure Limits, a sub-committee of the Advisory Committee on Toxic Substances, which is one of the topic committees advising the Health and Safety Commission. All these committees include representatives of employers, employees, other stakeholding interests and independent experts.

The EC uses the scientific advice from SCOEL to make proposals for occupational exposure limits. Limits based solely on scientific considerations are considered as adaptations to technical progress, and are incorporated in proposals for Commission directives within the framework of CAD. Limits that take account also of socio-economic factors are included in proposals for Council directives amending CAD or the Carcinogens at Work Directive. Such proposals are referred to the two Parliamentary Scrutiny Committees.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

UK Nationals Detained Abroad

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many UK nationals are (i) being detained, post conviction and (ii) awaiting trial in *(a)* Egypt, *(b)* Jordan, *(c)* Lebanon, *(d)* Syria, *(e)* Turkey, *(f)* Iraq, *(g)* Iran, *(h)* Israel, *(i)* Algeria, *(j)* Morocco, *(k)* Libya, *(l)* Tunisia, *(m)* Pakistan, *(n)* Nigeria, *(o)* Sudan, *(p)* Ethiopia, *(q)* Saudi Arabia, *(r)* Oman, *(s)* Yemen, *(t)* Kuwait and *(u)* UAE. [63539]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 21 June 2002]:* The following table gives details of British nationals detained overseas in the countries referred to. As legal systems differ considerably around the world, we have interpreted the 'pre-conviction' cases as those that are generally still subject to the initial local legal procedure. This includes, for example, all detainees on remand, those currently undergoing trial and those whose trials have finished but where sentences have not yet been passed.

Country	*Number of British nationals in detention pre-conviction*	*Number of British nationals in detention, serving prison sentences*
Egypt	5	1
Jordan	0	0
Lebanon	1	0
Syria	1	0
Turkey	1	1
Iraq	0	0
Iran	0	0
Israel	2	1
Algeria	0	0
Morocco	0	11
Libya	0	0
Tunisia	0	0
Pakistan	3	2
Nigeria	1	0
Sudan	0	0
Ethiopia	2	0
Saudi Arabia	7	3
Oman	2	1
Yemen	0	4
Kuwait	0	1
UAE	8	13

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many UK nationals are (i) in detention awaiting trial and (ii) serving prison sentences in *(a)* India, *(b)* Burma, *(c)* Malaysia, *(d)* Singapore, *(e)* Indonesia, *(f)* China, *(g)* Vietnam, *(h)* Laos, *(i)* Thailand, *(j)* Cambodia, *(k)* the Philippines and *(l)* Papua New Guinea. [63541]

Mr. Straw *[holding answer 21 June 2002]:* The following table gives details of those British nationals detained overseas in the above countries. As legal systems differ considerably around the world, we have interpreted the 'pre-conviction' cases as those that are generally still subject to the initial local legal procedure. This includes, for example, detainees on remand, those currently undergoing trial and those whose trials have finished but where sentences have not yet passed.

Country	*Number of British nationals in detention pre-conviction*	*Number of British nationals in detention serving prison sentences*
India	12	10
Burma	0	0
Malaysia	0	2
Singapore	0	9
Indonesia	4	4
China	0	1
Vietnam	0	1
Laos	0	0
Thailand	9	[1]17
Cambodia	0	1
Philippines	0	[2]17
Papua New Guinea	0	0

[1] five detained awaiting deportation

[2] three detained awaiting deportation

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the Government's policy is on giving assistance and representation to UK nationals detained abroad, before and after trial. [63544]

Mr. Straw *[holding answer 21 June 2002]:* Under the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, HMG's consuls will be informed of the detention of a British national by the detaining authorities, if that person requests it. On being informed, the Consul will contact the detainee as soon as possible and if necessary follow this with a visit. One of the Consul's main duties is to ensure that the detainee has legal representation; the Consul can provide the detainee with a list of English speaking local lawyers. The Consul will do whatever he can to ensure that the welfare of the detainee is adequately provided for, that his human rights are respected and that he is not discriminated against because he is a foreigner. He will also raise any specific medical needs with the detaining authorities.

Consuls visit convicted prisoners at least once a year, and more regularly if prison conditions are poor or if we have particular concerns about a prisoner. The Consul will continue to provide the same support as pre-trial. Furthermore, if we have concerns about a prisoner's health or are concerned that he did not receive a fair trial, we will consider making representations on his behalf or ultimately supporting a plea for clemency. We would look to our panels of pro bono doctors and lawyers to assist in such instances.

UK Nationals Killed Abroad

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many UK nationals were unlawfully killed in *(a)* India, *(b)* Burma, *(c)* Malaysia, *(d)* Singapore, *(e)* Indonesia, *(f)* China, *(g)* Vietnam, *(h)* Laos, *(i)* Thailand, *(j)* Cambodia, *(k)* the Philippines and *(l)* Papua New Guinea during the period 1 May 2000 to 1 May 2002. [63540]

Mr. Straw *[holding answer 21 June 2002]:* Our consular records show that the number of UK nationals reported as unlawfully killed in the following countries during the period 1 May 2000 to 1 May 2002 were:

(a) India 7
(b) Burma 0
(c) Malaysia 1
(d) Singapore 0
(e) Indonesia 1
(f) China 1
(g) Vietnam 0
(h) Laos 0
(i) Thailand 10
(j) Cambodia 0
(k) Philippines 2
(l) Papua New Guinea 1.

Zimbabwe

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he pressed for the extension of the travel ban list of Zimbabweans supporting President Mugabe's regime at the recent GAC meeting of 17 to 18 June. [63543]

Mr. Straw *[holding answer 21 June. 2002]:* The principal objective at the 17 June Council was to review the EU high-level Troika visit to the SADC region from 20 to 22 May. In its conclusions, the Council expressed its continued concern at the deteriorating situation in Zimbabwe. The Council will review the targeted measures against Zimbabwe at its meeting on 22 July.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Zimbabwean Government concerning surveillance and the British High Commissioner in Harare. [63652]

Mr. Straw: The British High Commission has asked the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Harare for assurances that they do not share the views expressed in the official Zimbabwean press on this matter, and that British High Commission staff will continue to enjoy the full protection to which they are entitled. We are awaiting a response.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many British High Commission staff based in Harare are entitled to diplomatic immunity. [63651]

Mr. Straw: Fourteen UK-based members of staff at the British High Commission and seven members of the DfID Central Africa office in Harare, and their resident spouses, are entitled to diplomatic immunity.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps his Department has taken to increase security *(a)* at the British High Commission and *(b)* for High Commission staff based in Harare. [63650]

Mr. Straw: Security of High Commission staff and the High Commission itself is kept under regular and close review. It would not be appropriate for me to list individual measures taken in recent months.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 17 June, *Official Report*, column 5W, on the High Commission, Harare, which members of the Zimbabwean Government attended the Jubilee celebrations at the High Commission. [63653]

Mr. Straw: None.

Arms Trade

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether permission was *(a)* sought and *(b)* given, by his Department for the re-export of MP5 submachine guns by MKEK (Turkey) to Indonesia in 1999. [61987]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: No such permission has either been sought or given by my Department. A licence is not required from the British Government in order to export items from Turkey to Indonesia.

Nelson Mandela

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what meetings were held between Government officials and Nelson Mandela during his recent visit to the UK to see Mr. Abdul Bassett al-Megrahi. [63649]

Mr. Straw: Former President Nelson Mandela made a private visit to the UK on 9–10 June, during which time he visited Mr. Abdel Baset Al-Megrahi in Barlinnie Prison in Glasgow.

Mr. Mandela met no Government officials other than the Governor of Barlinnie Prison and his staff, and the Chief Executive of the Scottish Prison Service.

India/Pakistan

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what evacuation plans there are for British nationals in India and Pakistan if hostilities break out. [61197]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding reply 13 June 2002]:* We have contingency plans for India and Pakistan, as we do for more than 100 other countries. We keep these plans under constant review. We do not discuss the detail of these plans in public, as doing so may make their implementation more difficult.

Mr. Ian Stillman

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent steps the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has taken to assist Mr. Ian Stillman in India. [62620]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary raised Mr. Stillman's case with the Indian Home and Foreign Ministers on 29 May 2002 during his recent visit to India. He asked that Mr. Stillman's application for transfer to a prison in Chennai be considered favourably and quickly. He also raised our concern about a Supreme Court Judge's comments about the disabled, made in connection with Mr. Stillman's case, on 6 May 2002.

Our High Commission in New Delhi continues to do all it can to ensure that the Indian authorities are meeting Mr. Stillman's welfare requirements adequately.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Coroners Courts

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his review of the workings of coroners courts. [29265]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) on 11 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 1242W.

Data Protection

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department with respect to the criminal conviction certificates to be issued by the Criminal Records Bureau, whether he will issue advice to employers requesting access to such certificates of job applicants; whether he plans to extend the statutory Code of Practice which cover other certificates to the criminal conviction certificate; whether he has undertaken research into the impact of the certificate on recidivism; if he will describe the activities, other than employment and visa applications, where the criminal conviction certificate is likely to be used; and if he will make a statement. [59266]

Hilary Benn: While it is possible that uses will be perceived for them in other circumstances, criminal conviction certificates (or Basic Disclosures, as they will be termed) are essentially intended for the purpose of employment checks, and also in connection with visa applications (instead of the use of the right of subject access under the Data Protection Act 1998). It is essential that people are not unfairly discriminated against because of information revealed in Basic Disclosures that they have been convicted in the past—not least because getting and holding down a regular job is likely to be a positive factor in preventing re-offending. In this, we have taken careful note of the results of recent research published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the National Institute for Economic and Social Research. The Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) will therefore be producing a range of advice urging employers to treat such information in a fair and reasonable manner. The CRB is also continuing to work closely with the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development and the National Association of Care and Resettlement of Offenders (Nacro) on the production of guidance for employers. The current provision on a statutory Code of Practice applies only to higher-level Disclosures. We shall consider making provision to cover Basic Disclosures when there is a suitable opportunity. Meanwhile, the CRB has been working on an equivalent "good practice guide".

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many vehicles' details are recorded on the Police National Computer; what data categories describe these vehicles and what types of markers are used in connection with vehicles; and how many vehicles *(a)* carry a particular marker and *(b)* fall within a particular category. [59256]

Mr. Denham: As of 23 May 2002 the estimated number of vehicles registered on the Police National Computer (PNC) database was 50,444,691. The database includes information on the make of the car, the model code, the colour, body type and engine size.

The PNC database stores information, which identifies each vehicle. For example there are four groups, which are used as types of markers, and the categories associated with these markers are as follows:

Vehicle state markers

- Scrapped
- Notification of a total loss of a vehicle by an insurer (V23) marked as likely to be an insurance loss
- Statutory of Road Notification (SORN) is current
- Vehicle Excise Licence (VEL) expired
- VEL is void.

Exceptional characteristics

- Foreign vehicle
- A direct export
- A personal export
- Diplomatic privilege
- A cherished transfer
- A permanently exported vehicle.

Of interest

Stolen

Police eyes only

Record query

Driving Vehicle Licence Agency (DVLA)-related status

Notified as Void by DVLA

DVLA notified that keeper has changed by owner

DVLA notified of a keeper has changed by police/local authority

The vehicle is In Trade

If the vehicle has not been registered at DVLA (i.e. a V5 registration document has not been issued for it).

Statistics are not maintained on either markers or the number of vehicles in each category due to the dynamic nature of the database. In addition to the 'markers' above, vehicles held on the PNC have 'Police Interest' reports in the following categories: LOS (lost/stolen), FOU (found), INF (information), SEE (seen and checked), COR (correction), REM (removed), DES (destroyed).

The number of vehicles with 'Police Interest' reports as at 23 May 2002 was 894,549.

Criminal Injuries Compensation Board

Mr. Patrick Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department by what date the backlog team set up by the Home Office Pay and Pensions Service will have dealt with all requests for pay details from the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board in respect of its employees and pensioners which were outstanding on 21 May. [59255]

Hilary Benn: Having checked through the backlog of cases currently being dealt with by Special Projects team, there are 12 pay queries relating to staff of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority (CICA) and the Criminal Injuries Compensation Appeals Panel (CICAP). We aim to have completed the work on these queries by the end of June, subject to Pay Service being able to access all information needed to resolve them.

Asylum Accommodation

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what provision he plans to make for the education of children of staff employed at the proposed Throckmorton asylum accommodation centres. [59604]

Beverley Hughes: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 12 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 1307W.

Identification Parades

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the policy is on the reimbursement of loss of earnings to witnesses taking time to attend identification parades; and whether that policy permits a degree of discretion. [48733]

Mr. Denham: This is an operational matter for police forces and no central guidance is issued. It is for the force to decide in the individual circumstances of the case whether to provide a witness attending an identity parade with compensation for loss of earnings. The increased use of video identification parades will help to minimise delays in the identification process and reduce burdens on witnesses' time.

Extradition

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent requests have been made by foreign Governments of the UK Government for extradition of named individuals; and what Her Majesty's Government's response has been. [62014]

Mr. Blunkett: In the year to 31 March 2002, the United Kingdom received 130[1] extradition requests. In the same period, the outcome[2] of cases decided was as follows:

	Number
Fugitives surrendered	58
Requests withdrawn	25
Fugitives discharged at court	13
Requests refused by Secretary of State	[3]5

[1] The number excludes requests governed by the backing of warrants regime in place as between the United Kingdom (UK) and Ireland. Those figures are not collected centrally. The number also excludes requests made directly to Scottish Ministers.

[2] Outcomes in any given year do not necessarily correspond to the number of requests received.

[3] Those five requests were from countries with which the UK has no general extradition arrangements.

Consideration of remaining request is continuing.

Community Policing

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will define operational matters with regard to community policing; and what guidance he issues on community policing. [61621]

Mr. Denham: I have no current plans to define operational requirements or to issue any guidance in relation to community policing. Future priorities for guidance will be set out in the National Policy Plan, subject to parliamentary approval.

The Government are determined to maximise the amount of time police officers spend in the community. We are taking steps in the Police Reform Bill to empower support staff to carry out those functions which prevent police officers from leaving the police station and we are encouraging Basic Command Unit Commanders to take innovative steps to increase the visibility of their officers. Also, the Policing Bureaucracy Taskforce, chaired by Sir David O'Dowd, is looking at how we can cut unnecessary bureaucracy in the police service.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when he will reply to the letter to him dated 22 April from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Abdul Hamid Afzali; [61692]

(2) when he will reply to the letter to him dated 23 April from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mrs. Azad Bakhat. [61679]

Mr. Blunkett: I wrote to my right hon. Friend on 20 June 2002.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many letters he has sent to chief constables about administrative matters since 7 June 2001. [62199]

Mr. Denham: Since 7 June 2001, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has sent one letter about an administrative matter which was addressed to all chief constables.

Competitive Tendering

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions in the last 12 months the requirement to engage in a competitive tendering process has been waived by his Department due to national security obligations under paragraph 6(h) of the supply regulations. [62819]

Mr. Blunkett: In the last 12 months the Home Department has waived the competitive tendering process due to national security obligations under the supply regulations on three occasions.

Burglaries

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the proportion of retail premises which were burgled in *(a)* Essex and *(b)* England in the last 12 months. [62369]

Mr. Denham: The Home Department does not collect separate information about the number of burglaries in retail premises. The numbers of offences of burglary in non-residential properties (which include retail premises) recorded by the police in Essex and England for the 12 months ended 31 March 2001 are given in the table. Both numbers have fallen compared to the previous year.

	Non-residential burglaries	
Geographical area	*Number*	*Percentage change from previous year*
Essex	9,452	–4
England	412,310	–7

The survey of crime affecting retailers and manufacturers announced by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary on 23 April will provide up to date information on crimes against retailers. The results are expected to be available next spring.

Terrorism

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what security measures are being taken to prevent terrorists from *(a)* smuggling into the United Kingdom a dirty bomb and *(b)* detonating such a device. [62708]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 19 June 2002]:* Since the terrorist attacks in the United States on 11 September 2001, the Government have conducted a thorough comprehensive review of all preventative and protective measures to counter terrorism, including the possibilities to which my hon. Friend refers. We have built upon the plans which we have developed over a period of years for responding to a wide range of terrorist threats, including those which might involve the threatened or actual use of radiological or nuclear materials. For security reasons, it is not our policy to disclose details of these plans.

Additional resources that I announced following the Budget on 17 April 2002 have assisted in expanding the scope and effectiveness of these measures.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Parades Commission

Mr. Patrick Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make an announcement on the Parades Commission's annual report. [64440]

Dr. John Reid: The Parades Commission's fourth annual report, covering the operation of the commission over the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002, was published on 20 June. Copies have been placed in the Library.

Car Crime

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland by what means he monitors joyriding as a specific aspect of vehicle crime; what recent studies have been conducted on the perpetrators of this crime; and how many *(a)* arrests and *(b)* prosecutions have been effected over the last 12 month period for which figures are available. [60853]

Jane Kennedy: The PSNI considers the term "joyriders" an inappropriate one to describe car thieves. The terms that best describe the activities of car thieves are: "casual car theft"—where the opportunist criminal is casual about the car that they are intending to take, and will take any vehicle which is found to be vulnerable; "professional car theft"—where the organised criminal targets a specific make, model, specification and colour of car or possibly a specific car.

Casual car crime is not monitored as a specific aspect of vehicle crime.

There is a growing understanding that many cars are not stolen but are in fact "runabouts". A "runabout" is an old vehicle, without current licence, normally uninsured, which has changed ownership several times since the last notification to DVLNI. These vehicles offer significantly less risk to drivers than the use of stolen vehicles, and it appears that many of the vehicles being used by "casual car thieves" are not stolen, but are "runabouts".

Concerned about the uses to which "runabouts" are put, the PSNI, from 19 March to 16 June 2002, undertook an operation known as "Clean Up". A substantial number of "runabouts" were seized. Some 943 vehicles were seized and owners reclaimed 145. Owners had to produce a vehicle licence or leave a surety of £120 until they produced a vehicle licence. To date 550 "runabouts" have been destroyed and the balance will also be destroyed over the next few weeks, except for a small number, perhaps 20–30, which are considered suitable for auction. The registration numbers, makes and models of all seized vehicles were forwarded to the Motor Insurance Information Centre who have to date not found any insured vehicles. The initial results of the operation found:

> A 25 per cent. reduction in road traffic collisions in West Belfast District Command Unit during the six weeks of the operation (measured against the preceding six weeks, and the same six weeks the previous year);
>
> Fire service identified a 40 per cent. reduction in arson of motor vehicles when measured against the preceding six weeks of operation "Clean Up" and a reduction of 24 per cent. when measured against the same six weeks the previous year;
>
> Following operation "Clean Up" there has been a 50 per cent. reduction in thefts from vehicles in the Belfast region.

It is anticipated that operation "Clean Up" may result in a change in the method of changing the ownership of vehicles.

Information on the number of arrests and prosecutions for "joyriding" is not available but I would refer the hon. Member to the following table which provides the recorded theft of vehicles/unauthorised taking offences and clearance rates for 2000–01.

	Northern Ireland
Recorded	10,806
Percentage cleared	11.4

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the *(a)* level of car ownership, *(b)* incidence of vehicle thefts, *(c)* level of stolen vehicle recoveries and *(d)* incidence of normal residence of individuals prosecuted for car theft was in each policing district in the last 12 months. [60854]

Jane Kennedy: The Department of Environment (NI) has advised that the level of car ownership in Northern Ireland for the calendar year 2000 was 622,488 out of an overall figure of 730,730 for vehicle ownership.

The table shows by district command units, the recorded number of theft of vehicles/unauthorised taking of vehicles and the percentage cleared in the year 2000–01.

Information on the incidence of normal residence of individuals prosecuted for car theft by policing district is not available.

Theft of vehicle/unauthorised taking offences recorded and percentage cleared 2000–01

	Recorded	*Percentage cleared*
Newtownabbey	402	8.5
Belfast South	2,312	7.8
Carrickfergus	119	10.1
Belfast North	1,023	9.8
Belfast West	1,180	7.9
Antrim	254	15.0
Lisburn	1,223	7.8
Castlereagh	325	9.2
Belfast East	587	10.9
North Down	264	6.8
Newry and Mourne	379	16.6
Craigavon	374	20.9
Dungannon and South Tyrone	182	19.8
Downpatrick	335	12.2
Newtownards	305	12.1
Cookstown	75	22.7
Armagh	141	29.1
Banbridge	100	20.0
Magherafelt	90	17.8
Larne	51	17.6
Moyle	33	24.2
Ballymena	117	33.3
Ballymoney	44	13.6
Limavady	110	22.7
Omagh	151	10.6
Coleraine	154	14.9
Strabane	95	21.1
Fermanagh	126	21.4
Foyle	255	18.8
Northern Ireland	10,806	11.4

Press Releases

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many press releases were issued by his Department *(a)* in each month between May and December 1997 and *(b)* in each year from 1998 to 2001 inclusive. [59474]

Jane Kennedy: The information requested is as follows.

(a) Between May and December 1997

	Number
May	64
June	114
July	80
August	173
September	98
October	135
November	97
December	83
Total	844

(b) In each year from 1998 to 2001 inclusive

	Number
1998	1,313
1999	1,055
2000	231
2001	248

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many press releases have been issued by his Department in each month of 2002. [59475]

Jane Kennedy: The information requested is as follows:

Between January and May 2002

	Number
January	25
February	28
March	27
Aril	31
May[1]	30

[1] To date

Domestic Violence/Sexual Attacks

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what specialist resources are available for the investigation of domestic violence and sexual attacks; what action has been taken in this area in the past three years for *(a)* research, *(b)* education; *(c)* crime prevention and *(d)* officer training; and how many staff and how many staff hours were employed in these areas, and at what cost, in each of the last three years. [60861]

Jane Kennedy: The PSNI currently has 35 Domestic Violence Liaison Officers. All received initial training in domestic violence procedures which was followed up during 2000 by a further accredited course from the university of Teesside through which each officer gained a certificate in Professional Policing (Domestic Violence). Each officer performs a minimum 40 hour week, working on a nine-to-five basis.

The work of these officers supports the front-line uniform response officers who are required to take decisive action at the scene of a domestic dispute. In addition, it is hoped that by autumn 2002 the PSNI will have completed work to enable uniform officers to access an Integrated Crime Information System (ICIS) database containing background information surrounding a potential violent incident prior to arrival at the scene.

The role of the Domestic Violence Officer is currently under review and it is intended that external agencies will be consulted as a basis of determining a multi-agency perspective on how to improve the service offered to victims of domestic violence. The PSNI makes use of research undertaken by its partners in the multi agency response to the problem.

Leaflets and posters have also been distributed by the PSNI throughout Northern Ireland on domestic violence. These have recently been translated into ethnic minority languages and are available in various areas of public contact.

All PSNI officers receive Child Abuse and Rape Enquiry (CARE) training. CARE unit detectives receive specialist training on child abuse and rape trauma syndrome. There are presently 12 CARE units, including five CARE suites staffed by a total of 85 highly trained officers. The CARE suites provide a non-threatening environment for the interview of children, comfortable interview rooms for victims of sexual offences and well equipped medical facilities where forensic medical officers can carry out examinations.

The Police Service of Northern Ireland, through its CARE Co-ordinator, carries out research into the various aspects of both child abuse and sexual offending. It works in liaison with the ACPO portfolio holders in relation to the development of educational lessons within the service provision.

In addition to the staff employed in CARE units, other officers from District Command Units and CID undertake work on sexual attacks.

Due to the variety of staff who provide support in both these areas of police work information regarding the number of staff hours and staff costs could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

TREASURY

National Statistics

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update his answer of 20 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 559W, on national statistics, to cover financial year 2001; and if he will make a statement. [60417]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Matthew Taylor, dated 24 June 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question about which statistical series National Statistics ceased collecting, calculating and publishing in the financial year 2001. (60417)

The scope of National Statistics is evolving and expanding and their coverage sometimes changes to reflect changes in the underlying administrative systems (e.g. the tax systems) on which some of the statistics are based. During 2001 the following National Statistics series were removed from publication for mainly operational reasons:

(i) Department for Education and Skills

Statistical Bulletin—Youth Cohort Study. Publication has ceased because this information is now published in three Statistical First Releases.

Statistical Volume—Statistics of Education: Student Support, England and Wales. Publication has ceased because the data are now published in two Statistical First Releases and on the Internet.

(ii) Home Office

Jury Disqualifications—this information is no longer collected. This followed an assessment of their fitness for purpose with key stakeholders.

Deaths Reported to Coroners and Scientific Procedures on Living Animals are still collected but have been withdrawn from scope following a review of all Home Office National Statistics.

Section 95 (Compendia)—this publication was withdrawn from scope and the data collected are now available on the Internet.

(iii) Department for Work and Pensions

Income-related benefits: estimates of take-up—the calculation and release of Family Credit take-up statistics previously contained within this publication has ceased because the benefit was replaced by Working Families Tax Credit.

(iv) Office for National Statistics

Jobcentre Plus vacancy statistics—this series has been suspended because of a discontinuity caused by the roll-out of Employer Direct. The figures will be reinstated at the earliest opportunity.

(v) Department for International Development

Oda/GNI ratio—data is still collected but has been withdrawn from scope.

Development Counts—still produced but has been withdrawn from scope as the publication is not under the editorial control of the statistics department.

EU Stability Pact

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he last assessed the extent to which planned public expenditure would need to be reduced to comply with the EU stability pact; and what his conclusion was. [63328]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) on 30 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 734W.

Bank Notes

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what *(a)* financial advantages he derives and *(b)* costs he incurs from the diversity of bodies able to issue bank notes in Northern Ireland; and what bodies regulate issuing banks. [63433]

Ruth Kelly: The Exchequer benefits from not bearing the printing and destruction costs associated with non-Bank of England sterling notes in circulation. However, the Exchequer also suffers a reduction in seignorage income, as the legislation does not require the issuing banks to wholly back their note issue with Bank of England notes. The Inland Revenue Stamp Office monitors the level of issuance by these banks.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many bank notes of each denomination from each issuing bank were in circulation in Northern Ireland on the last day for which information is available. [63432]

Ruth Kelly: Values of the notes in circulation for each of the issuing banks, as at 8 June 2002, are as follows:

£

Bank	*Value*[1]	*Value*[2]	*Total*
Bank of Ireland	482,688,297	278,105	482,966,402
Ulster Bank	257,892,500	70,076	25[illegible]962,576
Northern Bank	267,053,976	439,105	26[illegible]493,081
First Trust Bank	244,908,000	—	244,908,000

[1] Value of notes of £5 and over in circulation.

[2] Value of notes of £5 and under in circulation.

Details of the denominational breakdown of notes in circulation are not provided to the authorities.

Notes:

In addition, notes issued by the National Bank are not in active circulation any longer. The amount outstanding is £61,507.

Bee Keeping

Mr. Breed: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will exclude the bee keeping industry from *(a)* insurance premium tax, *(b)* filing fees to the Financial Services Authority and *(c)* the Financial Services Compensation Scheme; and if he will make a statement. [63523]

Ruth Kelly: Insurance Premium Tax is a consequence of writing contracts of general insurance and it applies to almost all general insurance where the risk is in the UK.

The FSA are aware of the concerns of the Bee Diseases Insurance Limited and discussions are ongoing.

Aviation Insurance

Chris Grayling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the level of Government support for aviation insurance. [63765]

Ruth Kelly: UK airlines, airports and other service providers can purchase third party war and terrorism cover from the Troika insurance scheme, set up and reinsured by the Government, above a primary layer purchased in the commercial market, up to the level enjoyed before commercial cover was cancelled following the terrorist attacks in the US on 11 September, to a limit of US $2 billion.

EU Enlargement

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment his Department has made of the impact of enlargement of the EU on the UK economy. [63491]

Ruth Kelly: The Department has not made its own study of the impact of EU enlargement on the United Kingdom economy. However, independent economic studies by the European Roundtable of Industrialists and the Centre for Economic Policy Reform show that EU enlargement will increase UK GDP by £1.75 billion per year and create 300,000 jobs within the EU-15. Copies of these reports are in the House of Commons Library.

Wages

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the *(a)* average wage and *(b)* median wage for (i) men and (ii) women in each year since 1997. [63673]

Ruth Kelly: The information falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Brian Jenkins, dated 24 June 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question on the average and median earnings since 1997. (63673)

The table below gives the information you require.

£

	Men		*Women*	
April each year	*Average*	*Median*	*Average*	*Median*
1997	408.70	349.70	297.20	260.40
1998	428.80	363.70	310.30	270.40
1999	444.30	374.80	327.90	285.40
2000	464.10	389.70	343.70	296.70
2001	490.50	407.70	366.80	313.20

The data relate to full-time employees on adult rates whose pay was not affected by any absence.

Gold Reserves

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much has been raised from the sale of gold reserves since 1997; and what the value of the gold would be at today's prices. [63790]

Ruth Kelly: The 395 tonnes of gold sold by the Government, as part of the restructuring of the United Kingdom's foreign currency reserves announced in May 1999, raised proceeds of $3.5 billion (around £2.4 billion at exchange rates at close on 19 June), which have been invested in interest-bearing foreign currency assets. At the price of gold at close on 19 June the 395 tonnes of gold would be valued at $4.1 billion (around £2.7 billion at exchange rates at close on 19 June).

Endowment Mortgages

Ian Lucas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the proportion of people with endowment mortgages who have policies which are unlikely to pay off the loan. [64313]

Ruth Kelly: The Association of British Insurers reported on 13 May 2002 that there is now a significant or high risk that 61 per cent. of the current 10.2 million mortgage endowments (covering 6 million households) will not pay out enough to pay off the target sum, usually the amount of the mortgage loan. This is based on the first 1.25 million re-projection letters and cannot be taken as a representative sample. The percentages are likely to change.

FSA research conducted in spring 2001 indicated that only three out of 10 policyholders had taken action to remedy their potential shortfall. Of the seven out of 10 households that have taken no action, around half had good reasons. For example, they had repaid the loan by other means and were continuing to fund the endowment as a savings vehicle.

Ian Lucas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much compensation has been given to consumers who were mis-sold endowment mortgages since 1992. [64315]

Ruth Kelly: Since 1988, when the system of financial service regulation came into force under the Financial Services Act 1986, and up until the end of the first quarter 2002, some £151 million in compensation has been paid to endowment policyholders following the complaints process. In addition, and as a result of the Financial Services Authority's (FSA) regulatory activities, some 20 firms have agreed proactively to compensate policyholders who were mis-sold their policies. This involves around 218,000 in policies, leading to total compensation of around £315 million due to be paid.

Demographic Change (London)

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the Government's projection is for demographic change in London over the next *(a)* five years and *(b)* 10 years for the age groups (i) 0 to four, (ii) five to 10, (iii) 11 to 15 and (iv) 16 to 19 years; and if he will make a statement. [64121]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Kidgell to Mr. Iain Coleman, dated 24 June 2002

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question concerning the projected demographic change in London over the next five and 10 year period for people under the age of 20. I am replying in his absence. (64121)

The attached table shows the projected population in each age group for each year from 2002 to 2012 in the london Government Office Region. The figures are derived from the 1996-based projections published by the Office for National Statistics in the volume Subnational Population Projections, series PP3 No. 10.

Mid 1996-based population projections 2002 to 2012 for all persons under 20 years of age—London GOR

thousands

Age group	*2002*	*2003*	*2004*	*2005*	*2006*	*2007*	*2008*	*2009*	*2010*	*2011*	*2012*
0 to 4 years	492.5	490.2	487.3	484.4	481.6	479.1	477.1	475.8	475.3	475.5	476.4
5 to 10 years	568.8	565.1	563.4	560.3	558.3	556.2	552.5	549.7	546.5	543.3	540.4
11 to 15 years	442.9	450.4	452.3	455.1	456.4	452.4	450.3	448.6	446.0	444.6	443.1
16 to 29 years	339.9	344.7	353.8	359.1	364.3	372.6	376.2	378.0	380.5	376.7	373.1

Source:
ONS

Drug-related Deaths

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many deaths there were in each of the last 10 years in *(a)* Buckinghamshire, *(b)* Chesham and Amersham and *(c)* the UK from (i) heroin overdose, (ii) other drug overdose and (iii) suicide other than by a drugs overdose. [62792]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Kidgell to Cheryl Gillan, dated 24 June 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question concerning how many deaths there were in each of the last 10 years in *(a)* Buckinghamshire, *(b)* Chesham and Amersham and *(c)* the UK from (i) heroin overdose, (ii) other drug overdose and (iii) suicide other than by a drugs overdose. I am replying in his absence. (62792)

Figures for deaths related to drug poisoning are currently available for 1993 to 2000 for England and Wales. Information for the United Kingdom as a whole could not be collated on a comparable basis in the time available. The information requested is given for 1993 to 2000 in the attached table.

Deaths related to drug poisoning[1]*, and suicides other than by drugs overdose*[2]*, England and Wales 1993 to 2000*[3]

Number of deaths

	1993	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
(a) Buckinghamshire county[4]								
Drugs mentioned on the death certificate								
(i)(a) heroin/morphine[5] only	[6]—	[7]—	[6]—	[7]—	[7]—	[7]—	3	[7]—
(i)(b) heroin/morphine[5] with other drugs	[6]—	[7]—	[6]—	[6]—	[7]—	[7]—	[6]—	[6]—
(ii) other drugs (heroin/morphine[5] not mentioned)	6	13	9	11	15	15	10	12
Suicide other than by drugs overdose	42	37	26	23	35	36	28	33

Deaths related to drug poisoning[1], and suicides other than by drugs overdose[2], England and Wales 1993 to 2000[3]

Number of deaths

	1993	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
(b) Chesham and Amersham[8]								
Drugs mentioned on the death certificate								
(i)(a) heroin/morphine[5]	[6]—	[6]—	[6]—	[6]—	[7]—	[6]—	[6]—	[6]—
(i)(b) heroin/morphine[5] with other drugs	[6]—	[6]—	[6]—	[6]—	[6]—	[6]—	[6]—	[6]—
(ii) other drugs (heroin/morphine[5] not mentioned)	3	3	[7]—	[7]—	5	3	[6]—	3
Suicide other than by drugs overdose	8	8	6	[7]—	7	5	4	4
(c) England and Wales								
Drugs mentioned on the death certificate								
(i)(a) heroin/morphine[5] only	126	197	263	353	332	468	575	716
(i)(b) heroin/morphine[5] with other drugs	61	80	94	113	113	178	179	210
(ii) other drugs (heroin/morphine[5] not mentioned)	2,065	2,127	2,206	2,255	2,413	2,276	2,189	2,042
Suicide other than by drugs overdose	3,930	3,818	3,771	3,554	3,526	3,799	3,836	3,643

[1] Selected using the following codes from the International Classification of Diseases Ninth Revision:
292 (drug psychoses);
304 (drug dependence);
305.2—305.9 (nondependent abuse of drugs);
E850—E858 (accidental poisoning by drugs, medicaments and biologicals);
E950.0—E950.5 (suicide and self-inflicted poisoning by solid or liquid substances);
E980.0—E980.5 (poisoning by solid or liquid substances, undetermined whether accidentally or purposely inflicted);
E962.0 (assault by poisoning—drugs and medicaments).

[2] Selected using the following codes from the International Classification of Diseases Ninth Revision: E950.6—E959, E980.6—E989 excluding E988.8.

[3] Data are for occurrences of death per calendar year.

[4] Data are for residents of Buckinghamshire county, based on geographic boundaries as at 2001. The figures therefore exclude data for Milton Keynes, which became a unitary authority in 1997.

[5] As heroin breaks down in the body into morphine, the latter may be detected at post mortem and recorded on the death certificate.

[6] Zero deaths.

[7] Less than three deaths.

[8] Data are for residents of Chesham and Amersham parliamentary constituency based on geographic boundaries as at 2001.

Orphan Funds

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what steps he is taking to arrange discussions with the assurance sector concerning their orphan funds; [64474]

(2) what recent discussions he has had with the assurance sector concerning the use of orphan assets in the life assurance sector in the United Kingdom; [64357]

(3) when he last met representatives of the insurance sector to discuss the use of orphan funds. [64476]

Ruth Kelly: Treasury Ministers have contacts with insurance companies and their representatives form time to time to discuss a wide range of issues.

Historic Buildings (VAT)

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to extend the reduction of VAT on the renovation and repair of historic buildings. [63546]

John Healey: Reduced rate items are limited by agreements with our European partners. EC law allows a reduced rate of VAT for works to housing, but does not permit a reduced rate for works to other types of building. However, in response to representations made by the Government, the European Commission has indicated that it will consider a reduced rate of VAT for listed places of worship in their general review of the reduced rates, which is due to take place in 2003.

Prescriptions

Mr. Heyes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will review the prescription pre-payment certificate scheme with reference to the evidence cited in paragraph 6.74 in the Wanless report. [60402]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

The Wanless report noted that 85 per cent. of prescriptions are dispensed free of charge and that the level of charges for those who have to pay is capped by the pre-payment certificate arrangements. We are taking steps to make pre-payment certificates more accessible. From 1 October, the prescription pricing authority (PPA) will take responsibility for issuing these certificates. The application form will be redesigned and carry the PPA's address, all patient material will be revised and pharmacists will be encouraged to publicise the availability of prescription pre-payment certificates. Once the new arrangements are in place, we can examine the opportunities for further improvements to access.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

King Edward VIII

Kevin Brennan: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to her answers of 10 and 11 June 2002, refs. 57217 and 57416, on the abdication of King Edward VIII, if she will list the categories of official papers relating to the abdication of King Edward VIII that will be reviewed by Departments. [62434]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to him on 11 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 118W. It is hoped that the results of the review, including the categories of official papers held by Departments, will be known and put into effect by the end of the year.

Kevin Brennan: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to her answers of 10 and 11 June, refs. 57217 and 57416, on the abdication of King Edward VIII, if she will list which official papers relating to the abdication of King Edward VIII have not yet been released. [62433]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to him on 11 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 118W.

It is hoped that the results of the review, including a list of official papers held by Departments will be known and put into effect by the end of the year.

Computers

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what measures are *(a)* in place and *(b)* under discussion in her Department in order to ensure compliance with the WEE directive. [60751]

Yvette Cooper: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by the Minister of State for the Department of Trade and Industry on 12 June 2002.

Land Registry

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans she has to implement the recommendation contained in the Land Registry's Quinquennial Review to compel the owners of property to declare the true and beneficial owners of property in the Land Registry; and if she will make a statement. [63093]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Land Registry and the Lord Chancellor's Department will jointly consider and consult other Government Departments on the recommendation by autumn 2003. Depending on the outcome of that consultation and ministerial agreement they will consult stakeholders and the public on the principles and details by spring 2004 and announce the results of the consultation by autumn 2004.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the inter-departmental steering group to take forward the proposals contained in the Land Registry Quinquennial Review has met since June 2001. [63091]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The inter-departmental steering group has met on seven occasions: 23 July, 17 September, 25 October, 20 November 2001 and 9 January, 19 March and 27 May 2002.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans are being formulated by the Land Registry to make public a list of previous owners for each property registered by the Land Registry; and if she will make a statement. [63092]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Section 69 of the Land Registration Act 2002, which is likely to be brought into force in the autumn of next year, provides that the chief land registrar may, on application, provide information about the history of a registered title. Rules making provision about applications for the exercise of this power are currently being drafted and will be the subject of public consultation, as part of a wider consultation exercise, later in the summer.

Judiciary

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will make a statement as to the change in arrangements concerning the advertising of vacant posts in the judiciary. [61844]

Ms Rosie Winterton: My noble and learned Friend, the Lord Chancellor, is committed to a system of judicial appointments that is fair to applicants and ensures that vacancies are filled promptly by candidates who best meet the published criteria. To this end, he published a consultation paper in April of this year on ways in which the selection procedures for the Circuit Bench and Recordership might be restructured or streamlined. Competitions for these appointments in 2002–03 have identified more suitable candidates than there are vacancies. The competitions for these appointments that would normally have begun in April 2002 have therefore been suspended for between six and 18 months. Any new vacancies that arise during this period will be made from reserve lists.

Similarly, in respect of the High Court Bench, there are many suitable candidates remaining from the 2000 selection round. Very few vacancies are expected over the next year. In the circumstances it would be both inappropriate and impracticable to mount a full scale recruitment exercise. The Lord Chancellor has, however, decided that people with appropriate judicial experience should not be denied the opportunity to be considered for these vacancies. Some 2000 holders of judicial office have therefore been invited to express interest in these appointments.

Bob Spink: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what proportion of *(a)* judges, *(b)* recorders and *(c)* assistant recorders are (i) women and (ii) non-white Caucasian. [61859]

Ms Rosie Winterton: As at 1 May 2002 all 107 High Court judges were of white origin, six of whom were women. The following table provides information on the Circuit Bench, District Bench and Recorders as at 1 May 2002. It shows the total number, the number and proportion of women judges and those judges who have stated on an ethnic monitoring questionnaire that they are of white origin. Applicants and part-time judges whose appointments have been renewed are asked to complete a questionnaire about their ethnic origin, but they are not obliged to do so. Many of those who have been appointed for some years will not have been asked to complete an ethnic origin questionnaire. The post of Assistant Recorder was abolished in April 2000 and all Assistant Recorders became Recorders.

Judicial appointments statistics, including women and ethnic minorities appointments, are published regularly on the LCD website (www.lcd.gov.uk).

	Total	*Women*	*Have stated they are of white origin*	*Have not completed an ethnic origin questionnaire*
Circuit judges	610	57	350	253
Percentage		9.3	57.4	
Recorders	1,324	162	1,185	100
Percentage		12.2	89.5	
District judges	435	80	240	183
Percentage		18.4	55.2	
Deputy District judges	774	155	579	183
Percentage		20	74.8	
District judges magistrates courts	103	20	89	11
Percentage		19.4	86.4	
Deputy District judges magistrates courts	152	30	138	5
Percentage		19.7	90.8	

Ethnic Minority Events

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many ethnic minority events *(a)* she and *(b)* her Ministers have attended since 7 June 2001. [62781]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Department does not separately classify or record events as being ethnic minority events. However, since 7 June 2001 the Lord Chancellor has attended one event and his Ministers have attended 17 events where an ethnic minority issue was integral to the purpose, identity and character of the event.

Wigs

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what recent discussions she has had with the judiciary concerning the wearing of wigs in court. [62935]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Following a public opinion survey which we will shortly be conducting in England and Wales, the Lord Chancellor will issue a consultation paper containing proposals on possible alternatives to the current modes of court dress for judges, lawyers and court staff. The Lord Chancellor is in regular contact with the Lord Chief Justice and the other Heads of Division and has kept them informed on the progress of the project.

Youth Courts

Kate Hoey: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans the Department has to reduce time spent in the pursuit of evidence and documentation in youth courts. [60326]

Yvette Cooper: A number of recent initiatives are under way that will impact on timeliness in youth court cases, for example, measures are being developed to admit in evidence digital photographs, which have been used instead of a physical identification parade. My Department is also working with the Home Office, the Crown Prosecution Service, the Law Society and others to increase the use of technology to transmit documentation electronically and to present digital images in court.

CABINET OFFICE

Staff Training

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how much the Department has spent on staff training and development in each of the last five years. [61059]

Mr. Alexander: For details of my Department's spend on staff training and development for the years 1997–98 to 2000–01, I refer the hon. Member to the answer my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Mr. Leslie) gave to the hon. Member for Buckingham on 15 May 2002, column 715W.

Estimated expenditure on staff training and development in 2001–02 is £4,025,000 and is broken down as follows:

	£ thousand
Core Cabinet Office	1,603
Central Office of Information	[1]588
Government Office for the regions	1,666
Centre for Management and Policy Studies	168

[1] Includes training partly funded by the Civil Service Modernisation Fund

The 2001–02 Resource Account is undergoing final adjustments and awaiting audit. As a result, the figures quoted are subject to change.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Explosives

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when the final draft consultation on Manufacturing and Storage of Explosives Regulations will be completed; when the regulations will be published with supporting evidence; under what powers the regulations will be implemented; and whether they will comply with the Health and Safety Executive's Mission Statement. [62566]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

I am advised by the Health and Safety Commission on policy on the safety of the manufacture and storage of explosives.

In March, the Health and Safety Commission published a consultation document setting out its proposals for new regulations on the manufacture and storage of explosives. The consultation period has just ended. The Health and Safety Executive will be considering the responses to the proposals before making recommendations to the Health and Safety Commission. If it approves the revised proposals, the Health and Safety Commission will then make recommendations to me.

It is for the Health and Safety Commission to decide if and when to make recommendations to me, however I understand that it is hoped to submit the proposals to the Health and Safety Commission in the first half of next year.

The regulations will be made under Section 1 of the Health and Safety at Work (etc.) Act 1974. Section 1 (2) gives the Health and Safety Commission remit to replace existing legislation such as the Explosives Act 1875 with regulations and Approved Code of Practice "designed to maintain or improve the standards of health, safety and welfare established by or under those attachments". I am sure that there is absolutely no question of the Health and Safety Commission making recommendations to me that were not fully in line with its remit or with its Mission Statement to ensure that risks to people's health and safety from work activities are properly controlled.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how the planned manufacturing and storage of explosives regulations will improve safety for *(a)* the general public and *(b)* those that handle explosives; what scientific advice he has received and how the regulations will apply to that advice; and what *(a)* explosives site controls and *(b)* explosives frequency controls the regulations will include. [62567]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

I am advised by the Health and Safety Commission on policy on the safety of the manufacture and storage of explosives.

The Explosives Act 1875 has been successful in securing a high level of protection both for the public and for workers employed in the manufacture and storage of explosives. However, over the years the Act has been overlaid with a large number of items of secondary legislation. The proposals are intended to further improve the safety record by: simplifying the existing legislation and making it easier for dutyholders and enforcers to understand; updating the regulatory framework to take account of changes in the industry and technology; and taking the opportunity to incorporate industry best practice.

The major controls in the proposals are:

a duty on anyone manufacturing or storing explosives to take appropriate measures to prevent fires and explosions, to limit the extent of fires and explosions, and to protect people in the event of a fire or explosion;

anyone manufacturing or storing explosives must have a licence from HSE or the local authority—or be registered with the local authority;

requirements to maintain separation distances around buildings where explosives are being manufactured or stored.

The measures are intended to prevent explosions occurring in the first place. The separation distances requirements are intended to ensure that explosives buildings are not located in places where they would present an intolerable level of risk to members of the public.

The proposals have been subject to extensive and very detailed consultation with employers, trade unions and local authorities as well as with the Ministry of Defence and other interested bodies such as professional associations. They were also subject to scrutiny from the HSC's Advisory Committee on Dangerous Substances.

The proposals on separation distances take full account of extensive explosion tests conducted by the Ministry of Defence. They are the product of work by a working group that includes internationally-respected experts on explosives and risk assessment and control. The report of their work has been published by the Health and Safety Executive, copies will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on his policy relating to the acceptable level of danger of uncontrolled risk to the public relating to the storage and manufacture of explosives; and if he will list *(a)* serious injuries and *(b)* deaths caused by explosives in each of the last five years, broken down by (i) domestic and (ii) commercial premises. [62568]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

I am advised by the Health and Safety Commission on policy on the safety of the manufacture and storage of explosives.

The Health and Safety Commission published a consultation document in March setting out proposals for regulations on the manufacture and storage of explosives. I expect to receive its recommendations for new regulations in the course of next year. The regulations will include requirements on those manufacturing or storing explosives to take appropriate measures to prevent explosions including revised requirements on separation distances to be maintained around explosives sites. Under no circumstances should the risks be uncontrolled.

The revised proposals are designed to ensure that the maximum level of risk to someone living or working in the vicinity of explosives factory or store is one in a million. This level is generally accepted as the benchmark for the broadly acceptable level of risk to members of the public from industrial activities.

HSE has not received any reports during the last five years of accidents involving either the manufacture or storage of explosives that have resulted in death or serious injury to members of the public.

Ionising Radiation Regulations 1999

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what are the annual costs to the nuclear power industry of compliance with the Ionising Radiations Regulations 1999. [63198]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

The annual costs to industry as a whole are estimated to be £1.3 million to £1.4 million in current prices. It is not possible to disaggregate the costs to the nuclear power industry.

English Heritage

Mr. Pound: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister to which Minister English Heritage is accountable in respect of London planning matters. [62269]

Mr. McNulty: English Heritage is a non-departmental public body responsible for advising the Government on all aspects of the built heritage in England. It is sponsored by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport but it also works closely with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, which is responsible for planning. It has a statutory role as consultee in certain planning and other heritage casework in Greater London and in the rest of England. This role is set out in the Town and Country Planning (General Development Procedure) Order 1995 and the joint DETR/DCMS Circular 01/2001.

Out-of-town Shopping Centres

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many planning permissions for out of town shopping centres have been granted since 7 June 2001. [63445]

Mr. McNulty: The information requested is not held centrally, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Travellers (Bournemouth)

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many traveller *(a)* caravans and *(b)* families were on unauthorised sites within the Borough of Bournemouth in each year since 1997. [63325]

Mr. McNulty: The ODPM does not collect cumulative figures for unauthorised gipsy and traveller encampments. A biannual count of gipsy caravans camped on both authorised and unauthorised sites is carried out by local authorities each January and July. The figures are collated by the ODPM. The count gives a snapshot figure for the day the count is carried out. A copy of the statistics is placed in the Library of both Houses. Since 1997 the figures are as follows:

Unauthorised caravans:

January 2002—None
July 2001—None
January 2001—None
July 2000—4
January 2000—14
July 1999—29
January 1999—None
July 1998—None
January 1998—None
July 1997—42
January 1997—None.

Figures for families have been kept only since 1999. A count is carried out at the same time as the count for gipsy caravans and therefore is a snapshot figure.

Families

January 2002—None
July 2001—None
January 2001—None
July 2000—4
January 2000—13
July 1999—29
January 1999—None.

Firefighters

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) if he will make a statement on his policy towards allowing firefighters to retire from the force through *(a)* ill health and *(b)* injury sustained while on active service with full pension rights; and if he will make a statement; [64217]

(2) if he will make a statement on the reviews he is undertaking of firefighters' pension arrangements. [64218]

Mr. Raynsford: We have at present no proposals to change the arrangements which allow firefighters to retire from brigades with an ill-health pension and injury award when a retirement results from injury on duty.

The Fire-fighters' Pension Scheme is kept under review and we continue to discuss amendments to the scheme with the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council, which represents fire service interests.

Children in Care

Paul Holmes: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many girls under 18 years of age, not of UK nationality, were taken into local authority care in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001; how many remained in care for less than one week; and what nationalities they were. [62216]

Jacqui Smith: I have been asked to reply.

Information on the nationality of looked-after children is not collected centrally.

PRIME MINISTER

Staff Training

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister how much his office has spent on staff training and development in each of the last five years. [61060]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office today.

Parliamentary Questions

Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister if he will set out the guidance given to Ministers in respect of the criteria applied in answering written parliamentary questions. [61971]

The Prime Minister: Section 1 of the Ministerial Code includes guidance to Ministers on their conduct in relation to Parliament.

Official Photographers

Mr. Collins: To ask the Prime Minister on how many occasions during the last 12 months an official photographer has accompanied him on official visits *(a)* overseas and *(b)* within the UK; what (i) travel expenses, (ii) costs of equipment and processing, (iii) staff payment and (iv) other costs were incurred on each occasion; what publications official photographs have appeared in during the last 12 months and what terms and conditions were attached to the publication of such photographs; and whether photographs taken on official visits are available for use in non-governmental literature. [62830]

The Prime Minister: None.

EU Applicant Countries

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister how many *(a)* EU applicant countries he has visited and *(b)* EU applicant Heads of Government he has met since 7 June 2001. [63442]

The Prime Minister: I visited the Czech Republic on 8 April 2002. Since 7 June 2001, I have met the Heads of Governments of Poland, Romania, Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Slovakia and Hungary in London. I have met the Heads of Government of the EU applicant countries at all the European Councils held since 7 June 2001.

Public Appointments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister what public appointments he has made since 7 June 2001; and if he will list the names of the persons and the organisations to which they have been appointed. [63441]

The Prime Minister: Since 7 June 2001 I have made the following appointments and re-appointments to public bodies:

Appointee	*Post held and body*
The right hon. Lord Morris of Aberavon QC	Member of the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments
Dr. Mike Philips	Trustee of the National Heritage Memorial Fund
Professor Jacqueline McGlade	Trustee of the Natural History Museum
Dame Rennie Fritchie	Commissioner for Public Appointments
The right hon. Lord Maclennan of Rogart	Member, Advisory Committee on Business Appointments
Professor Martin Daunton	Trustee, National Maritime Museum
Raymond Miles Esq.	Trustee, National Maritime Museum
Dr. Derek Langslow	Trustee, National Heritage Memorial Fund
Professor Sir Christopher White CVO	Trustee, Victoria and Albert Museum
David Rayner Esq. CBE	Trustee, National Museum of Science and Industry
Sir Angus Grossart CBE	Trustee, National Heritage Memorial Fund
Professor Tom Pritchard	Trustee, National Heritage Memorial Fund
John Baker Esq. CBE	Chairman, Senior Salaries Review Body
The right hon. Lord Sutherland	Surveillance Commissioner
Sir Charles McCullough	Surveillance Commissioner
The right hon. Sir Michael Hutchison	Surveillance Commissioner
Lord Bonomy	Surveillance Commissioner
The right hon. Sir John MacDermott	Surveillance Commissioner
Dame Bridget Ogilvie	Trustee, National Museum of Science and Industry
Air Chief Marshal Sir Peter Squire GCB DFC	Trustee of the Imperial War Museum
Tom Phillips Esq. RA	Trustee of the National Portrait Gallery
Sir John Kerr GCMG	Trustee of the National Gallery
Miss Judith Mayhew	Trustee of the Natural History Museum
Professor Roderick Smith	Trustee of the National Museum of Science and Industry
Sir Andrew Turnbull KCB CVO	Official Head of HIM Home Civil Service
William Cockburn Esq.	Chair, School Teachers Review Body
Ms Janet Langdon	Member, School Teachers Review Body
Peter Gedling Esq.	Member, School Teachers Review Body
Tony Vineall Esq.	Member, School Teachers Review Body
P. Tett Esq.	Member, Prison Service Pay Review Body
Sir Howard Davies	Trustee, Tate Gallery
Sir Ron Cooke	Trustee, National Museum of Science and Industry
Richard Haythornthwaite Esq.	Trustee, National Museum of Science and Industry
The right hon. Lord Mayhew of Twysden QC	Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments
Professor Sir Martin Rees	Trustee, British Museum
Sir John Boyd KCMG	Trustee, British Museum
Admiral Sir Jock Slater	Chairman, Imperial War Museum
Dr. David Landau	Trustee, National Gallery
Donald Moore, Esq.	Trustee, National Gallery
Professor Christopher Baines	Trustee, National Maritime Museum
Ian Dahl Esq.	Trustee, National Maritime Museum
Victor Benjamin Esq	Trustee, National Maritime Museum
Lord Puttnam of Queens CBE	Trustee, National Museum of Science and Industry
Sir Christopher Mallaby CMG CVO KCMG	Trustee, Tate Gallery
Julian Opie Esq.	Trustee, Tate Gallery
The right hon. Chris Smith MP	Member, Committee on Standards in Public Life
Professor Alice Brown	Member, Committee on Standards in Public Life
Sir Michael Perry CBE	Chair, Senior Salaries Review Body
Dr. Bleddyn Bryn Roberts	Member, School Teachers Review Body

Countryside, Liberty and Livelihood March

Mr. Evans: To ask the Prime Minister if he will meet the Countryside, Liberty and Livelihood march on London on 22 September. [63924]

The Prime Minister: I have no plans to do so.

Gibraltar

Mr. Evans: To ask the Prime Minister what visits he has made to Gibraltar since June 1997; and what the purpose of each visit was. [63923]

The Prime Minister: I have not visited Gibraltar since June 1997. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary visited on 3 May 2002.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Evans: To ask the Prime Minister how many times in the last five years he has visited the Falkland Islands; and what plans he has to visit the islands. [63922]

The Prime Minister: I have not visited the Falkland Islands in the last five years and have no plans to do so. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence visited the Falkland Islands on 11–12 March 2002.

NFU/Countryside Alliance

Mr. Evans: To ask the Prime Minister how many times he has met representatives from the *(a)* National Farmers Union and *(b)* Countryside Alliance since June 1997; and what topics were discussed. [63919]

The Prime Minister: I have meetings with a wide range of organisations and individuals. As with previous Administrations it is not my practice to provide details of all such meetings.

Hunting With Hounds

Mr. Evans: To ask the Prime Minister if he plans to meet a hunt before the end of the consultation period for the Hunting with Hounds Bill. [63920]

The Prime Minister: No. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Rural Affairs has met a variety of people, including those involved in different forms of hunting, as part of the process he announced to the House on 21 March 2002.

Tibet

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he had with Li Ruihuan, Chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, concerning the situation in Tibet, during Chairman Li's recent visit to the UK; and what response he received. [63860]

The Prime Minister: My discussions with Mr. Li Ruihuan focused on India/Pakistan and the war against terrorism. However, my noble Friend the Lord Chancellor also met Mr. Li and raised Tibet and other human rights concerns with him.

Alastair Campbell and Jonathan Powell

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister if he will rescind the authority vested in Alastair Campbell and Jonathan Powell to give instructions to civil servants. [63811]

The Prime Minister: No.

Cabinet Committees

John Cryer: To ask the Prime Minister what changes are planned to the membership of each Cabinet Committee. [64492]

The Prime Minister: I have revised the composition of Cabinet Committees in the light of the recent machinery of government changes. I have also established three new committees: a sub-committee, CJS (IT) on information technology in the criminal justice system; MISC20 on social and economic aspects of migration; and MISC21 on the Government's response to parliamentary modernisation. MISC16, having fulfilled its specific remit to review the practice on tackling illegal working and policy on managed migration, has been wound up. These issues will now be taken forward by MISC20. The full list of committees, their terms of reference and their membership has been placed in the Library of the House and will shortly be available on the Cabinet Office website (www.cabinet-office.gov.uk).

HEALTH

Joint Triage Protocols

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to develop joint triage protocols between NHS Direct and GP out-of-hours co-operatives. [54268]

Mr. Lammy: NHS Direct uses an extensive database of triage protocols designed to cover the wide range of presenting conditions of callers. They are designed to assess the acuity of patient condition and may result in referral to a range of providers including care at home, pharmacist, general practitioner (in or out of hours) and accident and emergency.

NHS Direct has full clinical control over their protocols and involves a wide range of health care professionals including many with experience of out of hours primary care, in their development.

NHS Annual Reports

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much NHS annual reports cost to produce and deliver in *(a)* Gloucestershire and *(b)* England in the last year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [54663]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 8 May 2002]:* The Department does not collect centrally data on production and distribution costs for annual reports produced by national health service bodies.

The Department published 'NHS Plan-A Progress Report for 2000–01' by the Modernisation Board in January 2002. I refer the hon. Member to the response given by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State to the hon. Member for Romsey (Sandra Gidley) on 9 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 354W.

Brain Injury

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects people with brain injury to benefit from the vocational services framework provisions. [56433]

Jacqui Smith: The Department of Health, the Department for Work and Pensions, the Health and Safety Executive together with the Department for Education and Skills are working together to prevent people from becoming ill or injured as a result of work and to reduce workplace absence due to sickness whatever the cause.

One of the aims is to ensure the development of rehabilitative initiatives to increase the prosperity of currently inactive people by facilitating, wherever practicable, an early return to their existing job or alternative work. We are exploring the possibility of building on existing good practice through the auspices of NHS Plus.

NCSC/CHI Merger

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement setting out the timetable for the merger of the National Care Standards Commission and the Commission for Health Improvement. [56610]

Jacqui Smith: Primary legislation will be required to establish the functions of the Commission for Healthcare Audit and Inspection which will bring together the work of the Commission for Heath Improvement, the independent healthcare functions of the National Care Standards Commission and the health value for money work of the Audit Commission.

We hope to introduce legislation as soon as possible.

Cervical Screening

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer of 18 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 167W, how *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the local primary care trust is measuring the success of attempts to increase uptake of cervical screening among Asian women. [57094]

Ms Blears: The coverage of the cervical screening programme is assessed as the proportion of women resident in a health authority who have had a screening result at least once in the last five years. Coverage has always been used as an indicator of quality in the cervical screening programme, as well as highlighting inequalities. Coverage rates for cervical screening are not collected by ethnic group nationally.

The new informed choice leaflet, "Cervical Screening: The Facts", which is sent out with every invitation for screening nationally, has been translated into Gujarati, Punjabi, Urdu, Bengali and Hindi.

The NHS Cancer Plan required all primary care organisations to review their screening coverage rates and draw up plans to improve accessibility of screening for women in socially excluded and minority ethnic groups.

Luton Primary Care Trust continues to monitor the uptake of cervical screening among Asian women through working with local general practices to promote cervical screening and from statistics collected from the local sexual health clinics.

MMR Vaccine

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to record nursery children having a single *(a)* measles, *(b)* mumps and *(c)* rubella vaccination. [57138]

Ms Blears: Information on immunisation status of children at nursery school is not routinely collected.

Care Direct

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information is provided on the Care Direct schemes in rural areas; and if he will make it available. [57456]

Jacqui Smith: As announced in February last year, Care Direct is being piloted in six local authorities in the south-west of England—Bournemouth, Bristol, Devon, Gloucestershire, Plymouth and Somerset. The second phase of pilots, starting in the autumn this year, will cover the remaining local authorities in the south-west.

The director of social services in Cornwall is leading the implementation of Care Direct for the county council. Implementation plans are now being developed to meet the needs of older people living in Cornwall. These will supplement and build on the existing services for older people in the county and I am certain that the new service will be especially responsive to the needs of the rural community that it will serve.

Local information about Care Direct in Cornwall will be made available nearer the time when the service becomes operational, but wider publicity about the service can be found now on the Care Direct website www.caredirect.gov.uk.

Schizophrenia

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects NICE to publish guidance relating to atypical antipsychotic medication for schizophrenia. [56592]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* The National Institute for Clinical Excellence issued its guidance on the use of newer (atypical) antipsychotic drugs for the treatment of schizophrenia on 6 June 2002.

Osteoporosis

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of orthopaedic beds were taken up with osteoporotic hip fracture patients in *(a)* Hull and the East Riding and *(b)* England and Wales, in the last two quarters for which figures are available. [57572]

Jacqui Smith: Information on the number of orthopaedic beds is not collected. Information on the average daily number of beds by broad ward classification is published annually for each national health service trust on the Department's website at www.doh.gov.uk/hospitalactivity. The latest available data are for 2000–01.

Carers Groups

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to mitigate the financial penalties on Carers Groups caused by the abolition of local inspection units. [57608]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 23 May 2002]:* I believe this question concerns the impact on domiciliary care providers of the new regulatory arrangements under the Care Standards Act which require them to register with the National Care Standards Commission from 1 April 2002, and pay a registration fee.

Our policy is to set fees to recover the full cost of regulating and inspecting service providers. We decided, however, that full cost recovery should be phased in over five years, in order to allow providers to adjust to the new fee regime and to avoid destabilising the care sector.

We consulted extensively on the fee structure before finalising it. The fee levels for each service have been determined according to the total costs for that service and in all cases have been set at a level lower than full cost recovery for that service. Thus in the first year of regulation by the Commission domiciliary care providers will only pay 24 per cent. of the actual cost of registration and inspection. In addition, we have agreed to make a concession to small agencies and set the annual fee at 50 per cent. of the level for other agencies. A small agency is defined in the regulations as one where no more than two members of staff, including registered persons but excluding someone employed solely as a receptionist, are employed at any one time.

Cosmetic Treatment

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment has been made by his Department on the relative effectiveness of *(a)* Dysport and *(b)* Botox for cosmetic treatment. [59416]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* The Department has not made any assessment of the relative effectiveness of Dysport and Botox for cosmetic treatments.

Care Provision

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* intermediate care beds and *(b)* registered care homes there were in (i) London and (ii) Kingston borough in (A) 1997 and (B) 2001; and if he will make a statement. [60076]

Jacqui Smith: There are no intermediate care figures for 1997. This is a new service and a new data collection. The only figures available are for May 2002 . There are 92 intermediate care beds in total in Kingston. 55 beds at Tolworth hospital, 29 at Surbiton hospital and eight beds at Hobrick house residential home. The total number of London beds for 2001–02 was 939. Kingston has an above average number of beds for their population compared to other London boroughs.

Previous data had been collected at health authority level.

The table shows the number of registered residential and nursing care homes, private hospitals and clinics in Kingston and London area in 1997 and 2001.

Registered residential[1] and nursing[2] care homes in Kingston and London areas in 1997 and 2001

Number

	1997		*2001*	
At 31 March	*Kingston*	*London*	*Kingston*	*London*
Residential care homes of which:	67	2,213	63	2,239
Local authority staffed homes	5	299	5	241
Independent homes	62	1,914	58	1998
Dual registered homes	4	44	2	86
Nursing homes[3,4] of which:	19	406	20	462
General and mental nursing homes	17	330	16	347
Private nursing homes and clinics	2	76	4	115
Total care homes	90	2,663	85	2,787

[1] Homes registered within Kingston-upon-Thames local authority, exclude children homes.

[2] Homes registered within Kingston and Richmond health authority.

[3] Registered general and mental nursing homes, private hospitals and clinics.

[4] Figures for registered nursing homes relates to the period 1 October 1996 to 31 March 1997.

Source:

Department of Health's annual returns.

Good progress is being made towards meeting the NHS Plan target of 5,000 additional intermediate care beds by 2003–04. The target of 1,500 additional intermediate care beds by March 2002 has been met comfortably and as a result London has benefited from more intermediate care beds. A proportion of these additional beds will be in independent care homes.

Intermediate care is not a single service model—it is a range of services that can be provided in a range of settings to meet the individual needs of service users and their carers—the key is the principle of patient centred care and the assessment process that underpins it. The appropriate settings can include designated rehabilitation facilities, nursing and residential homes, sheltered housing, a range of community based options and, of course, people's own homes.

Cardiac Care

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average waiting time for heart bypass operations for patients from Essex hospitals was in each year since 1995. [60542]

Mr. Lammy: Essex residents are treated mainly at two specialist out of county hospitals; St. Bartholomews and The London National Health Service Trust, and Papworth Hospital National Health Service Trust.

Annual figures are not available.

Over the last three years for St. Bartholomews and The London NHS Trust the latest available average waiting time information for these operations is 6.62 months

Over the last two years for Papworth hospital NHS trust the latest available average waiting time information for these operations is 4.48 months.

Source:

Essex Health Authority Monthly Performance Returns

Mental Health

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the difference is between *(a)* earmarking and *(b)* ringfencing in the context of the additional revenue and capital allocated to mental health services in 2002–03 to ensure that the funding reaches front line services in *(a)* England and *(b)* North Yorkshire. [60507]

Jacqui Smith: The additional £75 million allocated to health authorities in 2002–03 was earmarked for mental health. These are funds that are identified at health authority level with the intention that they be spent on the purpose for which they were allocated. This allows national health service organisations maximum flexibility to use the resources available to meet national and local needs.

The Secretary of State has a power under section 97(6) of the NHS Act 1977 to ring fence sums so that they can only be issued for the purpose for which they are issued. This power is used very sparingly.

The earmarked allocation is being monitored though to investment via the service and financial framework negotiations and reports. Department officials are working with front line NHS organisations to ensure sufficient emphasis and investment has gone into the NHS Plan commitments to ensure progress ready for the 2004 target dates.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the role of ward hostesses is in mental health trusts. [61460]

Jacqui Smith: The exact role of a ward hostess would be for local determination. However, in general terms the role would focus around meeting the needs of patients' food and drink requirements. The hostess should be integrated as a member of the ward team.

NHS Dentistry

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding has been made available to the Morecambe and Lunesdale constituency for NHS dental provision. [60776]

Jacqui Smith: Information on funding of national health service dental provision is not available on a constituency basis.

The gross fees paid to general dental practitioners (GDP) within the old Morecambe bay health authority area, for providing NHS dental treatment, were £9.28 million in 2001–02. Additional sums are paid to GDPs, for example to reimburse business rates. Funding for hospital and community dental services is drawn from the health authority's main allocation. This information is not identified separately.

In 2001–02 the following additional funds were made available to Morecambe bay health authority to improve NHS dental services:

£308,000 revenue and £312,000 capital to establish a personal dental services dental access centre pilot scheme (DAC). The DAC has surgeries in Barrow and in Lancaster, to offer unregistered patients access to dental services. The revenue funding available for the current year for this DAC is up to £820,000 and a further capital payment will be made of around £160,000. The service aim is to treat up to 17,000 patients a year when both centres are fully operational.

An allocation of £270,800 was made in 2001–02 to GDPs from the modernisation fund for grants to local dental practices to provide practice improvements and additional facilities.

£7,500 was allocated to the health authority from the dental action plan fund to enable additional patient registrations to be secured.

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what has been the *(a)* cost and *(b)* saving from the pursuit of the Department's Public Service Agreement targets in each year since they were introduced; [60887]

(2) what the *(a)* cost and *(b)* saving has been from the Department's pursuit of Service Delivery Agreement targets in each year since they were introduced. [61634]

Mr. Lammy: The Department's public service agreement set outs the key outcomes it is committed to deliver with the resources provided, and its service delivery agreement sets out the key steps towards delivery of those targets. Every year the Department publishes performance against its targets—including on value for money and the resources it has used, in its departmental report.

Action Zone (Tyne and Wear)

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many homes in Tyne and Wear have been insulated as a result of the Health Action Zone campaign there. [61430]

Ms Blears: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 10 June 2002, *Official Report,* column 1087W.

Ward Housekeepers

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the job description of a ward housekeeper. [61461]

Mr. Lammy: The main elements of the role are ensuring the delivery of cleaning, catering, and minor maintenance, together with other specified tasks to meet individual patient needs as determined by the ward sister/charge nurse. A full job description is available in a document published by NHS Estates—'A First Guide to New Modern and Dependable Ward Housekeeping Services in the NHS'—published in November 2001.

Youth Treatment Centres

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the definition is of a youth treatment centre; what conditions they treat; where they are located; and how many children are treated in each. [61458]

Jacqui Smith: Two youth treatment centres were opened in the 1970s to provide long-term care and treatment for a small minority of severely disturbed and antisocial children whose specialist treatment needs could not be satisfactorily met by the forms of residential provision that existed at that time. The first centre, based in Brentwood in Essex, closed in 1995 and the second based in Birmingham in the Midlands closed in 2000. The children and young people that may have been considered for placement with youth treatment centres are now cared for in local authority provision or placed by the youth justice board as appropriate to their needs.

School Fruit

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 29 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 624W, on school fruit, which varieties of fruit are distributed as part of the national school fruit scheme; and from which countries each fruit is imported. [61525]

Jacqui Smith: Apples, pears, bananas and easy peel citrus are supplied as part of the national school fruit scheme. The contracted suppliers and distributors of fruit to the scheme have reported the following countries of origin for the four fruit types:

Apples: UK, Belgium, France, the Netherlands, New Zealand, South Africa, Argentina, Chile and the USA

Pears: UK, Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Portugal, South Africa and Chile

Easy peel citrus: Spain, South Africa, Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay

Bananas: Cameroon, Belize, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guadaloupe, Martinique, Surinam and Windward Isles.

Health Care Professionals

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health under what circumstances he plans to demand patient information from health care professionals. [61424]

Mr. Lammy: I have no plans to demand patient information from health care professionals. While the Health Service (Control of Patient Information) Regulations 2002 permit me to introduce a requirement for patient information to be disclosed in support of work on cancer or communicable disease surveillance, I will only do so if so advised by the independent patient information advisory group. In the absence of such a requirement, the regulations are permissive rather than prescriptive, allowing but not requiring information to be disclosed.

Hearing Aids

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department is taking to monitor whether *(a)* primary care trusts and *(b)* health authorities are making funding available to provide the best quality hearing aids to all patients. [61078]

Jacqui Smith: The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) issued guidance on hearing aid technology in July 2000. Directions have been issued obliging health authorities and primary care trusts to provide appropriate funding so that clinical decisions made by doctors involving NICE recommended treatments or drugs can be funded.

We expect all health authorities and primary care trusts to meet their statutory obligations to provide appropriate funding for treatments recommended by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence. The new strategic health authorities will manage the performance of their constituent national health service bodies in meeting these commitments.

Abortions

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by health authority in England and Wales the percentage of NHS-funded abortions occurring within 10 weeks gestation of pregnancy in each of the last five years. [61073]

Ms Blears: The information requested is set out as follows.

Abortions in England and Wales 1997–2001 performed under 10 weeks gestation, percentage NHS funded

	Year of termination				
Health authority of residence (2001 boundaries)	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*[1]
England					
Avon	64	63	64	60	53
Barking and Havering	44	49	42	50	71
Barnet, Enfield and Haringey	47	55	58	51	47
Barnsley	58	70	63	69	72
Bedfordshire	48	44	48	51	53
Berkshire	78	80	78	75	78
Bexley, Bromley and Greenwich	49	58	51	57	62
Birmingham	59	56	62	66	67
Bradford	73	70	67	68	65
Brent and Harrow	75	77	74	73	75
Buckinghamshire	64	63	66	67	72
Bury and Rochdale	53	56	49	63	65
Calderdale and Kirklees	79	77	75	77	76
Cambridgeshire	82	82	82	84	81
Camden and Islington	51	55	55	57	55
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	64	82	86	87	76
County Durham	93	89	88	88	88
Coventry	92	95	87	92	96
Croydon	75	75	53	53	68
Doncaster	84	81	83	83	85
Dorset	42	44	41	46	45
Dudley	54	53	53	50	65
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	49	40	40	43	40
East Kent	64	65	67	72	80
East Lancashire	84	81	84	88	86

Abortions in England and Wales 1997–2001 performed under 10 weeks gestation, percentage NHS funded

	Year of termination				
Health authority of residence (2001 boundaries)	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*[1]
East London and The City	39	39	43	43	33
East Riding	88	88	89	90	89
East Surrey	49	51	60	58	70
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	47	43	54	52	54
Gateshead and South Tyneside	92	91	92	87	88
Gloucestershire	82	77	79	79	83
Herefordshire	87	84	88	91	87
Hertfordshire	52	61	59	61	63
Hillingdon	47	55	59	55	62
Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and SE Hants	82	82	85	86	82
Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster	51	56	53	54	54
Kingston and Richmond	44	43	40	39	38
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	40	58	59	58	51
Leeds	75	64	59	72	70
Leicestershire	77	81	83	83	79
Lincolnshire	85	84	88	89	89
Liverpool	82	74	71	68	60
Manchester	55	57	71	82	86
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	54	52	49	48	44
Morecambe Bay	86	87	76	82	77
Newcastle and North Tyneside	92	92	94	93	95
Norfolk	91	92	90	90	90
North and East Devon	94	94	94	94	95
North and Mid Hampshire	40	42	42	54	64
North Cheshire	79	76	75	73	79
North Cumbria	97	98	98	97	96
North Derbyshire	84	86	86	88	90
North Essex	50	57	53	52	52
North Nottinghamshire	77	82	83	84	84
North Staffordshire	62	71	68	64	63
North West Lancashire	39	48	48	60	73
North Yorkshire	79	72	72	71	71
Northamptonshire	66	68	64	63	62
Northumberland	97	96	94	95	95
Nottingham	69	79	84	80	78
Oxfordshire	89	88	84	82	79
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	31	45	30	26	37
Rotherham	76	69	74	77	78
Salford and Trafford	47	46	59	66	71
Sandwell	73	70	68	70	79
Sefton	78	71	67	64	75
Sheffield	81	77	78	82	86
Shropshire	61	68	72	75	78
Solihull	29	27	29	48	55
Somerset	91	86	85	82	81
South and West Devon	89	87	95	96	92
South Cheshire	74	70	66	68	74
South Essex	61	64	62	64	68
South Humber	89	92	93	93	91
South Lancashire	52	47	53	57	67
South Staffordshire	57	64	68	75	78
Southampton and South West Hampshire	75	71	76	76	77
Southern Derbyshire	76	81	86	76	78
St. Helens and Knowsley	74	71	68	65	63
Stockport	64	59	63	63	73
Suffolk	87	86	87	88	85
Sunderland	95	88	87	88	88
Tees	97	95	94	96	96
Wakefield	63	50	51	63	71
Walsall	51	45	46	48	48
Warwickshire	90	85	81	87	88
West Kent	59	75	76	73	77
West Pennine	62	58	52	73	81
West Surrey	64	64	68	66	70
West Sussex	38	42	47	50	55
Wigan and Bolton	60	58	62	68	73
Wiltshire	51	55	55	59	69
Wirral	84	66	75	73	83
Wolverhampton	44	38	38	58	67

Abortions in England and Wales 1997–2001 performed under 10 weeks gestation, percentage NHS funded

Health authority of residence (2001 boundaries)	*Year of termination*				
	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*[1]
Wales					
Bro Taf	61	56	66	73	70
Dyfed Powys	90	92	90	89	90
Gwent	93	92	90	86	88
Morgannwg	93	94	92	91	89
North Wales	83	82	82	81	84

[1] Provisional

Care Homes

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he is planning to issue guidance on standard 27.3 of Care Homes for Older People National Minimum Standards to *(a)* set out the ratios of care staff to service users and *(b)* provide a system for calculating staff numbers required. [63816]

Jacqui Smith: The Department commissioned the residential forum to produce the guidance. This was published on 27 March. On the same day I issued statutory guidance to the National Care Standards Commission, under Section 6 of the Care Standards Act. The guidance sets out how the Commission should apply the regulations and standards in relation to staffing levels in care homes, to ensure that the approach to staffing levels is not rigid and that it avoids placing additional burdens on care homes.

Copies of the Residential Forum's guidance are available from:

Social Care Association (Education)
Thornton House
Hook Road
Surbiton
Surrey KT6 5AN
Tel 020 8397 1419.

My guidance to the Commission on applying the Residential Forum's guidance is available on the Department's internet website at: www.doh.gov.uk/ncsc.

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what (1) assessment his Department has made of the impact the new care standards proposals will have on the level of care home fees; [61980]

(2) what action his Department is taking to deal with the ongoing disputes between care homes and local councils over the level of fees; and what assessment he has made of the impact of disputes between care homes and local councils on bed blocking in hospitals; [61977]

(3) if he will increase the level of funding to local councils in England for fees for care homes; [61979]

(4) if he will introduce an arbitration system for dealing with disputes over the level of fees for care homes. [61978]

Jacqui Smith: The Government is providing records levels of funding for social services. Resources have increased nationally by 20 per cent. in real terms between 1996–97 and 2002–03, an average real terms increase of 3 per cent. per annum. In addition, as announced on 17 April, we are increasing the resources for personal social services by an annual average of 6 per cent. in real terms from 2003–04 to 2005–06. Councils have been incentivised to use some of their 6 per cent. annual increases to stabilise the care home market and fund home care services for older people.

Included within these additional funds are resources provided to meet the cost care homes incur in meeting the care standards. We expect local authorities to reflect this in the fees they pay homes, as laid out in the "Building Capacity and Partnership in Care" agreement. The Department will continue to review the progress that is being made in the implementing of the agreement.

The setting of fee levels are a matter for local decision and we have no plans to intervene in local negotiations.

Care Home Fees

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of local authorities who are not making up the shortfall between preserved rights income and care home fees at the point of change; and if he will make a statement. [61512]

Jacqui Smith: We have issued guidance to local authorities on how to implement the abolition of preserved rights. When negotiating fees, councils should take account of the additional resources they are receiving to meet any shortfall between the old income support rates and the cost of care.

Lynde House Care Home

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place a copy of the report into Lynde House care home in Twickenham carried out by Mary McClaren in the Library. [61786]

Jacqui Smith: No. The report into Lynde House Nursing Home was commissioned independently by Kingston and Richmond health authority, which regulated Lynde House under the Registered Homes Act 1984, and is not the responsibility of the Department. Under the Health Authorities (Establishment and Abolition) (England) Order 2002, responsibility for the findings of the report will fall to Richmond and Twickenham Primary Care Trust and the South West London health authority, which replaced Kingston and Richmond health authority on 1 April 2002.

The National Care Standards Commission took over responsibility for the regulation of all care homes in England on 1 April 2002. The Commission will, of course, bear in mind the findings of the report and any other relevant information when inspecting the care home in future.

Carers' Special Grant

Jeff Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much carers' special grant has been allocated to *(a)* Barnsley and *(b)* Doncaster in each of the last four years. [61789]

Mr. Lammy: The table shows how much carers' grant has been allocated to Barnsley and Doncaster in each of the last four years.

Carers' grant

£000

	Metropolitan borough council	
	Barnsley	*Doncaster*
1999–2000	96	113
2000–01	234	281
2001–02	325	390
2002–03	396	475

Chiropody

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, (1) pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Warrington, North (Helen Jones) 24 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 691W, on chiropody, for what reason the Government have decided not to publish Feet First II; [62065]

(2) if he will place the outcomes of the review of chiropody services, Feet First II, in the Library. [61843]

Jacqui Smith: We currently have no plans to publish the review of "Feet First", nor to place a copy in the Library. Since the review was undertaken the focus on policy has shifted from professionally-led guidance to patient-led services. We want to ensure national health service organisations like the new primary care trusts make decisions on services based on their local populations' clinical needs. To help them make these decisions, and to ensure clinical input, chiropodists have been involved in the development of national service frameworks (NSF) for older people and diabetes. The NSF for older people, which was published in March 2001, sets performance measures for accessing chiropody/podiatry services.

Children in Care

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many, and what percentage of children who left *(a)* a residential care home and *(b)* foster parents at the age of 16 years were not in education, employment and training at any one time between the ages of 16 to 18 years in the last five years for which figures are available. [61784]

Jacqui Smith: At present, the Department does not hold statistics that would allow us to answer this question. Since the introduction of the quality protects programme, individual local authorities should be compiling their own data about the progress of young people who they were looking after on the sixteenth birthday from August 1998, so that they have information about the education and employment outcomes of young people who have been in their care.

The Children (Leaving Care) Act was commenced in October 2001. As part of the arrangements for monitoring the Act, local authorities are now required to submit details to the Department about the education, training and employment of 19-year-old care leavers, who had been looked after in their seventeenth year. The first set of data from this sample will be published in autumn 2002. It would then be possible to match this data with other information about young people's last placement prior to leaving care, to research whether for this cohort of young people there are significant correlations between placement type and education and employment outcomes.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 17 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 151W, on children in care, if he will provide such information as the Department has on the numbers of *(a)* mentally and *(b)* physically disabled children in care. [63872]

Jacqui Smith: The Department carried out a children in need census in February 2000 which showed that in a typical week, there were about 29,000 children who were receiving services and were regarded as disabled, of whom 8,000 were children looked after. This report can be found on the children in need home page of internet at www.doh.gov.uk/cin/cin/2000.htm (paragraphs 30–32 refer).

These figures were considered too unreliable to publish at local authority level, because of confusion in some authorities as to whether to include all disabled children or only those who need services by virtue of their disability or disabilities. No further breakdown is made in relation to children who are mentally disabled and/or physically disabled.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 17 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 151W, on children in care, which survey the information regarding the number of children in care births came from. [63870]

Jacqui Smith: The results of the survey, funded by the Department, were published in 1992 by the national children's bureau under the title "Prepared for living? A survey of young people leaving the care of three local authorities" (authors: N. Biehal et al.). The publication is available in the Library.

Gunshot Wounds

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if there is a requirement upon hospital staff to notify police when persons are admitted with gunshot wounds. [61414]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* Hospital staff are not required to notify the police when persons are admitted with gunshot wounds. Health care professionals are guided by their professional codes of conduct regarding patient confidentiality and the disclosure of information outside the clinical team.

Epilepsy

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of the adequacy of NHS care for *(a)* adults and *(b)* children who suffer from epilepsy; and if he will make a statement; [62329]

(2) what the Government's response has been to the National Sentinel Audit of Epilepsy Related Death; and if he will make a statement. [62328]

Jacqui Smith: We have recently welcomed the publication of the Government funded National Sentinel Audit of Epilepsy-Related Death. The audit looked at investigations into epilepsy deaths, care provided prior to death and contact with bereaved families. We have given a commitment to consider the recommendations of the audit and develop an action plan by September 2002 to try to improve epilepsy services and reduce the number of preventable deaths from epilepsy.

We recognise that people with epilepsy can sometimes experience difficulty in receiving appropriate services and adequate treatment for their condition. We are undertaking a range of initiatives to improve services for the care and management of people with epilepsy. For example, we have:

Provided funding to the Joint Epilepsy Council (JEC) to develop a "national statement of good practice for the treatment and care of people who have epilepsy", which was published in May 2002. The statement makes a series of recommendations for good quality epilepsy services. It is intended to facilitate commissioning and will be of use to national health service purchasers, providers and service users.

Asked the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) to develop a clinical guideline (due in summer 2004) for the diagnosis, management and treatment of epilepsy to help address widespread variations in clinical practice and contribute to the improvement of services. This will be supported by a technology appraisal (due autumn 2003) of the clinical and cost effectiveness of new anti-epileptic drugs in children and adults, to help promote appropriate uptake and equitable access.

Announced that the national service framework for long-term conditions (NSF) is expected to develop standards of care for specific neurological conditions, including epilepsy. The NSF is expected to be published in 2004. Implementation is expected to start from 2005.

Developed the expert patients programme, which aims to provide training in self-management skills for people with long-term chronic conditions. The first pilot phase will include people with epilepsy.

Provided funding to the National Society for Epilepsy for its living well project. The project aims to promote independent living by providing locally based short-term courses for people with epilepsy to develop self-help and self-management techniques.

Dentists

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dentists have ceased to perform NHS work since 1 May 1997; and what the net effect of this has been on the NHS budget. [62647]

Mr. Lammy: The available information is for the number of dentists leaving the general dental service (GDS) in England and is shown in the table for the years 1997–98 to 2001–02.

The number of leavers covers all reasons for leaving the GDS including final retirement from dental work and dentists taking career breaks as well as those who left to practice solely privately. Figures from 1998–99 onwards are inflated by the transfer of some dentists from the GDS to some personal dental service (PDS) pilots. The total number of dentists includes principals on a health authority list, assistants and vocational dental practitioners.

The effect on the national health service budget of those dentists leaving the GDS cannot be estimated because the dentists left for a variety of reasons.

Since 1997–98 more dentists have joined than left. The number of GDS dentists has increased from 16,387 at March 1997 to 18,254 in March 2002, an increase of 1,867. Dentists are able to vary the amount of work they do in the GDS.

General dental service (GDS): number of dentists who left the GDS from 1997–98 to 2001–02

England

	Principals	*Assistants*	*Vocational trainees*	*Total*
1997–98	738	85	77	900
1998–99[1]	761	106	105	972
1999–2000[1]	780	157	95	1,032
2000–01[1]	875	181	136	1,192
2001–02[1]	859	193	164	1.216

[1] Figures affected by the transfer of some dentists from the GDS to the PDS.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* children and *(b)* adults are registered with an NHS dentist within Leicestershire health authority; and what percentage of people covered by Leicestershire health authority are registered with an NHS dentist. [62646]

Mr. Lammy: Arrangements are now in place to ensure that patients can gain access to national health service services by calling NHS Direct. This means that even if a patient chooses not to register with a dentist it will still be possible for that patient to access all forms of dentistry that are provided by the NHS.

The number of children and adults registered with a general dental service (GDS) dentist and the percentage of population registered with a GDS dentist in Leicestershire is shown in the table at 30 April 2002.

General dental service: number of patients registered and percentage of population[1] registered with a GDS dentist in 2002

Leicestershire[2]

At 30 April 2002	*Number of patients registered thousands*	*Population registered percentage*
Total	458.4	49
Adults	321.5	45
Children	136.9	63

[1] ONS 2000 mid year population estimates based on the 1991 census.

[2] From 1 April 2002, Leicestershire, Northamptonshire and Rutland health authority has assumed responsibilities for the previous Leicestershire health authority.

Nursing Care Payments

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were eligible for nursing care payments of *(a)* £35, *(b)* £70 and *(c)* £105 in each primary care trust; and if he will make a statement. [62843]

Jacqui Smith: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) on 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 975W.

Hospital Pharmacies

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to allow hospital pharmacies to fulfil prescriptions from GPs. [62353]

Mr. Lammy: Hospital pharmacies could be providers of local pharmaceutical services under pilot schemes to be set up under the Health and Social Care Act 2001 and, as such, would be able to dispense prescriptions written by general practitioners.

National Care Standards Commission

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will instruct the National Care Standards Commission not to inspect premises for adherence standards which are the responsibility of other agencies; [62964]

(2) if he will list those National Care Standards which are duplicated in the rules of other agencies; [62965]

(3) for what reason local authorities remain the enforcing bodies for health and safety in care homes following the creation of the National Care Standards Commission. [62966]

Jacqui Smith: The national minimum standards do not duplicate the rules of other agencies although they may refer to them for completeness. The national standards are designed to ensure care provision is fit for the purpose and meets the assessed needs of residents. It is for the National Care Standards Commission to decide in the particular circumstances of each individual home whether the home conforms to the standards necessary to meet the assessed needs of its residents.

The commission must take national standards into account when making a decision as to whether an establishment complies with statutory requirements under the Care Standards Act. However, providers and their representative organisations urged that the commission should be allowed to take a range of other factors into account and the commission may also take into account any other factors it considers reasonable or relevant to do so. For example, compliance with other statutory requirements, as assessed by the relevant regulatory body.

With the exception of environmental health issues, the responsibility for enforcement of health and safety requirements in care homes, as with all other establishments, rests with the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). There is a degree of overlap in some areas between health and safety requirements and national standards but these are complementary rather than two organisations covering the same angle. The commission is currently working with the HSE and Local Government Association to develop a memorandum of understanding to clarify each other's roles and responsibilities in health and safety matters. The memorandum will be underpinned by locally agreed protocols. This will aid clarity in liaison with other bodies should adverse incidents arise and ensure protection of vulnerable people in care.

Cosmetic Prosthesis Services

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the development of a national programme of cosmetic prosthesis services. [63212]

Jacqui Smith: We have no plans to develop a national programme of cosmetic prosthesis services. The national health service already provides silicone cosmesis coverings for prosthetic limbs free of charge to prosthetic limb users. We have made funding available for these coverings totalling £4 million for three years from April 2001 and the full range of prosthetic limb components is now available from disablement service centres.

Hospital Discharges

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) pursuant to his answer of 17 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 168W, on hospital discharges, in which paragraph and page number in the NHS Plan the target to reduce the number of delayed discharges from hospital by 20 per cent. between March 2002 and March 2003 is set out; [63871]

(2) whether his target to reduce delayed discharge by 20 per cent. in the period March 2002 to March 2003 is for *(a)* the number of people that experience delayed discharge and *(b)* the number of bed days that a person is kept in hospital awaiting discharge. [63814]

Jacqui Smith: The NHS Plan target to reduce the total number of people that experience delayed discharge is in paragraph 12.9 on page 102 and states that we will end widespread bed blocking by 2004. The target to reduce the number of people that experience delayed discharges from hospital by 20 per cent. between March 2002 and March 2003 was set for the national health service as a milestone to progress to this overall target. This is expected to also reduce the number of bed days that people are kept in hospital awaiting discharge.

Long-term Care Beds

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 17 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 167W, on long-term care beds, how much in cash terms the 6 per cent. in real terms increase in personal social services will be in each of the next three years. [63867]

Jacqui Smith: The increases in personal social services resources over the next three years which were announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 17 April 2002 are in cash terms 10.3 per cent. for 2003–04, 6.9 per cent. for 2004–05 and 8.8 per cent. for 2005–06, an average annual increase of 8.7 per cent.

Long-term Health

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 17 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 167W, regarding long-term health, what generic issues relevant to people with long-term conditions will be set out as part of the NSF for long-term health conditions. [63869]

Jacqui Smith: Following the recent announcement of the scope of the national service framework (NSF) for long-term conditions, we expect to appoint an external reference group (ERG) by the autumn. The ERG will undertake detailed work on developing the NSF and give consideration to the specific conditions and generic issues to be included. Some examples of the generic issues that the ERG could consider include patient and carer involvement, information, rehabilitation, pain management, and care and support in the home.

Headache Disorders

Gillian Merron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he plans to include primary headache disorders in the national service framework for long-term medical conditions. [63694]

Jacqui Smith: The Department has recently confirmed that the national service framework (NSF) for long-term conditions will focus on developing standards of care for specific neurological conditions and some of the generic issues relevant to people with a long-term condition.

An external reference group (ERG) is expected to be appointed by the autumn. The ERG will undertake detailed work on developing the NSF and will consider the specific conditions to be included. We will draw the ERG's attention to the submissions we have received from Headache UK on headache and migraine.

Local Government Funding (Harrow)

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received about the social services element of Harrow council's local government settlement. [63901]

Jacqui Smith: There is frequent contact between the Department and Harrow council on various issues including the social services element of Harrow's local government finance settlement.

Carers

Helen Southworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will ensure that carers are included in risk assessments relating to professional care providing teams with equivalent health and safety needs; and what recent research he has conducted into the health and safety needs of carers, with special reference to training needs. [62273]

Jacqui Smith: The national strategy for carers, "Caring about Carers", gave advice to social services departments and to the national health service on promoting carers health and safety, including the need for training, and quoted studies about the effect of caring on people's health and safety. The Department also commissioned a report, recently published, from the Office for National Statistics on the "Mental Health of Carers". Earlier this year the Health and Safety Executive published guidance on manual handling, "Handling Home Care", which highlights issues for service providers and their care staff and for service users and their families.

The duties of undertakings, in respect of the health and safety of persons not in their employment, are laid down in section 3 of the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 and Regulation 3 of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 (SI(99)3242).

HOUSE OF COMMONS PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES (HANSARD) ● 2001-02

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Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 25 June 2002

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Public Libraries

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations she has received from local authorities regarding Public Library Standard 18. [62679]

Dr. Howells: Councillor Bob Littlewood, the London borough of Redbridge's Cabinet Minister for Culture and Leisure wrote to my right hon. and noble Friend Baroness Blackstone on 16 April 2002. His letter referred specifically to Public Library Standard 3(i) and 18. Other authorities have written either about the standards in general or about other of the standards individually.

PLS 18, in common with the other standards, helps to define authorities' existing statutory obligations under the Public Library and Museums Act 1964 to provide library services that are comprehensive and efficient.

I am monitoring the application of the public library standards through the annual library planning process. Analysis of the 2001 plans shows that nearly all authorities are using the introduction of the standards to plan for improvements in the quality of their library services but that, in many cases, authorities recognise that this will require them to direct more of their budgets into their library services than hitherto. It is for library authorities to ensure that they make the right allocation of resources to ensure the provision of a comprehensive and efficient service within the meaning of the Act.

Camelot

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if the Comptroller and Auditor General has been given access to all the papers the relevant Government Departments hold on whether Camelot and its associated companies are run by suitable people. [63642]

Mr. Caborn: The National Lottery Commission has given the Comptroller and Auditor General access to all the papers held by the commission which he wished to examine as part of his inquiry into its award of the second National Lottery licence, except those which it would not be lawful for the commission to disclose. A number of Orders opening gateways allowing access to these papers have already been made; action to open the remaining gateways, which relate to the Criminal Justice Act 1987 and the Companies Act 1985 and 1989, is in hand by the Departments responsible for those Acts and should be completed shortly.

Departmental Annual Report

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the cost was of publishing her Department's annual report for each of the past three years; and if she will provide a breakdown of the costs incurred. [63348]

Dr. Howells: The cost of publishing the Department's annual report for each of the past three years was as follows:

Annual report costs 2000–02

	2000	*2001*	*2002*
Design, typesetting, pdfs	40,212	45,144	56,105
Print (buy back of copies from The Stationery Office)	18,310	24,648	[1]25,000
Proofreading	648	533	570
Total	59,170	70,325	81,675

[1] Estimated print costs.

Note:

The costs for 2002 include the development of a new design template which the Department plans to follow for the next two to three years

ITV Digital

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on progress of discussions on the situation at ITV Digital. [63672]

Dr. Howells: ITV Digital is in administration and progress with the administration is a matter for the administrators. ITV Digital surrendered the licences granted to it under the Broadcasting Act 1996 on 30 April 2002. These licences were re-advertised by the Independent Television Commission. I understand that the ITC has received six applications and aims to award the licences by 4 July. Decisions on the licence awards are a matter for the ITC.

Regional Broadcasting

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what discussions she has had with the ITC over the Charter for Broadcasting in the Nations and Regions; [63603]

(2) what safeguards to preserve the current level of regional programmes are to be introduced in the Charter for Broadcasting in the Nations and Regions; [63604]

(3) what assessment has been made of the impact of the Charter for Broadcasting in the Nations and Regions on independent television companies. [63605]

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions she has had with the ITC on the change in hours for regional broadcasting which they are proposing for the Meridian area; and if she will make a statement. [63865]

Dr. Howells: The Department was kept informed of progress as the ITC negotiated the Charter for Broadcasting in the Nations and Regions with the ITV companies. The Charter seeks to enhance investment in regional programme production, introduce a more effective regional schedule and strengthen regional accountability. The draft Communications Bill introduces requirements for Ofcom to set Channel 3 services targets to secure quality and levels of investment in programmes produced in the regions for the regions.

Television Licences

Mr. Colman: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she proposes to adopt the new model of television licence fee evasion referred to in the National Audit Office report, "Collecting the Television Licence Fee"; and what estimate she has made of the level of television licence fee evasion for *(a)* the last month for which figures are available and *(b)* the last five years. [64586]

Dr. Howells: My Department is adopting the new model with effect from today. This will enable the BBC to use these new, improved figures in its annual report and accounts, as recommended by the NAO report.

The new model uses improved data to estimate the number of licensable premises. Consequently the level of estimates of evasion for previous years has been revised upward. The figures from the new model show, as did those from the old model, that evasion has declined steadily in recent years. The new model estimates evasion at 7.8 per cent. at the end of May 2002, compared with 8.6 per cent. at May 2001 and 11.4 per cent. at May 1997.

DEFENCE

Trident

Mr. Salter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in what discussions he has participated concerning a successor warhead for Trident; when his last discussion of this subject was; and if he will list the other participants in that discussion. [63452]

Dr. Moonie: None. We currently have no plans for a replacement for Trident, and no decision on any possible successor system is yet needed. In line with the policy set out in the Strategic Defence Review, we intend to maintain a minimum capability to design and produce a successor to Trident should this prove necessary.

Gulf War Veterans (Scotland)

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Gulf war veterans live in Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [58564]

Dr. Moonie: Of the 53,462 United Kingdom service personnel who were deployed to the Gulf during the 1990–91 conflict, the Ministry of Defence has records of the post codes for 45,302 who are still alive, of which 3,817 are in Scotland. The post codes were gathered between 1996 and 2001 for the purposes of a series of epidemiological studies and may now be out of date.

QinetiQ

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps the Government are taking to ensure that employees of Serco Operations will be offered broadly comparable final salary pension schemes in that company's final salary pension scheme when their jobs are transferred to QinetiQ; and if he will make a statement. [63168]

Dr. Moonie: Future pension arrangements for employees of Serco Operations who are due to transfer to QinetiQ were agreed on 18 June 2002 between QinetiQ, Serco and the trade unions. All of those who were members of Serco's final salary pension scheme will be offered membership of the QinetiQ final salary pension scheme when they transfer.

Service Accommodation

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the *(a)* budget and *(b)* timescale is for the programme to improve single living accommodation for armed forces personnel. [63163]

Dr. Moonie: The budget for improvements to single living accommodation is £2 billion.

Project SLAM in conjunction with parallel projects is aiming to deliver 70,000 new or upgraded bed spaces within a 10-year period commencing in 2003.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he intends to improve the single living accommodation at RAF Stafford. [63165]

Dr. Moonie: The need to upgrade single living accommodation (SLA) at RAF Stafford was considered when compiling the RAF SLA modernisation programme, (Project SLAM). However, as RAF Stafford was assessed to have sufficient SLA at grade 2 condition or above to meet its long term requirements, it was not included in the programme. Along with other stations with grade 2 accommodation, RAF Stafford will be considered for upgrade once the worst RAF SLA has been upgraded.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the criteria are for prioritising the projects for the improvement of single living accommodation for armed forces personnel. [63164]

Dr. Moonie: Prioritisation is on a "worst first" basis at locations where there is a long term operational need for single living accommodation (SLA).

The worst SLA is defined as grade 3 and below, as assessed against the Ministry of Defence's four tier system laid out in Joint Service Publication 315.

Atomic Weapons Establishments

Mr. Salter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if in future he will place in the Library copies of submissions made to local planning authorities concerning the atomic weapons establishments as they occur, and inform the House as they are deposited. [63451]

Dr. Moonie: No. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence complies with Department of the Environment Circular 18/84 (Town and Country Planning Act 1984) in a similar manner to all Government Departments, non-Department authorities and other Crown bodies regarding submitting and advertising of Notices of Proposed Development (NOPD). The local planning authority treats the NOPD in the same way as they do a planning application submitted under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. NOPDs are advertised in the local press by the planning authority in the same manner as a planning application. Standard orange Notices from the planning authority are displayed at the gates of AWE Aldermaston and at the entrance to The Mearings at AWE Burghfield for the statutory 21 days.

The public are at liberty to view and purchase copies of all Notices and the outcome of same from the local planning authority.

Suicide (Service Personnel)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many suicides by service personnel on duty have been investigated by civil authorities, broken down by each of the armed forces, since 1997; and if he will make a statement; [63678]

(2) how many suicides by service personnel on duty have been committed by those having served less than two years, broken down by each of the armed forces, since 1997; and if he will make a statement; [63680]

(3) how many suicides by service personnel on duty have resulted in officers' ammunition rounds being found to be missing, broken down by each of the armed forces, since 1997; and if he will make a statement; [63685]

(4) how many service personnel deaths while on duty have been of officers under 25 years of age, broken down by each of the armed forces, since 1997; and if he will make a statement; [63679]

(5) how many suicides by service personnel on duty have been recorded in each of the armed forces since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [63677]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Shoeburyness

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many controlled explosions were carried out at the Shoeburyness ranges in each of the last 20 years; [63784]

(2) how many shells were fired at the ranges in Shoeburyness in each of the last 20 years; and how many of these were subsequently recovered; [63787]

(3) how many complaints were made about noise caused by explosions at the Shoeburyness ranges in each of the last 20 years. [63785]

Dr. Moonie: A search of the archives is being undertaken to ascertain what records we have for the period requested. I will write to the hon. Member when this search has been completed and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the implication of the changes in ownership of QinetiQ for range activities at Shoeburyness; and if he will make a statement. [63783]

Dr. Moonie: The Shoeburyness Range site, which is currently managed by QinetiQ, remains in Ministry of Defence ownership. In common with all MOD's contractors, it is QinetiQ's responsibility to ensure that its activities comply with the law in meeting its contractual obligations to the MOD. MOD has retained those legal and regulatory controls necessary to meet its responsibilities as the site's owners.

Gulf War

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made in identifying the factors that have caused ill health in Gulf War veterans; and if he will make a statement. [63551]

Dr. Moonie: As a group, Gulf veterans report significantly more ill-health than other comparable groups. A number of possible factors for this have been suggested but peer-reviewed scientific research, confirmed and validated by other researchers, has no identified the cause. Further important research is underway, and the Government is committed to carrying out some such further research. I hope to announce some new areas of research shortly. I would encourage members of the scientific community who have other new ideas to submit proposals for further work to the Medical Research Council (MRC). The MRC will assess the proposals and recommend to the Ministry of Defence those which it considers to be soundly based and of sufficient scientific merit to justify being taken forward.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set up a Royal Commission to investigate the causes of Gulf war illnesses; and if he will make a statement. [63773]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence accepts that some veterans of the 1990–91 Gulf conflict have become ill and that many believe this ill health is unusual and related to their Gulf experience. There is evidence that Gulf veterans report more ill-health than other comparable groups. The Government attach great importance to investigating the causes of this and believe that the best way of doing so is through scientific and medical research. A number of important research projects are currently under way and I hope to announce further work shortly. The Government do not believe that a Royal Commission to investigate the causes of Gulf veterans' illnesses would be helpful at this time.

Defence Diversification Agency

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the Defence Diversification Agency and proposals to establish defence diversification councils. [63809]

Dr. Moonie: The Defence Diversification Agency now has 15 offices throughout the United Kingdom, and is continuing to work closely with regional development agencies and the UK business community as a whole to enable the exploitation of defence-funded science and technology.

Work is on-going to establish a Defence Diversification Council and I hope to make an announcement in the near future.

Lance Corporal Robert Lyttle

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the outcome was of the trial of Lance Corporal Robert Lyttle of the RIR; and what the outcome was of disciplinary measures taken against this soldier. [63953]

Dr. Moonie: Lance Corporal Robert Lyttle of the Royal Irish Regiment was tried at Edinburgh High Court on 21 April 2002; he was found guilty of indecent assault and was subsequently sentenced to three years imprisonment.

Howe Barracks

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what conclusions have been reached following the investigation of the circumstances leading to a child being taken to hospital having taken an ecstasy tablet alleged to have been supplied by an individual based at the Howe Barracks in Kent. [63849]

Mr. Ingram: During investigation by the civil police, six members of the Royal Irish Regiment were questioned in respect of allegations of supplying an ecstasy tablet to a child. One Ranger was subsequently charged with supplying ecstasy; the case is now with the Crown Prosecution Service. One Ranger was cautioned for possession of ecstasy and one received a reprimand for possession.

Defence Estate

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what works are in hand to improve the fabric of the defence estate in each establishment in Wiltshire. [63828]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Married Quarters

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the quality of married quarters for service families in Wiltshire. [63827]

Dr. Moonie: Service families accommodation in mainland United Kingdom is managed and maintained by the Defence Housing Executive. Of the 2,205 properties in Wiltshire, 134 are at standard 1 for condition, 1,512 at standard 2, 539 at standard 3 and 20 at standard 4. Standard 1 for condition is achieved when a property meets a series of criteria which have been agreed with the services and families' representatives. They included modern bathroom and kitchen facilities, double glazing, energy efficiency and security measures.

Training

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much was spent in the last 12 months on training by the *(a)* Royal Navy, *(b)* Royal Marines, *(c)* Army and *(d)* RAF in the United Kingdom; and what proportion of these totals was spent in Scotland. [63929]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 3 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 1019W.

Royal Prerogative

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what decisions have been made by his Department in the last year under authority from the Royal Prerogative. [63126]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 5 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 25W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice).

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will reply to the question from the hon. Member for Pendle relating to the cost of the funeral of the Queen Mother. [64323]

Mr. Ingram: I have written to the hon. Member today.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Reproductive Health Programmes

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer of 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 884W, on reproductive health programmes, what the aims are of the HIV/AIDS and reproductive health programme in Zambia; how much funding has been provided to it by her Department per annum since 1997; and if she will make a statement. [62586]

Clare Short: The aim of DFID's "Family Planning and HIV/AIDS" project in Zambia is

> 'To increase the use of modern methods of family planning and use of condoms for HIV/STI prevention.'

The project is a successor project to the "Family Planning Logistics" project which also directly addressed HIV/AIDS and reproductive health issues. It was approved in September 2000. Funding of £2.9 million has been provided as follows:

Year	*Amount £000*
2000	116
2001	1,439
2002	1,345
Total	2,900

DFID is currently developing a targeted £20 million multisectoral HIV/AIDS programme in Zambia while continuing to address the impact of HIV/AIDS through all sectors of its wider country programme.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer of 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 884W, on reproductive health programmes, what the aims are of the Regional HIV/AIDS Programme of the Southern African Development Co-ordinating Committee; how much funding has been provided to it by her Department per annum since 1997; and if she will make a statement. [62585]

Clare Short: The aim of this programme is to support the Southern African Development Community's (SADC) HIV/AIDS strategy with a focus on interventions in Botswana, Namibia, Lesotho and Swaziland.

The main outputs will be:

Strengthening of SADC's Health Sector Coordination Unit (and its successor following SADC restructuring);

Improved inter-country coordination and strengthening of National AIDS Control Programmes;

Increased promotion of, and access to, low cost condoms via social marketing;

Support to people living with HIV/AIDS groups for increased advocacy and service capability;

More effective management of sexually transmitted infections, particularly in private sector employing migrant labour;

Increased ability in Government Departments and NGOs for behaviour change communication interventions.

The programme became operational in May 1999. Expenditure to date totals £750,668.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer of 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 884W, on reproductive health programmes, what the aims are of the sexual and maternal health programme in Malawi; how much funding has been provided to it by her Department per annum since 1997; and if she will make a statement. [62584]

Clare Short: Since 1997, my Department has committed a total of £23.5 million for sexual, reproductive and maternal health programmes in Malawi. The main purpose is to increase access to, and utilisation of, reproductive, maternal (ante-natal, delivery and post-partum care) and sexual health services and adoption of safer sex practices especially among the poor, young people and marginalised groups. A further benefit is the positive effect such help can have in countering the incidence of HIV/AIDS.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer of 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 884W, on reproductive health programmes, what the aims are of the sexual and reproductive health programme in Zimbabwe; how much funding has been provided to it by her Department per annum since 1997; if funding continues; and if she will make a statement. [62583]

Clare Short: Zimbabwe has one of the world's worst HIV/AIDS epidemics. Adult HIV prevalence is 34 per cent., and it is estimated that 2,000 to 3,000 people die of AIDS each week.

DFID's Sexual and Reproductive Health Programme is a £20 million programme approved in 2000 to run over five years. It aims to prevent and mitigate the impact of HIV/AIDS for poor Zimbabweans. The programme works through civil society and parastatal organisations and activities focus on promoting behaviour change, condom supply and sexual health services for high-risk groups, and capacity building for community home-based care. The programme has spent £5.267 million in the last two years and continues.

Royal Prerogative

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what decisions have been made by her Department in the last year under authority from the royal prerogative. [63133]

Clare Short: The Department does not keep records of the individual occasions on which powers under the royal prerogative are exercised.

Nepal

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance her Department has given the Nepalese Government to assist it in rebuilding facilities destroyed due to terrorist attacks by Maoist groups. [63477]

Clare Short: My Department has not provided assistance to the Nepalese Government to rebuild facilities destroyed by Maoists. My Department has, however, developed a programme of short-term support for people in conflict affected areas, and is working to reorientate the entire DFID programme towards conflict resolution.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the estimated cost is of damage to UK-funded projects in Nepal due to terrorist attacks by Maoist groups. [63476]

Clare Short: Maoist insurgents in Nepal have not so far targeted UK development staff or project activities and, despite the worsening security situation throughout the country, UK funded-development assistance is continuing, albeit more slowly.

Development Projects (Environmental Impact)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what standards her Department uses to assess the environmental impact of proposed development projects; and whether the environmental standards applied to development projects are less stringent than those applied in the United Kingdom. [63515]

Clare Short: DFID are rarely involved in funding major infrastructure projects of the sort that would require an environmental impact assessment (EIA) in the UK. DFID procedures require environmental screening on all projects above £1 million, or below this threshold if significant environmental impacts are anticipated. The screening is supported by DFID's environmental guide, which provides guidance, such as screening checklists that highlight potential beneficial and adverse impacts. If initial screening indicates that an activity could have significant impacts on the environment, then further investigation must be undertaken, which may include further environmental analysis; a full EIA; or an environmental audit. The objective of DFID's appraisal system is not only to assess potential positive or negative impacts, but also to seek opportunities to improve policy formulation and decision-making, e.g. we are currently undertaking an appraisal of strategic choices regarding Russia's accession to the WTO.

The DFID environmental appraisal process applies to expenditure on policies, programmes and projects. The EC EIA directive, transposed into UK legislation, currently applies to projects (e.g. building new roads, building power stations, etc.), but the EU directive on programmes and plans (2001/42/EC) is in the process of becoming UK law. DFID procedures also allow for intermediate level of investigation—environmental analysis—where a full EIA is not required. In the UK EIA legislation there is no such intermediate form of analysis.

Safe Drinking Water

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what proportion of the aid distributed by her Department in the past five years has funded the provision of safe drinking water in developing countries. [63513]

Clare Short: DFID place as much emphasis on access to appropriate sanitation as they do on access to safe water. Much of the work supported by DFID is for both water supply and sanitation, for example, support to the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council and the Water and Sanitation Program. Therefore, it is not possible to clearly apportion financial expenditure to water supply solely.

The proportion of bilateral aid commitments whose principle aim was to target safe drinking water and adequate sanitation in developing countries was 6 per cent. on average over the last five years. This represents a commitment of 3 per cent. total aid commitments on average.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Sewage Disposal Companies

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what powers exist for local authorities to take legal action against sewage disposal companies on grounds of public nuisance. [57142]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* Local authorities have no statutory nuisance powers under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 to deal with nuisance from sewage treatment works. However, it is possible for local authorities or the public to take common law action. My Department is currently exploring the available legislation and existing controls as a possible means to address the problem of nuisance from sewage treatment works in the future.

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Advisory Committee on the management of the research programme for management and storage of radioactive waste and management of the community plan of action in the field of radioactive waste is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55687]

Mr. Meacher: The Advisory Committee on Programme Management for the Management and Storage of Radioactive Waste was established under European Council Resolution 77/C 192/01 of 18 July 1977. The committee advises the European Commission on the Community Plan of Action in the field of radioactive waste which was last renewed by Council Resolution 92/C 158/02 of 15 June 1992. This plan expired at the end of 1999. However, as an interim arrangement the committee continue to advise the Commission on the aspects of the plan.

The committee has met once in the past 12 months. Its annual cost to public funds is negligible. The UK is represented by officials from my Department and the Scottish Executive.

The committee is currently advising the Commission on preparation of the fifth report regarding the situation and prospects of radioactive waste management in member states of the European Commission. Previous reports are publicly available from the Commission of the European Communities.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Advisory Committee on Waste Management is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [61707]

Mr. Meacher: The committee's mandate is to assist the European Commission to adapt aspects of wastes directives. It tends to be strategic/thematic in nature.

The committee generally meets twice per year and last met on 21 March 2002. The UK's representation is determined by the agenda for each meeting but the basic representation is usually two officials. The cost to public funds comprise travel and subsistence costs incurred in attending a one day meeting in Brussels (approximately £650 per meeting) and staff costs (around £700 per meeting). The Commission reimburses the travelling costs for one official's attendance at each meeting.

The meeting on 21 March focused on the development of thematic strategies on resources and on recycling and the planned EC Communication on Waste Prevention Targets.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the EU Committee for the adaptation to technical and scientific progress of the Directive on the protection of the environment is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; when it is next due to meet; what the United Kingdom representation on it is; whether experts nominated by the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [62920]

Mr. Meacher: The question does not specify which Directive is being referred to. Many Directives have as their objective the protection of the environment, and many of them have committees for the adaptation to technical and scientific progress.

Water Quality

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Harrow, West, on 16 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 830W on the Water Framework Directive, what measures the Government are *(a)* taking and *(b)* intending to implement prior to 2012 to prevent deterioration of water quality in the United Kingdom. [60669]

Mr. Meacher: The information is as follows:

(a) Measures taken to prevent deterioration of water quality in England are already in place, such as discharge consent conditions in relation to quality standards for water, the management of water quantity (through abstraction licensing) and measures to protect groundwater under the Groundwater

Regulations. These measures help meet obligations from existing Community water quality legislation and domestic river quality objectives.

(b) Under the Water Framework Directive, article 4, in making operational the programmes of measures in the river basin plans, member states have to implement the necessary measures to prevent deterioration in the status of water bodies. All measures must be operational by 2012 at the latest.

It is too soon to say what additional water quality protective measures might need to be implemented prior to 2012. To the extent that new regulatory powers are needed, they will be included in proposed regulations on which we plan to consult next year.

Implementation of the Directive in Scotland and Northern Ireland, and with respect to the devolved functions in Wales, are matters for the Scottish Executive, the Northern Ireland Executive and the National Assembly for Wales.

Rio Earth Summit

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps have been taken by the Government since the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 to *(a)* set goals on environmental protection and *(b)* improve eco-efficiency and resource productivity relating to land use issues; and what these (i) goals and (ii) improvements have been. [44344]

Mr. Meacher: We have put in place a range of planning guidance to promote a sustainable pattern of physical development and land and property use. Sound planning policies and an effective and efficient planning system are central to the Government's policies to improve eco-efficiency and resource productivity. Our policies concentrate the majority of new development within existing urban areas and in doing so help to reduce the need to travel and safeguard the countryside from unnecessary development. We have a target to provide 60 per cent. of additional dwellings on previously developed land by 2008 which, as a result of our policy changes, has been met.

Planning policy is also supported by a number of fiscal measures aimed at improving environmental outcomes; by encouraging better use of existing property to reduce new build, through a 150 per cent. tax credit for cleaning up contaminated land, and through taxes introduced on landfill in 1996, and on the quarrying of aggregates in 2002. Legislation to apply modern standards of conditions to old mineral workings was extended in 1995 to apply to all such sites, and tougher environmental tests before opencast coal sites can be opened or enlarged were introduced in 1999. Action, both statutory and voluntary, has commenced to limit or remove the more damaging existing planning permissions which threaten the integrity of the sites proposed or designated under the EU's Natura 2000 network. This includes a major voluntary purchase by English Nature of the most important and vulnerable lowland peat bogs in England.

The Department and its agencies have a variety of mechanisms to protect and enhance the rural environment. These include nearly £1 billion for agri-environment schemes under the England Rural Development Programme, and further support by English Nature, the Countryside Agency and the Environment Agency. DEFRA also provides 75 per cent. of funding for national parks for the same purpose. These mechanisms are making a significant contribution to a number of the Government's PSA targets, including those to reverse the decline in farmland birds by 2020, and bring 95 per cent. of all nationally important wildlife sites into favourable condition by 2010. They also contribute to meeting the targets for maintaining/restoring priority habitats and species under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan which was drawn up to meet commitments flowing from the Rio Earth Summit.

Waste Refrigeration Equipment

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the length of time needed to clear the backlog of refrigerators and freezers stored by local authorities. [62666]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 18 June 2002]:* Information given by companies investing, or intending to invest, in treatment plant suggest that sufficient plant should be in place by the end of the year to ensure that the backlog of fridges does not increase further and that the backlog of appliances will be dealt with during 2003.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed), of 15 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 270W, on waste refrigeration equipment, when the new recycling plants will come online; and what their capacity will be. [62668]

Mr. Meacher: New recycling plant are already coming online in the UK. Two mobile plant with annual capacities of 150,000 each are operating in Lewes and Northampton, the former since April and the latter since May. Three static plant, with annual capacities of 300,000 each, are due to be operating by the end of July. Further plant will be installed by the end of the year.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to provide funding to local authorities to assist with the disposal of refrigerators, beyond the £6 million allocated for the last financial year. [62975]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 18 June 2002]:* I will make an announcement shortly setting out my proposals for additional funding for waste disposal authorities.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many refrigerators and freezers are being stored by local authorities pending disposal or recycling. [62667]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 18 June 2002]:* Current estimates are that there are more than 900,000 units awaiting treatment.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on her estimate of the extra costs to local authorities in 2002–03 as a result of the EU Directive on the recycling of refrigerators and freezers. [63077]

Mr. Meacher: Although the initial annual cost is likely to be around £40 million this will decrease as plant are commissioned, competition becomes established and more fridges that do not need treatment enter the waste stream.

EU Management Committees

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the EU Committee for the adaptation to scientific and technical progress of the decision establishing a common procedure for the exchange of information on the quality of surface fresh water in the Community is next due to meet; whether experts nominated by the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members; and if she will make a statement. [63931]

Mr. Meacher: The role of the committee, which is set out in Article 8 of the decision (Council Decision 77/795/EEC, OJ L 334, 24.12.1977, p29), is to give its opinion on any measures proposed by the Commission which are necessary to adapt the decision's provisions to technical or scientific progress. The committee has not met for more than five years and there are no meetings scheduled. Therefore the most recent meeting predated the establishment of the Scottish Executive in 1999, and potential UK representation has not been addressed. In the event of any meeting being scheduled, officials in this Department would, as a matter of course, liaise with their counterparts in the Scottish Executive.

Radioactive Material

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what safeguards are in place to prevent the theft of radioactive material from *(a)* hospitals, *(b)* universities and *(c)* other establishments licensed to hold such material. [62543]

Mr. Meacher: Under the Radioactive Substances Act 1993 any person who keeps or uses radioactive material must have a certificate of registration from the Environment Agency. The certificates impose responsibilities in respect of security and general management. The Agency carries out a regular programme of inspections to ensure that the conditions of the certificate are being complied with. The Agency would not hesitate to take enforcement action if conditions were not being complied with.

The Agency has recently carried out a programme of inspections at sites holding higher activity sources. At most sites security arrangements were found to be satisfactory. In a small number of cases the need for improvements was identified. The Agency will ensure that these improvements are implemented.

Air Quality

Mr. Pollard: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent action she has taken to measure trends in air quality in St. Albans, with special reference to nitrogen oxide levels near motorway junctions; and if she will make a statement. [61787]

Mr. Meacher: There are currently three non-automatic nitrogen dioxide monitoring stations in St. Albans, which are part of the UK nitrogen dioxide diffusion tube monitoring network. The sites are in roadside and urban background locations. The trends at these sites are shown in the table, in addition to a fourth site which closed at the end of 2000. Concentrations at all sites have increased since monitoring began in 1993, although levels are close to or well below the annual mean standard for nitrogen dioxide of g/m^3. St. Albans district council also operate other diffusion tube sites which are not part of the UK network, one of which is near the motorway.

Annual mean nitrogen dioxide (g/m^3) at four sites in St. Albans, 1993–2001. Measurements using diffusion tubes

Annual mean NO_2 (g/m^3)

	Roadside	*Intermediate*	*Background*	*St. Albans Background*
1993	25.7	18.5	15.4	14.7
1994	33.5	24.3	22.3	16.4
1995	42.7	39.9	34.4	27.0
1996	56.1	42.1	42.2	33.4
1997	42.4	32.8	29.5	25.3
1998	36.8	30.8	22.3	23.8
1999	44.3	35.1	29.3	27.0
2000	42.8	34.9	27.9	23.5
2001	41.8	NM[1]	28.6	24.3

[1] Monitoring site closed at the end of 2000.

GM Crops

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will set out her Department's advice on the appeal processes involved in the registration of GM seeds. [62992]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 19 June 2002]:* A sequence of mechanisms applies, which enable appeals to be made at various stages in the development of a GM variety prior to the marketing of seeds of that variety.

1. Before a GM crop variety can be considered for seed registration it must have been assessed at European level for safety to human health and the environment and be approved for placing on the market under Part C of Directive 90/220/EEC on the Deliberate Release into the Environment of Genetically Modified Organisms. This directive has now been replaced by the new Directive 2001/18/EC, which has to be implemented by member states by October 2002. Under part C of the new directive, the European Commission and all member states discuss applications for consents to market GMOs (including GM seeds) in the EU and may ask for further information, make comments on, or present reasoned objections to the proposed release. The Commission is required to consult the public while the application is being considered, and these views are copied to all member states. The Commission and member states then make a collective decision on the application, and a marketing consent is either granted or refused. The new directive (like its predecessor) does not have any specific provisions for appeal against the decision to grant or refuse consent. However, it does ensure that if new information comes to light regarding the risks posed by the GMO to human health or the environment, the consent can be altered or revoked as appropriate.

2. The Seeds (National Lists of Varieties) Regulations 2001 provide a three-stage appeal process. On payment of the appropriate fee, persons affected by a proposed relevant decision (which includes proposals to add any varieties, GM or conventional, to the UK National List) may make written representations to the national authorities and/or oral representations to a person appointed by them. The national authorities are required to consider such written and/or oral representations before taking a relevant decision and must give notice of their decision and the reasons for it as well as information about how that decision may be appealed to the Plant Varieties and Seeds Tribunal.

3. The Plant Breeders' Rights Regulations 1998 set out similar arrangements in respect of plant breeders' rights.

Environmental Liability

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the Government's position on the proposed EU directive on environmental liability. [57621]

Mr. Meacher: The purpose of the proposed Directive is to establish a framework for the prevention and remediation of environmental damage in accordance with the principle that the polluter pays. This represents an important and significant development in EC environmental law. The Government have therefore conducted a public consultation on the proposals, and the UK position on the detail of the proposal will be finalised in the light of the comments received.

In broad terms however, the Government support a regime which is equitable, proportionate, clear, insurable, easy to implement, does not damage business competitiveness, and delivers clear environmental benefits.

The partial regulatory impact assessment submitted to Parliament (COM (02) 17), indicates that much of the environmental damage covered by the directive is already the subject of existing domestic regimes, but the proposals go further in some respects. The directive would set higher standards of remediation and introduce the concepts of equivalent compensation and interim losses. Further benefits would arise from introducing a regime across the European Community which would harmonise the rules and standards for environmental liability across member states. Provided that the right balance between costs and benefits is achieved, this proposal could therefore play a useful part in safeguarding the environment.

Noise Forum

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the United Kingdom Noise Forum's inaugural conference on 20 May. [62573]

Mr. Meacher: I was very pleased to attend the conference and have received some encouraging feedback from those who attended. My officials are currently preparing a conference report which will be published and sent to all those who attended the conference. I shall also make copies available to both the House Libraries and in addition it will be placed on the DEFRA website at http://defraweb/environment/noise/index.htm. It is my intention, once I have received the report, to consider its recommendations and decide how Government can take these forward with a view to taking action on the various problems noise causes to society.

Waste Paper Exporters

Jonathan Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will review the operation of the PERN system. [63781]

Mr. Meacher: The current system of PRNs and PERNs has worked moderately well, allowing the UK to increase recovery from 30 per cent. to 48 per cent. over four years. However, if there are specific problems I am open to discussion about how these can best be resolved.

Jonathan Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent assessment she has made of the criteria used for granting packaging export recovery notes to waste paper exporters. [63774]

Mr. Meacher: PERNs are issued by exporters accredited by the Environment Agency to businesses or schemes obligated under the Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations 1997 (as amended).

I understand that, in order to be accredited, exporters must undergo scrutiny by the agency on the basis of the same criteria used to scrutinize reprocessors wishing to be accredited to issue PRNs.

Duck Producers

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many inspections have been carried out on the premises of duck producers in the last five years. [63170]

Mr. Morley: The State Veterinary Service carried out 50 welfare inspections of duck producers during 2000 and 32 welfare inspections in 2001. Separate figures for duck welfare inspections are not available for earlier years.

Japanese Knotweed

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what research the Government are conducting into tackling Japanese knotweed, with particular reference to natural biological methods of control. [57931]

Mr. Meacher: The Department is not currently undertaking any research specifically into biological control of Japanese knotweed.

However, through the joint DEFRA/Environment Agency flood management research programme, the Government are supporting a programme of work relating to management and control of aquatic and riparian plants, including Japanese knotweed, by the Centre for Aquatic Plant Management. Also, English Nature, the Government's scientific adviser on wildlife and conservation in England, has commissioned a study on management of problem non-native species, which includes consideration of Japanese knotweed.

National Waste Minimisation and Recycling Fund

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will announce how the National Waste Minimisation and Recycling Fund will be distributed. [64784]

Mr. Meacher: I am pleased to announce today the arrangements for the distribution of the National Waste Minimisation and Recycling Fund. Local authorities in every region of England (apart from London which is being handled separately) will receive a total of £42 million in 2002–03 from the fund to kick start new projects. The money will go to schemes that improve recycling, complement municipal waste management strategies and contribute to a better quality of life for residents.

From over 190 applications to the fund for 2002–03, 112 schemes were approved by DEFRA with the assistance of an expert panel. Details of the successful schemes will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses shortly when the local authorities have been informed. We are now inviting applications for grants from the fund for 2003–04 when £76.3 million will be available; almost double the amount for 2002–03.

The national fund prioritises five key areas:

improving partnership initiatives between authorities;

contributing to high performance, innovation and best practice;

establishing a challenge fund for general projects;

developing community initiatives;

turning around low recycling performance.

Overall, England recycled just 10 per cent. of its household rubbish in 1999–2000—one of the lowest rates in Europe and we are taking action to improve this. We have set a target of 25 per cent. recycling by 2005–06 and have allocated £19.9 million from the fund for helping turn around low performance and £12.5 million for partnership working. The assistance given by this fund will help some of the lowest performers in their efforts to reach a minimum recycling rate of 10 per cent. in 2003–04.

Neighbourhood renewal is also a key area of Government policy and over half of the 88 NRU local authorities in England are low recycling performers. 21 NRU local authorities were approved for direct grant in 2002–03, amounting to a total of some £14 million.

We will be publishing revised guidance for the submission of bids to the fund for 2003–04 very shortly on DEFRA's website.

Albatrosses/Petrels

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures her Department has implemented since June regarding the conservation of *(a)* albatrosses and *(b)* petrels. [61168]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* The main threat to albatrosses and petrels arises from long-line fishing for tuna and toothfish in the southern oceans, in which I understand that no metropolitan UK vessels are involved. Last June the UK signed the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP), made under the Convention on Migratory Species. ACAP will require its parties to co-operate in the development and implementation of an action plan for the conservation of these species, encompassing both the control of fishing activities, including measures to mitigate the impact of long-line fishing, and the protection of breeding sites, some of which are in the UK's overseas territories. The RSPB has recently undertaken research into these and other bird species on Gough Island, funded by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

The Government are currently in discussion with the authorities of the range state overseas territories to ascertain whether they need new legislation in order to implement the requirements of ACAP. We are also considering the position in respect of the metropolitan UK, and will explore with our partners in the European Union the prospects for wider European participation. I hope the UK will be in a position to ratify ACAP, possible initially on behalf of some of the overseas territories, later this year.

Food and Agriculture Organisation Discussion Paper

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the recent FAO discussion paper on Good Agricultural Practice, with specific reference to the section on animal welfare; and if she will make a statement. [63330]

Clare Short: I have been asked to reply.

FAO's discussion paper on Good Agricultural Practice was circulated for comment to the "Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development (SARD) Major Stakeholder Groups" defined in chapter 14 of Agenda 21. The UK Government have not been consulted and we have as yet made no assessment of the paper.

Food Safety

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what is the maximum safe concentration of ethinyloestradiol in foods for human consumption. [60833]

Ms Blears: I have been asked to reply.

Ethinyloestradiol is a human drug that is available only on prescription. It is not authorised for use in animals and its presence in any concentration in food is unacceptable.

It has not been possible to identify a dietary concentration of ethinyloestradiol that is universally accepted as being safe for everyone, as a level of exposure that is without hormonal effects has not been found. In addition, ethinyloestradiol is a human carcinogen, but a threshold dose below which there is no increased risk of cancer for anyone has not been established.

TREASURY

Royal Prerogative

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what decisions have been made by his Department in the last year under authority from the royal prerogative. [63139]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) on 23 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 207W.

VAT (Face Value Vouchers)

Barbara Follett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the consultation on the VAT treatment of face value vouchers announced in the 2002 Budget. [64686]

John Healey: Customs have today issued a consultation document entitled "Modernising the VAT Treatment of Face Value Vouchers". Copies have been placed in the Library of the House. Responses to the consultation are invited by 1 October 2002.

Queen Mother (Memorial Coin)

Barbara Follett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans Her Majesty's Government have to issue a coin in memory of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother. [61140]

Mr. Gordon Brown: Her Majesty the Queen has been graciously pleased to approve my recommendation that a crown piece should be issued to celebrate the life of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother. Collector versions of the coin will be ready by early summer and the coin will also be available, later in the year, at its face value of £5 from most post offices.

Working Families Tax Credit

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the answer of 5 February 2002 to the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison), *Official Report*, column 851W, on fraud and error, if he will place a copy of the report on the benchmarking exercise on working families tax credit fraud in the Library. [56462]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue are continuing to analyse the data from their compliance benchmarking exercise. We shall be considering the results, and questions of publication, when we have received their report.

Remarriage Statistics

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of the married population was represented by those previously divorced in each year since 1997. [60839]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Andrew Turner, dated 25 June 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question concerning the proportion of the married population represented by those previously divorced in each year since 1997. (60839)

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) produces estimates by current marital status annually, but these are not additionally available by the previous marital status. Hence estimates of the married population are not available separately for those who had married for the first time, those who remarried after being divorced, and those who remarried after being widowed.

However, ONS has made some special estimates of the proportion of the married population who had remarried after a previous divorce, using the General Household Survey (GHS). Using the 1998 GHS for England and Wales, it is estimated that 15 per cent of married men had remarried after a previous divorce, and the corresponding figure for women was 14 per cent. The proportions for 2000 were the same as those for 1998. (There was no GHS in 1997 or 1999).

Of the 2000 population of men who had re-married after divorce, 7 per cent had divorced between 1997 and 1999, inclusive. The corresponding proportion for women who had remarried after divorce was 6 per cent. Small sample numbers do not allow reliable estimates for individual years of divorce to be made.

MPs (Personal Data)

Mr. Forth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information is held by his Department on each hon. Member in relation to *(a)* personal relationships, both current and past, *(b)* financial status and dealings, *(c)* connections with companies and interest groups, *(d)* connections with Governments and *(e)* published works; and what was held in January 2002. [61819]

Ruth Kelly: Information that may be held by the Treasury, Inland Revenue and HM Customs and Excise is limited to what is available from published reference sources, information which the Inland Revenue and HM Customs and Excise hold in connection with the tax affairs of individuals and companies and information that HM Customs and Excise may also hold in connection with other matters such as customs investigations. Aside from information from published sources, the Departments are debarred from releasing such information to third parties either by statute or as a result of their duty of confidence to the individuals concerned.

Landfill Tax

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will set out the timescale for changing the landfill tax rules to make contaminated soil disposed of to landfill liable to the full rate of landfill tax; [63489]

(2) what the Government's policy is on changing the landfill tax rules to make contaminated soil disposed of to landfill liable to the full rate of landfill tax. [63490]

John Healey: The Government are satisfied that the exemption from landfill tax for waste arising from the clear up of contaminated land is continuing to play an important role in encouraging the redevelopment of brownfield sites, and have no plans to withdraw it. HM Customs and Excise will, however, review the exemption in 2004, in the light of developments in waste management techniques.

Iraq

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assets belonging to Saddam Hussein have been seized and are held by the UK Government; and if he will make a statement. [63552]

Ruth Kelly: The most recent (first quarter 2002) statistical returns to the Bank of England indicate that UK banks' liabilities to Iraq amount to $634 million. These funds are frozen under the terms of Article 3 of The Iraq (United Nations Sanctions) Order 2000. There are restrictions in the Order on the disclosure of details relating to individual accounts. The Government is committed to maintaining UN controls on its international obligations against the Government of Saddam Hussein until Iraq complies with UN Security Council resolutions.

Black Economy

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether it is his policy to include the black economy activity in EU countries when assessing convergence; and what his assessment is of the effect of so doing in respect of each EU economy. [63864]

Ruth Kelly: The Government has said that it will complete an assessment of the five economic tests within two years of the start of this Parliament.

Tax Credits

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 10 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 396W, on tax credits, whether the figure for the number of recipients of child tax credit in paragraph 3.2 of "The Child and Working Tax Credits: The Modernisation of Britain's Tax and Benefit System", represents the number of families expected to *(a)* claim and *(b)* be eligible for CTC. [64210]

Dawn Primarolo: In the publication, "The Child and Working Tax Credits: The Modernisation of Britain's Tax and Benefit System", families receiving the child tax credit are defined as those expected to both claim and be eligible for the credit.

Endowment Mortgages

Ian Lucas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will introduce legislation to compel the publication of the commissions earned by sellers of endowment policies. [64314]

Ruth Kelly: Independent financial advisers who advise on the sale of endowment policies are required to disclose the cash value of commissions they would earn on those sales before a policy is effected.

Equivalent disclosure, of the costs of the sale, is required where a tied salesman makes a sale.

Landlords

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received concerning anomalies and disincentives in the tax system facing individual and corporate landlords. [63910]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government have received a number of representations from a variety of organisations regarding taxation.

Economic Growth

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the accuracy of UK economic growth figures prepared by the Office for National Statistics. [61975]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Kidgell to Mr. Nick Gibb, dated 25 June 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question on the accuracy of the UK economic growth figures proposed by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). I am replying in his absence. (61975)

ONS consistently applies well documented and internationally validated methods, and works with an extensive range of data sources founded on sound statistical practice. The National Accounts framework enables a high degree of validation through well structured balancing and alternate estimates of conceptually equivalent measures.

Customs and Excise

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many mobile detection teams are employed by Customs and Excise in Scotland; how many staff are employed in each team; what the shift-work pattern is of each team; what the budgetary provision is for each team; and what the budgetary provision was for each team in each year since 1997. [63710]

John Healey: For operational reasons it is not Customs policy to disclose specific information on the number of staff in teams, their work patterns or their specific budgetary provision.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the expenditure by the Customs and Excise on advertising was in each fiscal year since 1997–98; and if he will make a statement. [63632]

John Healey: HM Customs and Excise did not run any advertising campaigns between April 1997 and March 1999.

Between April 1999 and March 2000, £83,000 was spent on a campaign to raise awareness of the Custom's confidential hotline and to encourage people to phone with information to help Customs.

£1.6 million was spent on an advertising campaign between April 2000 and March 2001 to support the Tackling Tobacco strategy. This was the first burst of a three year campaign and aimed to raise awareness of the links to organised crime and of the penalties for those who are caught smuggling or dealing in illicit tobacco. Among all our audiences there was a steady increase in awareness of Government action and the penalties. Research has shown 41 per cent. awareness of the advertising among the general public. Within trade groups, awareness increased significantly among HGV drivers (at 83 per cent.) and retailers (81 per cent.).

Between April 2001 and March 2002, £830,000 was spent on campaigns including burst two of the Tackling Tobacco smuggling campaign (spend £560,000) and an information campaign for the Joint Fashion Industry Teams (spend £29,000). This was a regional campaign in London and Leicester to raise awareness of the information line for the fashion industry to help them understand the rules on VAT, benefits, taxes and employment to help them to operate in the formal economy.

All expenditure quoted excludes VAT. Figures include advertising and related campaign costs, such as production and research.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what percentage of dogs used by Customs and Excise in *(a)* Manchester and *(b)* Hull are (i) drugs detector dogs and (ii) cash detector dogs; [63705]

(2) how many cash detector dogs are used by Customs and Excise at the Rosyth ferry port; [63703]

(3) how many dog handlers were employed by Customs and Excise in *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000, *(d)* 2000–01 and *(e)* 2001–02 in (i) Glasgow, (ii) Aberdeen, (iii) Hull and (iv) Manchester; [63704]

(4) what use is being made of the dog husbandry facility at Glasgow Airport. [63706]

John Healey: There are currently 11 dogs operational in Manchester and Hull and five vacancies. When filled, these will bring the total to 16 operational dogs, comprising nine drugs dogs, four currency dogs, and three multi-skilled drugs/tobacco dogs, each with one handler.

The consolidation of detector dog resources in large units based in Manchester and Hull has enabled Customs to provide the full range of dog skills (drugs, tobacco and cash) in support of frontier activity across northern England and Scotland. The deployment of the detector dogs is flexible, intelligence led and focused on the delivery of operational impact.

The Rosyth/Zeebrugge ferry service started on 17 May 2002. Customs staff will be deployed regularly at Rosyth on a risk free basis, both from flexible multi-functional teams currently located in Scotland and, as required, from UK national strike force teams, including detector dogs from the Manchester and Hull units.

The consolidation of dog resources to Manchester and Hull followed reviews on the usage and outputs of detector dogs, including those based at the former Aberdeen and Glasgow units. The number of dog handler posts in Manchester has remained at eight from 1997 to date. From 1997 to 2001, four posts were based at Hull, increasing to eight posts this year.

Aberdeen dog unit had three posts in 1997–98 and 1998–99, and the dog unit closed in the summer of 1999. Glasgow dog unit had four posts in 1997–98 and 1998–99 and five posts in 1999–2000. This reduced to four posts in 2000–01 and the unit closed in summer 2001. When the dog unit at Glasgow Airport was closed in the summer of 2001, the facility was dismantled and the land returned to the British Airports Authority.

Performance Targets

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what targets and performance indicators are included in his public service agreements with the Department of Education and Skills; which are in respect of the performances of named local education authorities; and what steps he takes to *(a)* monitor the achievement of those targets and *(b)* audit the quality of information obtained to the Department from less local education authorities as to their performance against those targets. [62214]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: I have been asked to reply.

The Department does not include indicators in its public service agreement targets specific to named local education authorities. However, all LEAs and schools are required to set annual targets for the performance of their pupils in the Key Stage 2 and 3 national curriculum tests and GCSE examinations.

LEAs are required to set out targets in their Education Development Plans (EDPs). The Department and Ofsted work together to assess the quality of EDPs and DfES education advisers provide guidance to assist LEAs in preparing and developing plans, which are submitted to the Secretary of State for approval. DfES both supports and challenges LEAs through monitoring and evaluating the implementation of EDPs. LEAs are visited by education advisers at least once a term; in addition EDPs are reviewed annually, and all LEAs are required to submit annually an update on targets for the coming school year for each school and the LEA as a whole, covering the targets listed in the EDP, and an evaluation report showing outcomes against targets at school and LEA level.

TRANSPORT

National Air Traffic Services

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) on how many occasions the National Air Traffic Control Service's computer has malfunctioned; [63123]

(2) what recent delays have been caused by the failures of the National Air-Traffic Control Service's central computer; [63125]

(3) what steps are being taken to improve performance of the National Air Traffic Control Service's central computer; [63122]

(4) what has been the average duration of blackout during failures of the National Air Traffic Control Service's central computer. [63124]

Mr. Spellar: While these are essentially operating matters for NATS my understanding is as follows.

NATS computer systems have failed on three occasions in recent months—at West Drayton on 27 March with aggregate total delays to all affected aircraft of 88,000 minutes; West Drayton again on 10 April with delays of 34,000 minutes; and at Swanwick on 17 May with delays of 82,000 minutes. NATS first action is to take immediate steps to reduce traffic volumes to levels that can be safely handled by the contingency arrangements in place. While this impacts on airline punctuality, the first priority must be to ensure safe operation.

There was no interruption to radar services, and at no time did controllers lose contact with pilots. Actions in regard to software and equipment have been taken to prevent any recurrence of these problems.

Aircraft Seating

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress he has made on implementing the recommendations of the anthropometric study to update minimum aircraft seating standards commissioned by the Joint Aviation Authority. [63756]

Mr. Spellar: The Joint Aviation Authorities (JAA) are still considering the recommendations contained in the anthropometric report. The UK Civil Aviation Authority has urged the JAA to reach an early decision on a common European standard for seat spacing.

Mr. Martyn Rogers

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans the Maritime Coastal Agency has to award Mr. Martyn Rogers of Brixham, Devon, an ex-gratia payment following the Parliamentary Ombudsman's report of December 2001. [63902]

Mr. Jamieson: The detailed claim submitted by Mr. Rogers' accountants on 13 February 2002 is being carefully considered by the Treasury Solicitor's Department on behalf of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency. The Treasury solicitor is waiting for a response from Mr. Rogers' accountants to their request of 26 April for clarification of a number of elements of the claim.

Multi-modal Studies

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which multi-modal studies *(a)* have reported, *(b)* are in progress and *(c)* are planned; and what the expected completion date or final report date is in each case. [63833]

Mr. Spellar: *(a)* The multi-modal studies that have reported and a final report published are as follows:

Multi-modal study and location	*Reported*
Access to Hastings	Reported December 2000
Cambridge to Huntingdon (A14)	Reported August 2001
South East Manchester (Stockport, Manchester Airport Link West, Poynton)	Reported September 2001
West Midlands Area (M5/M6 and M42 between M40 and M6)	Reported October 2001
West Midlands to North West (M6)	Reported May 2002
London to South West and South Wales (A303, M4)	Reported May 2002
A1 (North of Newcastle) Tranche 2	Reported May 2002
North/South Movements in the East Midlands (M1 Junctions 21 to 30)	Reported May 2002

(b) The multi-modal studies that are currently in progress and their expected reporting dates are as follows:

Multi-modal study	*Expected report date*
A453 (M1 Junction 24 to Nottingham)	June 2002
Hull (East/West) Corridor (A63 and A1033 to Port of Hull)	July 2002
Tyneside Area (A1/A19)	August 2002
London to Ipswich (A12)	August 2002
South and West Yorkshire Motorway Box (M1 J30 to A1 West Yorkshire/M18/M62 and A1(M)	August 2002
South Coast (Southampton to Folkestone Coastal Corridor)—(M27, A27 and A259)	August 2002
ORBIT—Transport Solutions Around London (M25)	October 2002
Thames Valley (London to Reading—M4)	November/December 2002
M60 Junction 12–18 (West to North Manchester)	December 2002
London to South Midlands (A1, M1, M11, A5 and A421)	December 2002
Norwich to Peterborough (A47)	February 2003
West Midlands to East Midlands (A42/M42 to M6 Corridor and M69 and A38)	April 2003

(c) The final two multi-modal studies that are planned but have yet to commence are as follows.

These studies are expected to report in 2004.

Multi-modal study and location

A52 (Clifton Bridge to Bingham, Nottinghamshire).

A34 (North from Southampton).

Railtrack

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the answer of 11 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 1137W, if he will list the major stations owned by Railtrack plc. [64369]

Mr. Jamieson: I understand that Railtrack plc owns some 2,500 stations across the national network, the great majority of which are leased to train operating companies for them to manage. However, Railtrack plc manages directly 14 of the largest stations, known collectively as "major stations". These are as follows:

London Bridge
London Charing Cross
London Euston
London King's Cross
London Liverpool Street
London Paddington
London Victoria
London Waterloo
Birmingham New Street
Gatwick Airport
Leeds City
Manchester Piccadilly
Edinburgh Waverley
Glasgow Central.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the total cost of Railtrack administration. [63762]

Mr. Spellar: As the exact extent of the period of administration is, at this stage, unknown it is not possible to estimate the total cost of administration.

However the fees of the Administrator and his advisers are currently averaging £3.25 million per month.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much the direct grants paid to Railtrack were, and when they were paid by the SRA, resulting from the increase in access charges granted to Railtrack as part of the last periodic review carried out by the ORR; and if he will make a statement. [62297]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* Direct grants from the SRA to Railtrack are a substitute income stream to track access charges from passenger train operators. In the absence of grant, access charges would need to be higher.

Appendix D of the Regulator's October 2000 Periodic Review sets out the profile of grant payments to Railtrack. Further grants agreed as part of the April 2001 agreement between Government and Railtrack are profiled in the appendices to the Regulator's letter to Railtrack of 9 April 2001.

Grant payments have so far been made of £337 million on 1 October 2001, £162 million on 16 November 2001 and £493 million on 1 April 2002.

Central Railways

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the SRA will complete the next stage of its work on Central Railways. [63768]

Mr. Spellar: The SRA is expected to provide a report to Ministers by September 2002.

Rail Freight

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what *(a)* statutory rules, *(b)* guidelines and *(c)* regulations control access to network information provided to companies who wish to put forward proposals for the development of new freight connections. [62285]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Transport on 20 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 510W.

West Coast Main Line

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will announce the outcome of the review of the PUG2 upgrade of the west coast main line. [63161]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority hopes to publish its west coast main line strategy in the next month or so. This will set out the authority proposed approach to the future development of the line, and to making the most effective use of the capacity which the upgrade will provide.

Secure Stations Scheme

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the stations which have accreditation under the secure stations scheme; and if he will make a statement. [64096]

Mr. Spellar: I have placed in the Libraries of the House a list that records the name of each of the 143 stations accredited under the secure stations scheme as of 21 June 2002.

The percentage of stations accredited under the scheme is small in relation to the number of stations eligible to be accredited under the scheme. However, the accredited stations account for approximately one third of the total annual passenger throughput of overground rail journeys.

Railway Byelaws

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what *(a)* discussions he has had and *(b)* representations he has received from the railway industry on the railway byelaws since June 2001; and if he will make a statement; [64139]

(2) what assessment of the railway byelaws has been made by his Department; what plans there are to update these byelaws; and if he will make a statement. [64140]

Mr. Jamieson: After several years of assessment and development of the byelaws made by the British Railways Board, the national railway operators made new byelaws using a common framework set. The Secretary of State confirmed these byelaws on 19 December 2000 and they came into operation on 18 February 2001. There are no plans to update them.

Union Railways (North) Limited, Union Railways (South) Limited and Hull Trains Limited have written to the Department about their proposals for making byelaws based on the framework set. GNER, Arriva Trains Merseyside and Thameslink have also made inquiries regarding the interpretation and application of their current byelaws.

Railway Vandalism

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what legislation exists relating to vandalism on the railways; what plans he has to update this legislation; and if he will make a statement. [64142]

Mr. Jamieson: The legislation used by the British Transport police in relation to acts of vandalism is:

England and Wales

Criminal Damage Act 1971

Railway Byelaws

Scotland

Malicious Damage (Common Law)

Railway Byelaws

Criminal Law (Consolidation)(Scotland) Act 1995.

Under the Railway Safety (Miscellaneous Provisions) Regulations 1997, Railtrack, as the infrastructure controller, is required to prevent unauthorised access to the track, so far as is reasonably practicable and to the extent necessary for safety.

There are no plans to update this legislation in relation to vandalism on the railways.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what guidance has been given by his Department to *(a)* the British Transport police, *(b)* the Health and Safety Executive and *(c)* the railway industry regarding vandalism on the railways; what plans he has to update the guidance; and if he will make a statement. [64143]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department has not issued any guidance on vandalism on the railways as this is an operational matter for the industry. However, the Minister for Transport, John Spellar, spoke at the Trespass and Vandalism on the Railways Conference in October 2001 where he encouraged the leading players in the industry to implement a more coherent national strategy to deliver a sustained, visible and effective campaign to tackle the problem. The Government are pleased to note that all sections of the rail industry recently came together in the National Route Crime Group to examine and promote ways of tackling trespass and vandalism on the railways.

East London Line

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will make resources available to enable rail freight to be diverted away from train paths required for the East London Line extensions. [64287]

Mr. Jamieson: As outlined in its Strategic Plan, the SRA is currently advancing feasibility work on an upgrade of the Gospel Oak—Barking line and take future growth in freight path demand away from the Dalston—Highbury and Islington section of the East London Line extension. However, it is not expected that existing freight paths using the Dalston—Highbury and Islington section will be diverted away from the route. The freight operators hold access rights with the rail regulator for this section, and the ability to run electric traction and gauge-sensitive traffic on the route means these paths are unlikely to be released.

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on progress in funding the East London Line extensions. [64285]

Mr. Jamieson: The advance works which London Underground are currently undertaking on the northern extension have been funded by the Strategic Rail Authority. The Authority, together with Transport for London and London Underground, is now engaged on a review of the scope of the project as a whole, and in doing so is looking for a robust revised business case, procurement options and the interdependencies on other projects. The revised business case should be submitted to Government in the autumn.

Light Transport Schemes

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what *(a)* support and *(b)* guidance has been given by his Department to (i) local authorities, (ii) industry and (iii) others regarding the development of (A) light rail schemes, (B) tram schemes and (C) guided busways; and if he will make a statement. [64102]

Mr. Jamieson: The initiative in bringing forward proposals for major local transport schemes, including light rail, tram and guided bus schemes, in England outside London, rests with the local transport authority concerned. Officials in my Department and the Government offices are ready to provide information, support and guidance as required and often meet the promoters of individual schemes. In addition, from time to time they arrange forums and workshops for local authorities and their advisers on particular transport modes: workshops have already been held this year on both light rail and guided bus. Officials also regularly provide background information and support to individuals studying and researching this area.

Relevant general guidance, covering all transport modes, which is freely available to all interested parties includes (a) the Department's guidance to local authorities on the preparation of Local Transport Plans (LTPs) (issued in March 2000) and LTP Annual Progress Reports (APRs) (latest edition issued in March 2002) and (b) the Department's guidance on the appraisal of major local transport schemes (most recently updated in May 2002).

Network Rail

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment *(a)* has been made and *(b)* is planned by (i) his Department, (ii) the SRA, (iii) the rail regulator and (iv) other organisations for which he is responsible; of the accountability of Network Rail; and if he will make a statement. [64136]

Mr. Jamieson: Network Rail will be accountable to its members and to the Rail Regulator. Its board and management will be incentivised to meet demanding performance targets, defined by the Rail Regulator and aligned to the SRA's strategic plan. It would also have obligations under its network licence and to its funders and customers.

Bus Services

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what support his Department *(a)* has given and *(b)* plans to give to improve co-ordination of bus services. [64138]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department supports the encouragement of safe, integrated, efficient and economic transport services. My officials are engaged in constructive dialogue with all stakeholders, including the Office of Fair Trading, to work together towards achieving these goals.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations have been received by his Department on fuel duty rebates for bus services; what plans he has to reform fuel duty rebates; and if he will make a statement. [64101]

Mr. Spellar: My Department receives from time to time representations from local authorities, bus companies and other organisations on the existing fuel duty rebate scheme and possible changes to it. We are currently taking forward the review of bus subsidies, including fuel duty rebate, announced in the April Budget. This will build on the on-going study by the Commission for Integrated Transport on value for money from bus subsidies.

Bus Regulation

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received from *(a)* industry and *(b)* passenger groups regarding the regulation of buses; and what changes he (i) has made and (ii) plans to make to regulation within the industry. [64137]

Mr. Jamieson: The bus industry is broadly content with the existing regulatory framework and advocates stability. As for passenger groups, the National Federation of Bus Users has made representations on the improvement of service provision and reliability, particularly through bus priorities, but has not specified regulation of the industry as a major concern.

We are always looking at ways of improving the details of regulation. On 1 March we extended the notice period for introducing or changing a local bus service registration to 56 days, and abolished the rule which allowed local service operators to alter timetables by up to 5 minutes from the registered time without changing the registration. We will soon be consulting on proposals to facilitate the registration of flexibly routed local bus services.

Quiet Lanes

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which local authorities included proposals for quiet lanes in their annual progress reports 2001 finance forms; and how many quiet lanes were proposed in each case. [63507]

Mr. Spellar: The table shows the information provided within the local transport plan annual progress reports submitted in August 2001 of those English authorities outside London which included proposals for the designation of roads as quiet lanes.

Authority	*2001–02*	*2002–03*	*2003–04*	*2004–05*	*2005–06*
Bath and north-east Somerset	3	3	3	3	3
Blackburn	0	1	1	1	1
Buckinghamshire	0	6	6	6	6
Cheshire	2	3	3	6	4
Cumbria	0	2	0	0	0
Darlington	0	0	0	0	1
Derbyshire	0	1	1	1	1
Devon	1	5	6	7	7
Dorset	0	0	1	0	1
East Riding	1	0	0	1	0
Halton	0	0	0	1	0
Isle of Wight	1	3	3	3	3
Kent	6	6	6	6	6
Lancashire	0	6	0	0	0
Medway	0	0	1	0	0
Milton Keynes	1	0	0	0	0
Nottinghamshire	0	1	1	1	1
Oxfordshire	0	5	5	5	5
Poole	0	0	0	0	1
Rutland	0	1	1	1	1
South Tyneside	0	0	1	0	0
Sheffield	2	0	0	0	0
Shropshire	4	6	6	6	6
Solihull	0	0	2	3	4
Somerset	3	0	0	0	0
Suffolk	0	10	20	20	20
Surrey	2	6	6	6	2
Telford and Wrekin	0	1	0	0	0
Thurrock	0	1	1	2	2
Wiltshire	0	1	0	0	0
York	0	2	4	6	8

Source:

LTP Annual Progress Reports 2001

School Run

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research has been conducted *(a)* by and *(b)* for his Department on the impact of the school run on (i) congestion, (ii) traffic growth, (iii) pollution, (iv) children's health and (v) road casualties; and if he will make a statement. [64100]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department has commissioned an extensive programme of research, following advice from the School Travel Advisory Group. The results of completed projects can be found on the Department's school travel website at www.local-transport.dft.gov.uk/schooltravel/.

Road Signage

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what *(a)* guidance and *(b)* legislation exists with relation to road signage on (i) motorways, (ii) trunk roads, (iii) local authority roads and (iv) unadopted roads; what changes have (1) recently been made and (2) are planned in each case; and if he will make a statement. [64134]

Mr. Jamieson: The principal legislation specifying the design and use of traffic signs (as traffic signs are defined in section 64 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984) to be placed on any road (as road is defined in section 142 of the 1984 Act), is the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions (TSRGD) 1994, SI 994/1519, as amended by SI 1995/2769 and SI 1995/3107. We consulted last year on draft revised and updated TSRGD and expect to publish the TSRGD 2002 later this year.

Guidance on the design and use of traffic signs is contained in the Traffic Signs Manual. Chapter 7, published in 1997, gives guidance on the design of sign faces. Revised Chapters 4 (design and use of warning signs) and 5 (road markings) will be published with the revised TSRGD. We have also consulted on proposals for publishing updated and revised guidance on the provision of directional signs to tourist destinations in England. Other relevant guidance is published in Local Transport Notes, including LTN 1/94 on the design and use of direction signs, Circulars (Roads), and Advisory Leaflets. Copies of the current Traffic Signs bibliography has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Road Surfaces

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which local authorities included proposals for noise reducing road surfaces in their annual progress reports 2001 finance forms; and what the total km of quiet road surfacing proposed was in each case. [63499]

Mr. Spellar: The table shows the information provided within the local transport plan annual progress reports submitted in August 2001 by those English authorities outside London which included road maintenance proposals which use new noise-reducing surfaces.

Kilometres

Authority	*2001–02*	*2002–03*	*2003–04*	*2004–05*	*2005–06*
Barnsley	4	4	3	4	4
Blackburn	4.2	5.8	6.8	6.8	6.8
Bolton	5	3	1	2	2
Bradford	19	22	17	17	17
Buckinghamshire	17	14	13	13	13
Calderdale	10	17	13	14	15
Cambridgeshire	168	140	140	140	140
Cheshire	2	1	2	1	2
Cornwall	60	65	70	75	80
Darlington	3	5	3	4	4
Derby	1	1	1	1	1
Devon	46	77	44	45	53
Dorset	11	7	6	7	10
Durham	1	1	1	1	1
East Sussex	0	0.5	0	0	0
Hampshire	4	6	6	6	6
Herefordshire	12	12	12	12	12
Knowsley	1	1	0	0	0
Lancashire	25	27	27	27	27
Leeds	10	14	12	12	14
Leicestershire	22	31	18	18	18
Lincolnshire	32	34	36	38	40
Medway	4	4	5	3	3
North Somerset	15	15	15	15	15
North Tyneside	0	0	0	0.5	0.5
Northamptonshire	5	4	5	4	4
Northumberland	9	6	7	5	8
Peterborough	8	8	8	8	8
Reading	4	4	4	4	4
Rutland	3	4	6	6	6
Sefton	3	3	3	3	3
Solihull	2	3	2	2	2
Somerset	50	0	0	0	0
Stockton on Tees	13	13	13	13	13
Suffolk	90	90	90	90	90
Sunderland	2	2	2	2	2
Surrey	44	18	19	4	0
Telford and Wrekin	2	2	1	1	1
Thurrock	11.7	4.2	3.7	3.7	3.7
West Sussex	65	85	67	67	67
Wakefield	0	2	2	2	2

Kilometres

Authority	2001–02	2002–03	2003–04	2004–05	2005–06
Warwickshire	4	0	0	0	0
Wigan	2	2	2	2	2
Wokingham	3	1	3	3	2
Worcestershire	15	15	11	11	11

Source:
LTP annual progress reports 2001

Road Tolls

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what assessment he has made of the potential impact of road tolls on *(a)* motorways and *(b)* trunk roads on the level of road usage on other roads; [59328]

(2) what estimate he has made of the amounts that could be raised by the introduction of road tolls on motorways. [59327]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

Various assessments of the impact of road user charging have been made in the background analysis document of the 10-year plan for transport and "Modernising the Taxation of the Haulage Industry Progress Report One", published by HM Treasury, HM Customs and Excise and the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions.

A number of multi-modal studies have also examined the impact of applying road user charges within their study areas. These papers are the work of study consultants. The Government have made no estimates of the revenues that might be generated.

Royal Prerogative

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what decisions have been made by his Department in the last year under authority from the Royal Prerogative. [63138]

Mr. Jamieson: Records are not kept of the individual occasions on which powers under the Royal Prerogative are exercised nor could it be practicable to do so.

Joint Working

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library a copy of the protocol on joint working between his Department and *(a)* the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and *(b)* the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. [63505]

Mr. Darling: My Department works closely with all Government Departments including DEFRA and ODPM.

Refurbishment

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the refurbishment projects that *(a)* are in progress and *(b)* will start within the next six months; and what action is being taken to ensure that these will procure certified timber. [59775]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

There are two major refurbishment projects currently under way or to commence during the next six months in the Department of Transport. These are:

Federated House, Dorking (Highways Agency): the use of timber from certified sustainable sources is included in the specification.

Eland House, London (DTLR(C)): the use of timber from certified sustainable sources will be included in the specification.

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much and what proportion of the departmental expenditure limit for 2002–03 will be accounted for by staff costs; what the figures were for 2001–02; and if he will make a statement. [61017]

Mr. Jamieson: Following the split of the Department between the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Department for Transport, the departmental expenditure limit (DEL) for the Department for Transport has yet to be settled.

Promotion Panel

Andrew Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many officers promoted from Band 6 to Band 5 at the HSE NW regional office, Manchester from January 1998 to December 2001, were successful at promotion panels in open competition; how many unsuccessful candidates were subsequently promoted; and if such promotions are in line with HSE policy and procedures. [62720]

Mr. Jamieson: The number of Band 6 officers promoted to B5 at the HSE NW regional office between January 1998 and December 2001 was six.

The information regarding the number of unsuccessful candidates who were subsequently promoted is not readily available.

Regional Spending

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what his Department's *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue spending for each English region in each year since 1992 was. [62811]

Mr. Raynsford: I have been asked to reply.

Information on the capital and revenue spending for each English region since 1992 for the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, and its predecessors is not available. Details of identifiable public expenditure outturn by region and function are published in the annual Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses (Cms 2821, 3201, 3601, 3901, 4201, 4601, 5101 and 5401).

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

New Partnership for Africa's Development

17. **Helen Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the development of the New Partnership for Africa's Development. [62121]

Mr. MacShane: The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NePAD) is a long term agenda for Africa, designed by African leaders for the attainment of sustainable development. Our work on the G8 Africa Plan shows our strong support for NePAD and we will seek to build stronger partnerships with those countries which put the NePAD principles into practice.

Russia

19. **Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on bilateral relations with Russia. [62123]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Bilateral relations are excellent, with an intensive programme of high-level visits. The Prime Minister is in regular contact with President Putin: they will next meet at the G8 summit on 25–26 June. We actively support Putin's programme of reforms, and we have a productive dialogue on the full range of issues.

21. **Mr. Crausby:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with Russia about combating terrorism. [62125]

28. **Valerie Davey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions are taking place with Russia on combating international terrorism. [62132]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State last discussed counter-terrorism with the Russians during the G8 Foreign Ministers' Summit in Canada on 12–13 June.

Middle East

20. **Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with Israeli representatives concerning the situation in Israel and Palestine. [62124]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: On 12 June my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister discussed with Prime Minister Sharon how to resolve the conflict in the Middle East, and generate confidence in a genuine political process. The Foreign Secretary spoke to Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres on 28 April. I had a discussion with the Israeli Ambassador on 18 June, at which I expressed concern about the situation in the region, and explored ways to restart a political process.

34. **Mr. Moore:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has held with European Union Foreign Ministers to co-ordinate their response to the situation in the middle east. [62139]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary is in almost constant contact with his European Union colleagues. Most recently, he attended the General Affairs Council in Luxembourg on 17 June, during which European Union Foreign Ministers discussed the situation in the middle east.

Pakistan

22. **Mr. Bryant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on recent security developments in Pakistan. [62126]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We remain seriously concerned about the security situation in Pakistan and are appalled by the many incidents of terrorist violence against Pakistani and foreign nationals. The vicious attack on worshippers in an Islamabad church in March and the two recent bombings in Karachi were particularly horrifying. As soon as the news of the latest bombing reached us, I immediately issued a statement expressing our sympathies to the friends and relatives of those killed.

We will continue to urge the Pakistani authorities to sustain their efforts to root out the terrorists and bring them to justice. The threat of war between India and Pakistan has further undermined the security environment in the region. We are encouraged by the recent steps taken by the Pakistani and Indian Governments to defuse tensions and will continue to urge them to move away from confrontation and towards dialogue.

World Trade

23. **Rosemary McKenna:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his assessment is of the effect of US steel tariffs on world trade. [62127]

Mr. MacShane: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier in the House today to my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Ms Munn).

31. **Kali Mountford:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on post-Doha world trade liberalisation. [62135]

Mr. MacShane: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier in the House today to my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Phil Hope).

Zimbabwe

24. **Angela Watkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he had concerning Zimbabwe at the recent European Council meeting in Seville. [62128]

Mr. MacShane: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary had no formal discussions with EU partners on Zimbabwe at Seville.

30. **Mr. Simmonds:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the political situation in Zimbabwe. [62134]

Mr. MacShane: What is happening in Zimbabwe is a man-made tragedy. Zimbabwe's only way back from disaster is through the restoration of the rule of law, an end to political violence, a return to democratic legitimacy, and the adoption of credible economic policies.

Our policy towards Zimbabwe is to sustain an international consensus by working with European, Commonwealth, US, African and other international and democratic friends to help restore democracy, good governance, respect for human rights and the rule of law.

David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with representatives of the Zimbabwean Government on the future of land owned by British expatriates; and if he will make a statement. [62110]

Mr. MacShane: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier in the House today to my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Tony Cunningham).

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what penalties can be imposed on an EU member state which does not enforce the travel ban imposed on members of the Zimbabwean Government. [62166]

Mr. MacShane *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* The travel ban is imposed by a Common Position (2002/145/CFSP of 18 February 2002). Under Article 15 of the Treaty on European Union, all member states are obliged to implement Common Positions. All member states have fully implemented and enforced the travel ban so far and we expect them to continue doing so. There are no penalties under the Treaty applicable in these cases.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which EU body oversees the implementation by member states of the travel ban restrictions imposed on the various members of the Zimbabwean Government. [62167]

Mr. MacShane *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* The European Union travel ban is imposed by a Common Position (2002/145/CFSP of 18 February 2002). Under Article 15 of the Treaty on European Union, all member states are obliged to implement Common Positions. The responsibility for implementing Common Positions lies with member states.

Gibraltar

25. **Mr. Francois:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the status is of the discussions with the Spanish Government on the future of Gibraltar. [62129]

Peter Hain: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary gave earlier in the House today to the hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle).

Malawi

26. **Diana Organ:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next intends to visit Malawi to discuss bilateral relations. [62130]

Mr. MacShane: The Secretary of State has no plans to visit Malawi.

Kashmir

27. **Mr. Doran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on plans for monitoring the forthcoming elections in Jammu and Kashmir. [62131]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We welcome the Indian Government's commitment to hold free and fair elections later this year in Jammu and Kashmir. We also welcome the measures announced recently by the Chief Election Commissioner aimed at delivering that commitment, including the presence of Indian and international monitors.

29. **Mr. Viggers:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what role the UK Government will play in easing tensions between India and Pakistan. [62133]

36. **Tom Brake:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the UK Government's role in reducing tension in Kashmir. [62141]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We have been working actively with our partners in the international community to encourage both India and Pakistan to reduce tensions, and to help create the conditions for them to negotiate a long-term solution to their differences.

As part of the co-ordinated international diplomatic effort, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary visited Pakistan and India on 28 and 29 May. He is in regular contact with both sides, and with our key international partners. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has also spoken at length to both sides, and to world leaders, including Presidents Bush and Putin, about the situation.

33. **Mr. Rooney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his assessment is of the present situation in Kashmir. [62138]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given earlier in the House today by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary to the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff).

EU Overseas Aid

32. **Mr. Baron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent meetings he has had with his EU counterparts regarding the distribution of the EU overseas aid package. [62137]

Peter Hain: The General Affairs Council held its annual "orientation" debate on the EU's external action, including the EC external budget, on 18 February. There was a brief follow-up discussion at the May 13 GAC meeting. The negotiations on the EC budget for 2003 are under way at official level in Brussels.

European Commission

35. **Mr. Djanogly:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the European Commission's role in foreign policy development. [62140]

Peter Hain: The Commission bears responsibility for implementing a range of European foreign policy tools. These include external trade questions (including sanctions), European external assistance and some external aspects of Justice and Home Affairs. The European Commission is not, however, responsible for the European Union's common foreign and security policy, which is intergovernmental (Title V of the treaty on European Union), though the Commission is fully associated with the Union's foreign and security policy.

Geneva Convention

37. **Mr. Blunt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the effectiveness of the Fourth Geneva convention. [62142]

Mr. MacShane: Together with their 1977 additional protocols, the four Geneva conventions of 1949 remain the cornerstone of international humanitarian law. The Fourth Geneva convention is the most lengthy, affording protection to civilian populations, which the experiences of the second world war showed to be singularly deficient in the international legal instruments adopted hitherto. The Government consider that the conventions have collectively stood the test of time and that, where properly applied, the Fourth convention and additional protocols offer a high degree of protection and serve to reduce the degree of suffering to which civilians may be exposed by conflict.

East Timor

38. **Ms Bridget Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what continuing support the Government will offer to East Timor. [62143]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier in the House today to my hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Mr. Turner).

Performance Targets

Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the performance targets that his Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies are required to meet, apart from those set out in the public service agreements for 1999 to 2002 and 2001 to 2004; and if he will specify for each target *(a)* who sets it and *(b)* who monitors achievement against it. [60470]

Mr. MacShane: In addition to the performance targets listed in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's public service agreements for 1999 to 2002 and 2001 to 2004, the FCO's service delivery agreement, agreed under the 2000 Spending Review, contains a number of targets for the period 2001 to 2004. Progress against the FCO's SDA targets is monitored by the FCO, using a combination of internally-generated management information, and through a series of scorecard measures agreed with HM Treasury. The FCO's current PSA, SDA, and information on scorecards can be consulted on the FCO website (www.fco.gov.uk). The following public bodes sponsored by the FCO have performance targets:

BBC World Service (including BBC Monitoring) (public corporation)

Targets for the BBC World Service are included in the FCO's PSA, scorecards to the FCO's PSA, and in the BBC World Service's annual report on output and performance measures. Targets are set by the FCO in consultation with the World Service. Progress is monitored by the FCO.

Targets for BBC Monitoring are set out in scorecards to the FCO's SDA. Additional key performance indicators/targets are set out in BBC Monitoring's corporate plan. These key performance indicators and targets are set by the FCO and other stakeholders in BBC Monitoring (Ministry of Defence, Cabinet Office and BBC World Service) in consultation with BBC Monitoring, and achievement is monitored by the stakeholders.

Britain-Russia Centre (executive non-departmental public body)

Performance targets for the Britain-Russia Centre are set out in its corporate plan. The plan is approved by the FCO and the FCO monitors progress against it.

British Association for Central and Eastern Europe (executive non-departmental public body)

Performance targets for the British Association for Central and Eastern Europe are set out in its corporate plan. The targets are set by the association, agreed with the FCO, and monitored jointly by the association and by the FCO.

British Council (executive non-departmental public body)

The British Council's annual corporate plan summarises the British Council's key operational and financial targets for the year. Progress against its targets is monitored by the British Council and the FCO.

The Great Britain-China Centre (executive non-departmental public body)

The Great Britain-China Centre has annual objectives which are included in its corporate plan. These objectives are set and progress against them monitored by the Great Britain-China Centre board in conjunction with the FCO.

Marshall Aid Commemoration Commission (advisory non-departmental public body)

The Marshall Aid Commemoration Commission's corporate plan contains annual performance targets. The plan is approved, and progress against its targets monitored, by the FCO.

Westminster Foundation for Democracy (executive non-departmental public body)

The Westminster Foundation for Democracy's performance targets are set through a consultative process between the FCO and the Westminster Foundation for Democracy's executive and board. Progress against targets is formally monitored quarterly by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy's board, which is attended by the FCO.

Wilton Park (executive agency)

A target for percentage of respondents who rate Wilton Park's conference programme highly is set out in a scorecard to the FCO's PSA. A number of additional targets for Wilton Park are incorporated into Wilton Park's corporate plan and information on its performance against them is in its annual report. These additional targets are set by the FCO-led Wilton Park departmental board in consultation with Wilton Park, and achievement is monitored by the departmental board annually.

Wilton Park Academic Council (advisory non-departmental public body)

The Wilton Park Academic Council's work is monitored by the FCO, which acts as Secretariat to it.

Arms Trade

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what end-use monitoring his Department carries out on the re-export of small arms, manufactured under British licence production agreements, by *(a)* MKEK (Turkey), *(b)* Pakistan Ordnance Factories and *(c)* Brugger and Thomet (Switzerland). [61983]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We have no specific end-use monitoring arrangements on the re-export of small arms manufactured overseas under commercial licence from defence manufacturers located in the UK.

The Government focus their efforts on assessment of potential end-use at the export licensing stage, including where needed through checks made by our posts overseas. Carrying out effective risk assessment on end-users before making the export licensing decision is the surest way of preventing arms from falling into the wrong hands. The Government remain committed to carrying out end-use monitoring in those circumstances where this will genuinely add value to our efforts to minimise the risk of misuse and diversion and where such monitoring is practicable. Our overseas posts have standing instructions to report on allegations of misuse of any UK-origin defence equipment and to take this into account during the export licensing process.

Licensed production of arms overseas typically depends on the supply to the overseas producer of controlled component parts and technology by the company licensing the manufacture of its products. Any controlled equipment or technology exported from the UK to a production facility licensed under a commercial arrangement between a British company and an overseas company would be assessed on a case by case basis against the consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria. Our criteria clearly set out our commitment to take account of the risk that exports might be diverted to an undesirable end-user or re-exported under undesirable conditions. The criteria were set out in the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Peter Hain) to hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Laura Moffatt) on 26 October 2000, *Official Report*, columns 199–203W.

Any exports of controlled equipment or technology that take place under commercial licensed production agreements entered into by UK-owned defence manufacturers located overseas would be subject to the export control rules of the country in which those defence manufacturers are located.

India/Pakistan

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what services are available at the British high commissions in India and Pakistan for British citizens who do not wish to leave their respective countries. [61194]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* We have been advising Britons to leave Pakistan since 31 May. We continue to do everything we can to help any British national who chooses to remain in India or Pakistan despite our advice. Our posts in India continue to provide the full range of consular services. While Chennai and Kolkata continue to offer a full visa service, a reduction in staff means that our visa services are more limited in Delhi and Mumbai.

In Pakistan we have recently closed our mission in Lahore but our posts in Islamabad and Karachi are still offering the full range of consular services. Reduced staff levels there mean, however, that services may take longer to provide. Furthermore, Karachi is no longer able to offer a visa service and Islamabad is only able to offer a much reduced visa service.

We have advised British nationals who choose to remain in either country to stay in touch with our high commissions, and to monitor the media (including our website—www.fco.gov.uk). We stay in touch with British nationals who have registered with us through a network of wardens (such networks are maintained by FCO diplomatic posts in many countries overseas; wardens are volunteers who help to disseminate information to the resident British community) in both India and Pakistan, and we are encouraging any British national who remains in either country, and who has not registered with the high commission, to do so.

Peru

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on relations with Peru. [62783]

Mr. MacShane: We enjoy good relations. I visited Peru for the inauguration of President Toledo last July. The Prime Minister met President Toledo at the EU-Latin American and Caribbean summit on 17 May. HRH the Duke of York paid an official visit to Peru in March. DFID's development co-operation programme stands at approximately £4.5 million per annum and we have committed a further £4 million, over five years, to President Toledo's anti-poverty economic recovery programme "A Trahajar". We are also supporting the rebuilding of democracy and support for human rights in Peru, as well as indigenous rights, police and military reform and drugs co-operation. The UK is one of Peru's main trading partners in the EU, and one of the largest foreign investors in Peru.

Timber

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what new steps the Government will take to verify the implementation of the bilateral agreement between the United Kingdom and Indonesia regarding the trade in illegal timber products. [63058]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Work towards implementation of this memorandum of understanding is ongoing both in the UK and in Indonesia. We are currently negotiating an action plan to implement the MOU with the Government of Indonesia in consultation with civil society and the private sector in both countries. The action plan will include means for monitoring progress and should be finalised by September this year.

Israel/Palestine

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his estimate is of the area by *(a)* acreage and *(b)* location on the (i) Israeli and (ii) Palestinian side of the planned and actual fence and trench which goes beyond their borders as defined by the (A) 1947 and (B) 1967 UN Resolutions. [63355]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The fence and trench are at an early stage of construction. We do not have definitive figures on the areas of Israeli and Palestinian territory affected by the proposed or actual construction. We will continue to monitor the facts on the ground.

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish a map of the fence and trench *(a)* planned and *(b)* under construction between Israel and the Palestinian west bank. [63356]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Her Majesty's Government have no plans to publish maps of Israeli Government proposals for a fence and trench. This is a matter for the Israeli Government.

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations *(a)* have been made and *(b)* he plans to make to (i) the Israeli Government and (ii) Arab nations concerning the plans by Israel to build a fence and trench dividing Israel and the Palestinian west bank; and if he will make a statement. [63354]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We have repeatedly made clear to the Israeli Government that only a political process leading to a comprehensive settlement will produce lasting peace. Physical barriers alone will not give the Israeli people the long-term security they deserve. Our efforts with Arab and other Governments will continue to focus on breaking the cycle of violence by restarting the political process. I raised this issue with the Israeli ambassador last week.

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if it is his Department's policy to support the construction of a fence and trench dividing Israel and the Palestinian west bank; and if he will make a statement. [63358]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: It is not. We do not believe that the construction of a fence and trench dividing Israel and the west bank will provide lasting security for Israel, which can only be achieved through negotiation of a permanent settlement by Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his Department's estimate is of the number of Israeli civilians killed by Palestinian suicide bombers who were understood to have entered Israel from *(a)* the Palestinian west bank and *(b)* Gaza. [63360]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: According to Israeli Defence Forces figures, 215 Israeli civilians have been killed by suicide bombings since the beginning of the current intifada. The Israeli Defence Forces claim that no suicide attack inside the Green Line has come from Gaza, and that all have originated in the west bank.

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the *(a)* length, *(b)* structure, *(c)* size and *(d)* defensive effectiveness of the fence and trench being constructed between Israel and the Palestinian west bank. [63357]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: At present, the fence and trench are at an early stage of construction. We continue to monitor the facts on the ground as they develop.

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Government of the United States concerning the construction of a fence and trench dividing Israel and the Palestinian west bank; and if he will make a statement. [63359]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We have not yet discussed Israel's construction of a security fence with the Government of the United States.

British Council Library (Paris)

Richard Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has for the British Council Library in Paris; and if he will make a statement. [63333]

Mr. MacShane: The lending section of the Council's library in Paris will close at the end of June. The lending collection will be donated to public institutions, such as the French National Library and the specialist English studies libraries, and so will remain accessible to the public in Paris. Investment of £445,000 will enable part of the centre to re-open in the autumn with an Open Learning area with 30 dedicated computers and a video conferencing facility. A free access information service will also provide 40 UK periodicals and newspapers, reference books on education and the learning of English in the UK, and guidance on cultural, educational and scientific services from Britain.

Nepal

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the Nepalese Government regarding the escalation of terrorist attacks by Maoist groups. [63480]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We are very concerned about the situation in Nepal. This brutal insurgency by the Maoists is undermining Nepal's young democracy and fragile economy. Maoist terrorists are conducting a savage campaign of intimidation in Nepal to further their own political aims.

The UK has long been a friend of Nepal and we are committed to continuing our developmental, political and military assistance to them. This message was reiterated to the Nepalese Prime Minister during his visit last month to the UK by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for International Development and my predecessor, the hon. Member for Exeter (Mr. Bradshaw). We reassured the Nepalese Prime Minister of our full support, but also made clear the need for effective action by the Nepalese Government on reform and development.

We have just hosted an international conference in London with representatives from the Nepalese Government and from other countries who share our concerns, to discuss how the international community can best co-ordinate its efforts in supporting the people of Nepal. We will continue to develop an integrated approach to security, reform and development within Nepal.

The UK has put together a comprehensive package of developmental and military assistance totalling more than £30 million for this financial year. This money will cover projects aimed at short-term development and to reinforce Nepal's development, military and police capacity.

Unlawful Killings (UK Nationals)

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many UK nationals were unlawfully killed in *(a)* Egypt, *(b)* Jordan, *(c)* Lebanon, *(d)* Syria, *(e)* Turkey, *(f)* Iraq, *(g)* Iran, *(h)* Israel, *(i)* Algeria, *(j)* Morocco, *(k)* Libya, *(l)* Tunisia, *(m)* Pakistan, *(n)* Nigeria, *(o)* Sudan, *(p)* Ethiopia, *(q)* Saudi Arabia, *(r)* Oman, *(s)* Yemen, *(t)* Kuwait and *(u)* UAE in the period from 1 May 2000 to 1 May 2002. [63542]

Mr. Straw *[holding answer 21 June 2002]:* Our consular records show that the number of UK nationals reported as unlawfully killed in the following countries during the period 1 May 2000 to 1 May 2002 were:

(a) Egypt: 0

(b) Jordan: 0

(c) Lebanon: 0

(d) Syria: 0

(e) Turkey: 2

(f) Iraq: 0

(g) Iran: 0

(h) Israel: 2

(i) Algeria: 0

(j) Morocco: 2

(k) Libya: 0

(l) Tunisia: 2

(m) Pakistan: 6

(n) Nigeria: 3

(o) Sudan: 0

(p) Ethiopia: 0

(q) Saudi Arabia: 7

(r) Oman: 0

(s) Yemen: 0

(t) Kuwait: 0

(u) UAE: 0.

Sudan

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many staff are assigned to the unit headed by Mr. Alan Goulty as Special Representative to Sudan; and what the budget of his office is for the current financial year. [63853]

Mr. MacShane: The Special Representative for Sudan is supported by a joint FCO/DFID Sudan Unit which has a permanent staff of four officials who can call on advisers across Whitehall as necessary. The staff and running costs of the unit for the current financial year come to approximately £450,000. In addition to this sum, the Sudan Unit and other DFID officials have call on another £7.75 million for humanitarian aid and peace-building activities.

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions the Government have had with the Government of Sudan since 1 January. [63820]

Mr. MacShane: The Government has continuous contact with the Government of Sudan through our diplomatic missions in London and Khartoum. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development visited Sudan in January. The UK Special Representative and other officials have had a series of discussions with members of the Sudanese Government since January, mainly on issues related to peace.

G8 Foreign Ministers' Summit

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on matters discussed, matters of agreement and disagreement, and decisions taken at the meeting of G8 foreign ministers in Whistler, Canada; and if he will place in the Library copies of all documentation circulated at the meeting, excluding security sensitive information. [63852]

Peter Hain: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary represented the UK at the meeting of Foreign Ministers of the Group of eight in Whistler, Canada on 12–13 June.

Issues discussed at the meeting included counter-terrorism, Afghanistan, South Asia, the middle east, non-proliferation, the Balkans, Cyprus and the Korean Peninsula. No formal decisions were taken on these or other issues, though a G8 statement on Afghanistan and a progress report on G8 activity against terrorism were agreed and issued at the meeting. Copies of those documents and of the Canadian chairman's summary of discussion have been placed in the Library of the House.

Visas

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many appeals were lodged against visa refusals in *(a)* Mumbai, *(b)* New Delhi and *(c)* Islamabad in 2001; and when he will re-open the entry clearance operation in (i) Mumbai, (ii) New Delhi and (iii) Islamabad. [64231]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The number of appeals received in 2001 by Mumbai, New Delhi and Islamabad are shown below:

Mumbai	733
Islamabad	4,941
New Delhi	1,396.

Entry clearance operations in Mumbai, New Delhi and Islamabad are not closed.

We are currently operating a restricted visa service in New Delhi and Mumbai. Since 4 June, New Delhi and Mumbai have only accepted settlement applications, urgent medical and compassionate cases and drop box applications for limited categories of travellers including previous visitors and returning residents.

Since 6 June Islamabad has been offering a very limited service, accepting applications through Fedex from returning residents and urgent medical and compassionate cases, including settlement and family visit applications in these categories.

We are keeping service and staffing levels under constant review. Our aim is a phased resumption of normal service at the security situation permits and staffing levels build up.

From 24 June New Delhi and Mumbai will be extending the service offered to accept applications in a broad category of 'straightforward' traveller.

Also from 24 June the visa service in Islamabad will be extended to include applications from:

a business visitor with a letter of invitation from a company in the UK who has travelled to the UK within the last three years and has evidence of this travel;

holder of a valid UK Work Permit;

a member of an airline crew on a route which passes through the UK;

a seaman with a previous visa for the same purpose. Applications must be accompanied by the seaman's book and a letter from a recognised shipping company

the spouse or child (under 18) of one of the above categories, and accompanying the main applicant to the UK.

Correspondence

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when his Department will supply answers to the chronology points discussed during the meeting with the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam and his constituent, the Reverend Jason Clark. [64365]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The chronology queries, to which the hon. Member refers, are Mr. Clark's contradictions of the Embassy and FCO's records.

It was agreed during the hon. Member's meeting with my noble Friend Baroness Amos on 20 February, that the chronology issue would be reviewed once our mutual concerns about Mr. Clark's health (and corresponding clemency plea to the Abu Dhabi authorities) had been addressed. I understand that this was agreed with Michael Clark himself in a meeting with embassy staff on 20 January 2002. As soon as these concerns are resolved, we will address the issues surrounding the discrepancies in our respective chronology of events in this case.

Royal Prerogative

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what decisions have been made by his Department in the last year under authority from the Royal Prerogative. [63130]

Mr. MacShane: I refer the hon. Member to the answers given to my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) on 6 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 467W, and to the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) on 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 967W, to which I have nothing further to add.

Subcontinent (Land Mines)

Mr. Pound: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the Governments of India and Pakistan concerning the deployment of land mines on their shared border. [62103]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We deplore the use of anti-personnel landmines. Although no recent representations have been made since 1998, when the United Kingdom became a State Party to the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction, we have lobbied all states non-party, whether users of anti-personnel landmines or not, to ratify the convention.

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the effects of unrest in Gujarat on relations between India and Pakistan. [62119]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We assess there to be no direct link between the recent unrest in Gujarat and relations between India and Pakistan.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

KPNQwest

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received concerning the financial situation at KPNQwest and the possible shutdown of its Ebone network; what effect she estimates this may have on internet users; and if she will make a statement. [64321]

Mr. Timms: I have not received any representations regarding the possible shutdown of KPNQwest's network, although officials in the Department and at Oftel are watching developments closely.

Some UK ISPs and websites may use KPNQwest for their connection to the internet. Loss of KPNQwest would not necessarily mean complete loss of internet access as major ISPs are likely to have more than one supplier of internet connectivity. It is possible however that access to some websites would be slowed down until traffic were fully rerouted via other networks.

There is a competitive market for internet connectivity, meaning that ISPs and websites should be able readily to obtain internet connectivity from other suppliers, if they have not already done so, since they were advised by KPNQwest to make contingency arrangements on 30 May.

Post Office

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much was spent, broken down *(a)* by consulting firm and *(b)* by project, on A6, Post Office consultancy and other expenditure related to the Post Office, as stated in Annex b in the Trade and Industry Government Expenditure plans for 2000–01; and if she will make a statement. [63545]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 21 June 2002]:* Payments to individual consultants are commercially confidential. The firms that advised Government were:

Deloitte and Touche (Financial Advice)
Herbert Smith (Legal Advice)
OC&C (Strategy Consultants)
RKR (Strategy Consultants)
Lazard (Investment Bank).

An independent legal adviser also provided a limited amount of legal advice.

The amount paid for advice per project is as follows[1]:

	£ million
Assessment of strategic options, acquisitions and alliances for the mails business	1.75
Assessment of strategic options for the Post Office Network (including Universal Bank and Your Guide)	0.99
Advice on implementation of the Postal Services Act	0.22
Other (including project co-ordination, expenses and unallocated costs)	0.10

[1] These figures should be seen as indicative as there was some cross over between projects.

Consignia

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her oral statement of 13 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 1022, on Consignia, whether the provisions of the sixth VAT directive exempting public postal services from VAT apply to all licensed postal operators; and if she will make a statement. [63504]

John Healey: I have been asked to reply.

The UK VAT exemption for public postal services applies only to the Post Office company and its wholly owned subsidiaries, such as Consignia plc, providing the public postal service.

Sub-post Offices

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many sub-post offices in Scotland have changed proprietor in each of the last five years. [62417]

Mr. Timms: This is a matter which falls within the day-to-day responsibility of Consignia and I have asked the Chief Executive to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Royal Prerogative

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what decisions have been made by her Department in the last year under authority from the Royal Prerogative. [63137]

Ms Hewitt: Records are not kept of the individual occasions on which powers under the Royal Prerogative are exercised, nor could it be practicable to do so.

Trade Subsidies

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what support schemes are available from the European Union for small and medium-sized enterprises in Britain; how much funding is available; and what proportion of this funding has been taken up by small firms in the last three years. [60499]

Nigel Griffiths: The primary source of European Union support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the United Kingdom is the European Structural Funds. For the funding period 2000–06 the UK has been allocated approximately £10 billion from these funds.

The priorities for this funding were the subject of negotiation with the Commission which resulted in a number of agreed programming documents being approved during 2000 and 2001. Expenditure under the programmes can be undertaken until 2008.

Since each document was drawn up and negotiated on the basis of the needs of the area concerned, the way in which support for SMEs is addressed varies between programmes. Although each programme includes a number of activities which involve either direct or indirect support to SMEs, the funding under the programmes is not disaggregated in a way that enables the amounts available or spent only for the benefit of SMEs to be easily identified, and it would involve disproportionate cost to provide this information.

Radioactive Materials

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures are in place to protect radioactive materials already in the United Kingdom that could be used to build a dirty bomb. [62709]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 19 June 2002]:* Nuclear materials on licensed civil nuclear sites and in transport are subject to rigorous regulatory requirements set, and monitored by, the Office for Civil Nuclear Security (OCNS). Nuclear power generators comply with the Nuclear Generating Station (Security) Regulations 1996, made under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. Other sites comply with Directions made under the Atomic Energy Act 1954 and the Nuclear Installations Act 1965. All civil nuclear material in the UK is subject to Euratom safeguards and to the terms of the UK/Euratom/IAEA Safeguards Agreement. Radioactive material, in accordance with the Radioactive Substances Act 1993, requires a certificate of registration from the Environment Agency or the Scottish Environment Protection Agency. The certificates impose responsibilities in respect of security and general management. In addition, the Ionising Radiations Regulations 1999 require employers to have in place appropriate accounting procedures. The regulatory bodies carry out regular programmes of inspections to ensure compliance and would not hesitate to take enforcement action were there a failure to comply with regulatory requirements.

Small Rural Businesses

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent steps her Department has taken to support small rural business. [63528]

Nigel Griffiths: The DTI and the Small Business Service (SBS) are supporting rural business in a number of ways.

The Development Fund for Rural Renewal, part of the Phoenix Fund, is supporting 20 projects with grants totalling £3 million. These projects aim to help rural business communities that have been affected by foot and mouth.

The Business Link network provides services to all small businesses including small rural business and some have specific programmes targeted on this sector. The SBS is pulling together examples of good practice in helping small rural businesses to assist Business Link operators in this work.

The Business Link website, www.businesslink.org, is being enhanced to include specific advice on rural issues and signposting the others who are also able to assist rural businesses.

There are many other activities taking place at local and regional level, many in co-operation with regional development agencies.

SBS has recently published research on "Encouraging and Supporting Enterprise in Rural Areas" and will be looking to use the results of this research in discussion with others active in supporting rural businesses.

Coal Industry

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much coal has been imported into *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* Wales in each year since 1997. [60281]

Mr. Wilson: Separate import figures for Scotland and Wales are not available. Total imports of coal into the UK since 1997, in millions of tonnes, were as follows:

	Tonnes (million)
1997	19.7
1998	21.2
1999	20.3
2000	23.4
2001	[1]35.5

[1] Provisional

Sources:
Digest of United Kingdom Energy Statistics 2001 (The Stationery Office)
Energy Trends, March 2002 (DTI publication)

Textile Industry

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the contribution to the UK economy of the textile industry. [63671]

Mr. Timms: The UK textiles industry accounted for 0.4 per cent. of UK GDP in 2000. In 2001, UK employment in the sector was 107,000 and UK exports were valued at £3.6 billion.

My Department recognises the UK textile industry as an important contributor to the UK economy and through its active support of the industry-led Textiles and Clothing Strategy Group, will continue to work with this key manufacturing sector to ensure it continues to improve and develop in the global economy.

Working Hours

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the average number of working hours per week for UK workers was in the last year for which figures are available; and what plans she has to move this closer to the EU average. [63956]

Alan Johnson: The average number of working hours per week for all UK workers (including part-time workers) was 37.7 in 2000, which is comparable to the EU average of 37.8.

BNFL

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether British Nuclear Fuels consulted her Department in advance of appointing Dr. Jim Currie to the BNFL Board. [63845]

Mr. Wilson: Yes.

Solar Energy

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent discussions she has had with BP on the building and operation of a solar photovoltaic cells plant in Wales. [63851]

Mr. Wilson: My predecessor and I have had meetings with a number of PV cell manufacturers, including BP Solar, to discuss the possibility of establishing manufacturing plants in the UK.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what initiatives she plans to take to increase expenditure on solar energy technology, with specific reference to *(a)* photovoltaics, *(b)* solar water heating and *(c)* solar interseasonal heat storage technologies respectively. [63855]

Mr. Wilson:

(a) On 26 March I launched the £20 million First Phase of the Major Photovoltaics Demonstration Programme (MDP), which should result in 3,000 domestic roofs and 140 larger non-residential buildings receiving PV systems over the next three years. In addition, the Domestic and Large Scale Field Trails are already underway with a combined budget of around £10 million. They should result in at least 500 domestic roofs and 15 large public buildings receiving PV installations. Subsequent phases of the MDP are dependent on the success of the First Phase and on sufficient funds being available.

(b) Solar Water Heating is a proven and reliable technology with an established but small market in the UK. We are considering support for it, along with other small-scale renewable technologies, under the £10 million Community and Household Scheme, which is currently being designed. An announcement will be made in the autumn and grants are likely to be available by the end of this year.

(c) Little work has been done in the UK on interseasonal storage. While heat may be 'free' and the technology itself quite simple, the cost of the necessary equipment and infrastructure is the barrier to wider exploitation. We will, however, be keeping a watching brief on seasonal heat storage developments.

Renewables Advisory Board

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry who the members of the Renewables Advisory Board are; and what their qualifications are to sit on the board. [63856]

Mr. Wilson: Provisional members attended the first interim meeting of the Renewables Advisory Board on 21 May 2002. We shall publicise shortly the details of the formal selection process, including the skills required, and will invite applications for the appointment of members to the full Board.

Nuclear Waste (Russia)

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent discussions she has had with Russian representatives on security of nuclear waste. [62136]

Mr. Wilson: The Department is responsible for the management of the interdepartmental programme for addressing the nuclear legacy in the Former Soviet Union (FSU), and Ministers and officials, plus those in other Government Departments are in regular discussion with their counterparts on a range of nuclear issues, not just the security of nuclear waste. The £84 million programme to tackle nuclear problems in the Former Soviet Union was announced to Parliament in July 2000 to cover the period 2001 to 2004, and future funding levels will depend on the outcome of the current Spending Review. The programme has, as one of its priorities, nuclear safety and security issues in Russia. An important element of the UK programme is assisting Russia in tackling the nuclear waste problems associated with the 100+ decommissioned nuclear submarines in NW Russia; particularly the safe disposal and secure storage of spent nuclear fuel from such vessels. Current discussions with Russia centre on concluding a legal framework agreement covering liability, tax and access issues etc.

Construction Industry

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action she is taking to prosecute construction companies who operate in the black economy. [63050]

Dawn Primarolo: I have been asked to reply.

The actions which the revenue Departments will take against those who operate in the informal economy and commit tax offences are laid down in the published prosecution policies of the responsible Departments. They will also work with colleagues in other Departments when other offences, such as benefit fraud, exist too.

National Insurance

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the total amount of national insurance contributions lost owing to false self-employment claims on CIS4 tax certificates was in each year for the last three years; and if she will make a statement. [63097]

Dawn Primarolo: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested is not available.

Endangered Species (Derived Products)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what new steps her Department has taken to regulate British companies trading in products derived from endangered and threatened species. [63059]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply.

British companies are subject to the provisions of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) which is implemented in the EU by Council Regulation (EC) No. 338/97 and Commission Regulation (EC) No. 1808/02.

Under these Regulations all commercial trade in endangered species is prohibited and permits may only be granted for trade in threatened species where it is clear that trade will not be detrimental and that the specimens were lawfully acquired. No new steps to regulate British companies have been taken, although the Regulations governing the enforcement of CITES are under review. One of the issues being considered is whether offences relating to internal trade should be made arrestable and the existing penalties increased. We intend to go out to public consultation on these proposals later in the year.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Extortion

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Solicitor-General how many prosecutions for extortion have been pursued in Northern Ireland in each year since 1994; and how many convictions have resulted. [63430]

Jane Kennedy: I have been asked to reply.

There is no one offence for extortion. The following tables provide the most relevant offences and convictions related to extortion during the period 1994 to 1999. Figures from 1999 to date are not yet available.

Table 1: Northern Ireland prosecutions for offences related to extortion: 1994–99

Offence	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*
Blackmail	22	38	25	14	32	5
Bribery	0	0	0	0	1	0
Kidnapping	19	26	35	17	15	13
Soliciting financial support for proscribed organisation	0	2	0	0	0	0
Soliciting or inviting support for proscribed organisation	0	0	0	0	0	0
Intimidation—residence/occupation	56	9	25	43	22	21
Intimidation—person leave employment	0	2	1	1	0	1
Intimidation—to do/refrain from doing any act	12	9	9	7	7	7
Threats to harm	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total	109	86	95	82	77	48

Table 2: Northern Ireland convictions for offences related to extortion: 1994–99

Offence	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*
Blackmail	9	28	13	14	26	4
Bribery	0	0	0	0	1	0
Kidnapping	8	20	14	12	12	10
Soliciting financial support for proscribed organisation	0	2	0	0	0	0
Soliciting or inviting support for proscribed organisation	0	0	0	0	0	0
Intimidation—residence/occupation	18	5	17	24	13	9
Intimidation—person leave employment	0	1	1	0	0	1
Intimidation—to do/refrain from doing any act	8	6	5	4	3	5
Threats to harm	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total	43	62	50	54	55	30

SCOTLAND

Royal Prerogative

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what decisions have been made by her Department in the last year under authority from the royal prerogative. [63136]

Mrs. Liddell: Records are not kept of the individual occasions on which powers under the royal prerogative are exercised, nor would it be practicable to do so.

Departmental Property

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what property her Department *(a)* leases and *(b)* owns in (i) Edinburgh and (ii) London. [63121]

Mrs. Liddell: My Department leases its office accommodation in Edinburgh and London.

Public Expenditure

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait) of 14 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 573W, on public expenditure, what assumptions were used to allocate the cited increases to Scottish health spending due to the 2002 budget, relating to *(a)* the percentage of the population used for the application of the Barnett formula, *(b)* the comparability factor used, *(c)* the total additions to English health spending and *(d)* other factors included in the calculation. [63769]

Mrs. Liddell: The rules for calculating the Barnett consequentials for increases in English expenditure are as set out in the Statement of Funding Policy. The latest available population figures were used.

New Deal (Young People)

Mr. Joyce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many young people have *(a)* participated in and *(b)* found jobs as a result of the New Deal in each constituency in Scotland; [61301]

(2) how many young people have received full-time education, training or work experience with the voluntary sector or the Environment Taskforce as a result of the New Deal in each constituency in Scotland. [61302]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I have been asked to reply.

Constituency results for the New Deal for Young People are contained in the Constituency Tables, which are available in the Library.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Cross-border Information Sharing

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 15 May 2002, Ref 55286, on cross-border information sharing on child sex offenders and child abusers, for what reason confidentiality will be maintained for the protocols being developed. [59230]

Jane Kennedy: Confidentiality is maintained because sex offenders and child abusers are often skilled at evading detection. Combating them is the priority and it is considered that to make public procedures, protocols and arrangements would have a detrimental effect on the ability to monitor and manage risk.

Age Discrimination

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies have a policy of not considering applications for employment by persons over a particular age. [59455]

Jane Kennedy: There are no formal age restrictions for recruitment to the Northern Ireland Office. An upper age limit is not set but advertisements for posts in the Northern Ireland Office state that the normal retirement age, under existing pension arrangements, is 60.

Entertainment Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the cost was of the Department's 2001 staff Christmas party; and how many people attended. [61656]

Jane Kennedy: The cost overall of the Northern Ireland Office's 2001 Christmas party was £682.50. The breakdown of this cost is as follows:

	£
Catering	352.50
Band/disco	260.00
Bus hire	70.00

Tickets were sold to staff [illegible] a cost of £8.00. Approximately 120 tickets were pu[illegible]ed. The sale of the tickets covered the overall cost o[illegible]2.50 and the surplus was donated to charity.

Terrorists

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he will make a statement on his proposals to deal with the issue of on-the-run terrorists. [64216]

Jane Kennedy: The Government have committed themselves to taking steps to resolve this issue, which we believe is an important part of drawing a line under the past. We are still considering how best to discharge that commitment. Once that process is complete we will make an announcement.

Police Numbers

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many police officers there were in Northern Ireland on *(a)* 9 September 1999 and *(b)* 31 May 2002. [64089]

Jane Kennedy: The number of police officers in Northern Ireland on 9 September 1999 and 31 May 2002 were as follows:

	Regular	*Full-time Reserve*	*Part-time Reserve*
9 September 1999	8,522	2,767	1,188
31 May 2002	6,947	2,070	994

PRIME MINISTER

Ethnic Minorities

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Prime Minister which Government Departments have a Sikh adviser to advise on matters relating to the Sikh community; and how they are selected. [63611]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 21 June 2002]:* As part of the Government's commitment to diversity, a number of Departments employ diversity and equality advisers. These liaise with various communities on policy, operational and employment matters. Some of these, for example in the Department for Work and Pensions and the Ministry of Defence, focus specifically on issues relevant to the Sikh community. Comprehensive information on the numbers and specific remits of individual advisers is not held centrally.

Selection for all permanent civil service posts is based upon merit.

Channel Islands

Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister what recent representations he has received from elected representatives from the state of Jersey in respect of radioactive risks posed to the Channel Islands. [63854]

The Prime Minister: I have received one representation on this issue, which has been passed to the Lord Chancellor for reply in view of the Lord Chancellor's responsibility for relations with the Crown Dependencies.

Ministerial Meetings

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on his meeting with Prime Minister Aznar on 18 June. [64232]

The Prime Minister: I met the Prime Minister of Spain in London on 18 June as part of the regular EU presidency tour of capital cities before a European Council. It was a very positive discussion covering the main agenda items for the Seville European Council on 21 and 22 June, including: a set of proposals and timetable for asylum and immigration; Council reform matters; the importance of keeping to the proposed enlargement timetable; national government involvement in the Convention on the Future of Europe and how to maintain the Spanish presidency's good progress on European defence issues.

Special Advisers

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 27 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1268W, on special advisers, whether the briefing material contains information relating to *(a)* the previous Conservative Government and *(b)* alternative policies held by opposition parties. [64233]

The Prime Minister: All briefing material is provided in accordance with the Ministerial Code, the Civil Service Code, and the Special Adviser Code of Conduct.

Royal Prerogative

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the occasions in the last 12 months when he has used powers granted by the Royal Prerogative. [63135]

The Prime Minister: Records are not kept of the individual occasions on which powers under the Royal Prerogative are exercised nor could it be practicable to do so.

Kananaskis Summit

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his oral answer to the hon. Member for Watford of 19 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 268, what proposals he will be putting to the forthcoming G8 summit at Kananaskis that would increase access for exports from sub-Saharan Africa to OECD countries; and how much these measures would generate in terms of increased exports from sub-Saharan Africa in each year. [64367]

The Prime Minister: The G8 summit is taking place in Kananaskis tomorrow and Thursday. The UK has put forward proposals for Africa on trade as part of a larger package of commitments on conflict, education, health, development assistance and debt. G8 members are committed to the objective of duty-free and quota-free access for all products originating from Least Developed Countries (LDCs) at the World Trade Organisation Doha Ministerial in November 2001. The UK sees it as imperative to move forward on integrating LDCs into the multilateral trading system and ensure they can harness the benefits of trade for poverty reduction. The forthcoming G8 summit in Kananaskis offers the opportunity to take forward these issues. The European Commission has estimated that developing country gains from a 50 per cent. cut in tariffs by both developed and developing countries would be in the order of $150 billion, around three times current aid flows.

Transatlantic Air Services

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his oral answer of 12 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 860, how many meetings have taken place between the UK and US Governments since 1 February to discuss liberalisation of transatlantic air services; when the meetings took place; when the next meeting is scheduled; who was present at the meeting; and what the outcome was of the discussion. [64322]

The Prime Minister: Further to the answer I gave at Prime Minister's questions I would like to outline the nature of the contacts made regarding this issue. It is right that we are keen to liberalise the US-UK air services agreement, but only on the basis that the terms are right and fair. Contact has continued to take place at official level. Ministerial discussions were conducted last year, and my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Transport discussed it with the American Administration in January. I have asked the Secretary of State for Transport to review all the options and consider the best way forward to restart the discussions formally.

WALES

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much and what proportion of the departmental expenditure limit for 2002–03 had been spent by 31 May; what the figures were for 2001–02; and if he will make a statement. [61004]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I refer the hon. Member to the answer he received from the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 17 June 2002, *Official Report,* column 130W.

Public Service Agreement Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the *(a)* cost and *(b)* saving from the pursuit of the Department's Public Service Agreement targets in each year since they were introduced. [61045]

Mr. Paul Murphy: My Department does not have a Public Service Agreement.

Broadband

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what targets he has set for the roll out of broadband services; and if he will make a statement. [61798]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The Government have set a target for the UK to have the most extensive and competitive broadband market in the G7 by 2005. We have not set any specific targets relating to broadband in Wales as these are a matter for the National Assembly for Wales.

Grants

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which organisations and outside bodies which were in receipt of grant in 1997–98 are no longer; what the annual saving is *(a)* individually and *(b)* in aggregate; which organisations and outside bodies which were not in receipt of grant in 1997–98 now are; and what the annual cost is (i) individually and (ii) in aggregate. [62043]

Mr. Paul Murphy: My Department came into existence in 1999 and makes no grant payments (other than to the National Assembly for Wales). It is a matter for the Assembly whether to continue or discontinue grants made by the former Welsh Office prior to 1 July 1999.

Royal Prerogative

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what decisions have been made by his Department in the last year under authority from the Royal Prerogative. [63140]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) on 23 October 2001, *Official Report,* column 182W.

Delegated Legislation

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Change of Category of Maintained Schools (Wales) Regulations; [63263]

(2) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the BSE Monitoring (Wales) Regulations; [63279]

(3) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Code of Conduct (Qualifying Local government Employees) (Wales) Order; [63295]

(4) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Children (Leaving Care) (Wales) Regulations; [63311]

(5) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Accounts and Audit (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations; [63216]

(6) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Beet Seeds (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations; [63232]

(7) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the National Health Service (Optical Charges and Payments) and (General Ophthalmic Services) (Amendment) (No. 3) (Wales) Regulations; [63241]

(8) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Foot-and-Mouth Disease (Amendment) (Wales) (No. 9) Order; [63249]

(9) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Education (Foundation Body) (Wales) Regulations; [63255]

(10) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Import and Export Restrictions (Foot-and-Mouth Disease) (Wales) (No. 9) Regulations; [63271]

(11) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Decisions Documents and Meetings) (Wales) Regulations; [63287]

(12) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Foot-and-Mouth Disease (Amendment) (Wales) (No. 8) Order; [63303]

(13) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Undersized Whiting (Revocation) (Wales) Order; [63319]

(14) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Welfare of Farmed Animals (Wales) Regulations; [63259]

(15) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Welsh Language Schemes (Public Bodies) Order; [63267]

(16) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Prescribed Waste (Wales) (Revocation) Regulations; [63283]

(17) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Conduct of Members (Principles) (Wales) Order; [63299]

(18) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Relocation Grants (Forms of Application) (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations; [63315]

(19) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Farm Waste Grant (Nitrate Vulnerable Zones) (Wales) Scheme; [63220]

(20) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Vegetable Seeds (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations; [63228]

(21) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the Special Waste (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations; [63235]

(22) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the Agricultural Holdings (Units of Production) (Wales) (No. 3) Order; [63245]

(23) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the Feeding Stuffs and the Feeding Stuffs (Enforcement) (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations; [63238]

(24) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the General Teaching Council for Wales (Additional Functions) (Amendment) Order; [63275]

(25) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the Local Commissioner in Wales (Standards Investigations) Order; [63291]

(26) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the Meat (Enhanced Enforcement Powers) (Wales) Regulations; [63307]

(27) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the Standards Committee (Grant of Dispensation) (Wales) Regulations; [63296]

(28) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the Import and Export Restrictions (Foot-and-Mouth Disease) (Wales) (No 9) (Amendment) Regulations; [63265]

(29) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the Valuation for Rating (Plant and Machinery) (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations; [63281]

(30) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the Code of Conduct (Non-Qualifying Local government Employees) (Wales) Order; [63297]

(31) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the National Health Service (General Dental Services) (Amendment) (Wales) Order; [63313]

(32) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the Parent Governor Representatives and Church Representatives (Wales) Regulations; [63218]

(33) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the Abolition of the Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce (Consequential Provisions) (Wales) Regulations; [63226]

(34) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the Specified Risk Material (Amendment) (Wales) (No. 2) Regulations; [63234]

(35) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the Import and Export Restrictions (Foot-and-Mouth Disease) (Wales) (No. 9) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations; [63243]

(36) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations; [63251]

(37) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the National Health Service (General Dental Services) (Amendment) (No 2) (Wales); [63257]

(38) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the Plant Health (Amendment) (Wales) Order; [63273]

(39) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the Adjudications by Case Tribunals and Interim Case Tribunals (Wales) Regulations; [63289]

(40) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the Central Rating List (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations; [63305]

(41) what discussions he has had with the Foot-and-Mouth Disease (Ascertainment of Value) (Wales) (No. 5) Order; [63253]

(42) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Education (Assisted Places) (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations; [63261]

(43) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Teacher Training Incentive (Further Education) (Wales) Regulations; [63269]

(44) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Local Authorities (Referendums) (Petitions and Directions) (Wales) Regulations; [63285]

(45) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Education (School Government) (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations; [63301]

(46) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Housing Grants (Additional Purposes) (Wales) Regulations; [63317]

(47) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Mandatory Travel Concessions (Reimbursement Arrangements) (Wales) Regulations; [63222]

(48) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Fodder Plant Seeds (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations; [63230]

(49) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Import and Export Restrictions (Foot-and-Mouth Disease) (Wales) (No. 10) (Fees) Regulations; [63237]

(50) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Agricultural Holding (Units of Production) (Wales) Order; [63247]

(51) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Agricultural Processing and Marketing Grant (Wales) Regulations; [63277]

(52) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Standards Committees (Wales) Regulations; [63293]

(53) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Common Agricultural Policy (Wine) (Wales) Regulations; [63309]

(54) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Transport of Animals (Cleansing and Disinfection) (Wales) Order; [63264]

(55) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the National Health Service (Charges for Drugs and Appliances) (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations; [63280]

(56) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Carers (Services) and Direct Payments (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations; [63312]

(57) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Local Authorities (Approved Investments) (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations; [63217]

(58) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Import and Export Restrictions (Foot-and-Mouth Disease) (Wales) (No. 12) Regulations; [63225]

(59) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Import and Export Restrictions (Foot-and-Mouth Disease) (Wales) (No. 11) Regulations; [63233]

(60) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the National Health Service (Travelling Expenses and Remission of Charges) (Amendment) (No. 2) (Wales) Regulations; [63242]

(61) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Children's Commissioner for Wales Regulations; [63250]

(62) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Education (Assisted Places) (Incidental Expenses) (Amendment) (Wales) Order; [63256]

(63) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Inspection of Education and Training (Wales) Regulations; [63272]

(64) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Conduct of Members (Model Code of Conduct) (Wales) Order; [63288]

(65) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Import and Export Restrictions (Foot-and-Mouth Disease) (Wales) (No. 8) Regulations; [63304]

(66) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Street Work (Inspection Fees) (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations; [63260]

(67) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Agricultural Subsidies (Appeals) (Wales) Regulations; [63268]

(68) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Local Authorities (Proposals for Alternative Arrangements (Wales) Regulations; [63284]

(69) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Commission for Local Administration in Wales and Local Commissioner in Wales (Functions and Expenses) Regulations; [63300]

(70) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Housing Renewal Grants (Prescribed Form and Particulars) (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations; [63316]

(71) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Education (Schools and Further and Higher Education) (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations; [63221]

(72) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Seed Potatoes (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations; [63229]

(73) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Potatoes Originating in Germany Notification (Wales) Order; [63236]

(74) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Agricultural Holdings (Units of Production) (Wales) (No. 2) Order; [63246]

(75) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Processed Animal Protein (Wales) Regulations; [63252]

(76) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the General Teaching Council for Wales (Functions) (Amendment) Regulations; [63276]

(77) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Local Authorities (Alternative Arrangements) (Wales) Regulations; [63292]

(78) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Contaminated Land (Wales) Regulations; [63308]

(79) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Foot-and-Mouth Disease (Marking of Meat, Meat Products, Minced Meat and Meat Preparations) (Wales) (No. 2) Regulations; [63266]

(80) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost effectiveness of the Potatoes Originating in Egypt (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations; [63282]

(81) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Local Authorities (Proposals for Executive Arrangements (Wales) Order; [63298]

(82) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Housing Renewal Grants (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations; [63314]

(83) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Learning and Skills Act 2000 (Consequential Amendments) (Schools) (Wales) Regulations; [63219]

(84) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Oil and Fibre Plant Seeds (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations; [63227]

(85) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Plant Health (Amendment) (Wales) (No. 2) Order; [63215]

(86) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Foot-and-Mouth Disease (Amendment) (Wales) (No. 11) Order; [63244]

(87) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Import and Export Restrictions (Foot-and-Mouth Disease) (Wales) (No. 10) Regulations; [63239]

(88) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Air Quality Limit Values (Wales) Regulations; [63258]

(89) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Education (School Day and School Year (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations; [63274]

(90) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Discharge of Functions) (Wales) Regulations; [63290]

(91) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Gelatine (Intra-Community Trade) (Wales) Regulations; [63306]

(92) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Foot-and-Mouth Disease (Amendment) (Wales) (No. 10) Order; [63248]

(93) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Specified Risk Material (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations; [63254]

(94) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Sweeteners in Food (Amendments) (Wales) Regulations; [63262]

(95) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Seeds (Fees) (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations; [63270]

(96) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Local Authorities Executive Arrangements (Functions and Responsibilities) (Wales) Regulations; [63286]

(97) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Feeding Stuffs (Sampling and Analysis) (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations; [63302]

(98) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Education (Publication of Draft Proposals and Orders (Further Education Corporations) (Wales) Regulations; [63318]

(99) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Smoke Control Areas (Authorised Fuels) (Wales) Regulations; [63223]

(100) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Cereal Seeds (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations; [63231]

(101) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Children's (Protection from Offenders) (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations; [63240]

(102) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Foot-and-Mouth Disease (Prohibition of Vaccination) (Wales) Regulations; [63278]

(103) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Local Government Investigations (Functions of Monitoring Officers and Standards Committees) (Wales) Regulations; [63294]

(104) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Disabled Children (Direct Payments) (Wales) Regulations; [63310]

(105) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Countryside Access (Draft Maps) (Wales) Regulations; [63561]

(106) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Education (External Qualifications) (Description of Tests) (Wales) Regulations; [63569]

(107) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the BSE Monitoring (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations; [63553]

(108) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Housing Renewal Grants (Prescribed Forms and Particulars) (Amendment No. 2) (Wales) Regulations; [63557]

(109) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations; [63565]

(110) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Farm Enterprise Grant and Farm Improvement Grant (Wales) Regulations; [63573]

(111) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Environmental Protection (Restriction on Use of Lead Shot) (Wales) Regulations; [63559]

(112) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Smoke Control Areas (Authorised Fuels) (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations; [63563]

(113) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) (Charges) (Amendment) (No. 2) (Wales) Regulations; [63571]

(114) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Foot and Mouth Disease (Amendment) (Wales) (No. 13) Order; [63555]

(115) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Colours in Food (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations; [63567]

(116) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the National Health Service (General Dental Services) (Amendment) (No. 3) (Wales) Regulations; [63562]

(117) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Import and Export Restrictions (Foot and Mouth Disease) (Wales) (No. 13) Regulations; [63570]

(118) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Import and Export Restrictions (Foot-and-Mouth Disease) (Wales) (No. 14) Regulations; [63554]

(119) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Housing Renewal Grants (Amendment No. 2) (Wales) Regulations; [63558]

(120) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Non-domestic Rating Contributions (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations; [63566]

(121) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Travel Concessions (Extension of Entitlement) (Wales) Order; [63574]

(122) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Relocation Grants (Forms of Application) (Amendment No. 2) (Wales) Regulations; [63556]

(123) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Countryside Access (Local Access Forums) (Wales) Regulations; [63560]

(124) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Preserved Rights (Transfer of Responsibilities to Local Authorities) (Wales) Regulations; [63564]

(125) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the South Wales Sea Fisheries Committee (Levies) Regulations; [63572]

(126) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the cost-effectiveness of the Education (Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales) (Conferment of Function) Order; [63568]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 18 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 316.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Royal Prerogative

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the occasions in the last 12 months when he has used powers granted by the Royal Prerogative. [63127]

The Deputy Prime Minister: Records are not kept of the individual occasions on which powers under the Royal Prerogative are exercised nor could it be practicable to do so.

Elected Mayors

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on his policy on elected mayors. [64227]

Mr. Raynsford: Our policy on directly-elected mayors is set out in the 2001 Local Government White Paper—Strong Local Leadership, Quality Public Services. Where local people think that a directly-elected mayor is right for their area, we think they should have the opportunity to vote for one. Councils have conducted extensive consultations with local people, who can also require a mayoral referendum by organising a petition signed by 5 per cent. of local electors or more.

The Secretary of State has the power in certain circumstances to direct a council to hold a referendum, including where it appears that the council has failed to have due regard to the outcome of local consultations. I told the House on 7 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 553W, that the Secretary of State did not intend to make any such directions until after we had completed a review of the regulations governing mayoral referendums, following the report "Reinvigorating Democracy? Mayoral Referendums in 2001" which the Electoral Commission published on 1 February 2002.

Since that time we have been putting in place proposals for a comprehensive performance management regime for councils, including independent assessment of their corporate performance. We are giving greater freedoms and flexibilities to all councils, with greater freedoms for high performing authorities.

Within this framework, we believe it will be right for each council to make and justify to local people its own judgments on the outcome of any consultation about proposals for a new constitution. Accordingly, in cases where, in our view, having regard to the outcome of the consultation, the judgment a council has reached does not appear to be justified, our approach will be not to intervene to direct a referendum.

We had informed Birmingham, Bradford and Thurrock councils that the Secretary of State was minded to require them to hold a referendum, on the grounds that the councils failed to have due regard to the outcome of local consultations. These councils judged that the results of their consultation on new executive arrangements did not warrant giving local people the opportunity of a referendum. We took, and continue to take, the view that the consultation results would have justified a referendum.

However, on the basis of the approach I am announcing today, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister does not propose to use his powers in these cases. We believe it is right that we make this clear to the councils today in order to remove uncertainty for them.

Flooding

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on his Department's role in preparing for floods; and how it is co-ordinated with DEFRA's responsibility for flood management. [63708]

Mr. McNulty: The Department's principal role in preparing for floods is through the co-ordination activities of the Severe Weather Sub-Group of the Central Local Partnership, which is chaired by Ministers from this Department. There is also regular contact between both Ministers and officials from this Department and the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

In addition, the former Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions published in February 2002 guidance to owners of homes and small businesses and people undertaking building work as well as planning authorities on "Preparing for floods". This complements the advice given on the consideration of flooding in the planning system (Planning Policy Guidance Note 25 "Development and flood risk"), published by the then DTLR in July 2001 and on measures of flood protection ("Damage limitation") and recovery from flooding ("After a flood") published by the Environment Agency in September 2001.

Mobile Home Parks

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he will bring forward legislation to protect the rights of park home residents. [63836]

Mr. McNulty: We are currently considering the options for changes to the law that would implement the undertakings given by the Government in its response to the Park Homes Working Party report.

Wales

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the *(a)* date, *(b)* location and *(c)* purpose was of visits by Ministers in his Department to Wales since 1997; and when he next intends to visit Wales. [62081]

Mr. Raynsford: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister was formed on 29 May 2002.

Since 1999 the Government have published an annual list of all visits undertaken by Cabinet Ministers costing £500 or more during each financial year. This Government have also published on an annual basis the cost of all Ministers' visits overseas. Information in respect of UK travel is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

All travel is undertaken fully in accordance with the guidelines set out in the Ministerial Code and Travel by Ministers, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

Computers

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many computers were replaced in his Department in each of the past three years; how the replaced units were disposed of and by which companies; and at what cost. [60746]

Mr. Leslie: The information requested is not held centrally, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Planning

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on his policy regarding planning gain. [64224]

Mr. McNulty: The Government published a consultation paper "Reforming Planning Obligations: delivering a fundamental change" in December 2001. This was a strategic level consultation and proposed the introduction of a tariff-based approach to planning obligations. We received over 500 responses, the majority of which welcomed our proposals. Ministers are considering policy options and there will be a policy statement in due course.

Ms Shipley: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he expects to publish a policy paper on planning reform. [62790]

Mr. Raynsford: We intend to continue driving forward the reform of the planning system, following the wide-ranging review set out in the Green Paper "Planning—Delivering a Fundamental Change".

The Deputy Prime Minister will issue a policy statement prior to the parliamentary summer recess setting out how we intend to take forward the reform agenda when it is ready.

Housing (North-West)

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what proposals he has to amend regional planning guidance in the north-west to allow local authorities to encourage the allocation of land zoned for industrial use to be used for housing. [63149]

Mr. McNulty: The Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to draft Regional Planning Guidance for the north-west were published on 20 May 2002. Policy UR5. This calls on local authorities to review existing commitments in development plans so that a realistic balance can be found between catering for strategic investments, providing for local indigenous economic growth and in meeting the broader social requirements of urban renaissance. Land that is no longer needed for business purposes could be put to alternate uses such as housing, with possibly a mix of uses considered.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the Government's new target is for the number of houses to be built in the north-west by 2021; and by how much this has changed from previous targets. [63152]

Mr. McNulty: The Secretary of State published proposed changes to draft Regional Planning Guidance for the north-west on 20 May 2002. These changes reduced the annual rate of housing provision form that in draft RPG by 15 per cent. The annualised average rate of housing provision for the region is 12,790 dwellings. The annualised figures apply to the period up to 2006 reflecting the 'plan, monitor and manage' approach set out in PPG3 which moves away from the previous 'predict and provide' approach. The proposed changes give weight to avoiding any premature release of greenfield land which would undermine attempts to promote the use of recycled land and the redevelopment of existing unfit and unpopular housing. Tackling low demand and abandonment lies at the heart of the revised strategy. The Secretary of State, in the consultation, on the proposed changes has requested views on whether the changes are sufficient to prevent the unnecessary release of greenfield land or whether there should be further changes to reflect the recommendations made by the Transport, Local Government and Regions Committee in its report on empty homes that no new planning permissions should be granted for greenfield sites.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how the cost of the planned reduction of new houses in the north-west region will be distributed among local authorities in the north-west; and if brownfield sites will be treated more favourably than greenfield sites. [63383]

Mr. McNulty: The Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to Draft Regional Planning Guidance for the north-west were published on 20 May 2002. The distribution of housing provision in the region is dealt with in Policy UR7. The broad split, set out as annual average rates of provision net of clearance, is as follows:

Manchester/Salford/Liverpool: 2,990

Rest of Greater Manchester, Merseyside plus the Unitary Authorities of Halton and Warrington: 4,310

Cheshire (exc. Halton and Warrington), Cumbria and Lancashire: 5,490.

A more detailed breakdown is available in Table 5.1 of the proposed changes to Regional Planning Guidance for the north-west.

The Government are committed to maximising the re-use of previously developed land and the conversion of existing buildings to promote regeneration and minimise the amount of greenfield land being taken for development. Policy UR4 of the proposed draft Regional Planning Guidance regional brownfield target of at least 70 per cent. has been set. This varies from 90 per cent. in Liverpool/Manchester/Salford to 50 per cent. in Cumbria. Further investment will be needed to meet these challenging targets and the Northwest Development Agency's strategies will need to be integrated with those of local planning and housing authorities to regenerate urban areas with mixed and balanced communities.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister for what reason his Department cut the number of houses to be built in the north-west region to 12,790; what effect he estimates their decision will have on the area; what account was taken of the north-west regional development agency's aim of encouraging more employment in the north-west in making this change; and if he will review his decision after the first year of operation. [63151]

Mr. McNulty: The Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to draft Regional Planning Guidance for the north-west were published on 20 May 2002. A key part of the strategy is to achieve the renaissance of urban areas by encouraging balanced economic growth and regeneration in a sustainable way. The proposed reduction in the annual rate of housing provision, coupled with an increase in the proportion of housing provided on previously used land from 65 per cent. to 70 per cent., are aimed at delivering this, while avoiding the premature release of greenfield land and promoting the use of recycled land, including the redevelopment of existing areas of unfit and unpopular housing; while supporting the Northwest Development Agency's aim of encouraging more employment in the NW region.

The plan monitor, manage approach will enable the annual rates of housing provision to be kept under continuous review, with an expectation that regional planning guidance will be reviewed and rolled forward at least every five years or more frequently if monitoring reveals clear signs of either under or over provision.

Homelessness

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on homelessness among young people in the South West. [63826]

Mr. McNulty: Between 1 January and 31 March 2002, there were 2,790 households in the South West region accepted by local authorities under statutory homelessness provisions, of which 153 were in the priority need category "vulnerable young person".

The Homelessness Act 2002 will place a statutory requirement on local housing authorities to adopt a strategy for preventing homelessness in their district and ensuring that sufficient accommodation, and any necessary support, is available for people who are, or may become homeless. On 14 March 2002, authorities were invited to submit proposals to the Homelessness Directorate in my Department for funding for local homelessness strategies. 21 authorities in the South West region have submitted bids which are being considered currently.

An Order has been laid for approval by Parliament to extend the groups of people who have a priority need for accommodation under the homelessness legislation. This will ensure that vulnerable homeless people leaving institutions, young people including those leaving care, and people fleeing domestic, racial and other forms of violence get the help they need.

In addition to the funding available for homelessness strategies, £8 million per annum has been provided to local authorities (through the local government finance settlement, with effect from 2001–02) to implement the Homelessness Act. A further £10 million will be allocated in 2002–03 to enable authorities to deliver the Priority Need Order.

Housing

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what his policy is on the provision of schemes for guaranteeing *(a)* deposits and *(b)* rent for tenants in private rented accommodation. [63912]

Mr. McNulty: Rent Deposit Guarantee Schemes, which combine Deposit schemes and Rent in Advance/Guarantee Schemes, can be effective in helping homeless households access the private rented sector. The Government fully recognise the valuable and vital service which Rent Deposit Guarantee Schemes can play in tackling homelessness. This is recognised in our recent report, "More than a roof". It is for this reason that we currently fund a number of rent deposit schemes aroundthe country, and we would expect local authorities to continue to include such schemes within their homelessness strategies.

Fareham

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what moneys have been provided *(a)* directly and *(b)* via agencies for which the Department has responsibility to the Fareham district since 1997. [63618]

Mr. Raynsford: The available information for Fareham district council is as follows.

Revenue grants provided directly by ODPM[1]

£000

	1997–98[2]	*1998–99*[2]	*1999–2000*[2]	*2000–01*[2]	*2001–02*[3]	*2002–03*[3]
Revenue support grant	961	708	432	98	300	0
Redistributed non-domestic rates	3,254	3,328	3,606	4,006	3,962	4,466
Specific and special grants outside AEF						
Single regeneration budget (SRB)	20	20	18	17	0	0
Housing acts urban developments grants to debt changes	0	0	16	0	16	16
House renovation grants capital financing specified capital grants (SCG)	0	0	0	0	168	0
Total revenue grants	4,235	4,056	4,072	4,121	4,446	4,482

[1] Revenue figures are from ODPM. OPDM previously within DETR/DTLR

[2] Outturn figures

[3] Budget figures

Housing grants provided directly by ODPM[1,4]

£000

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Housing revenue account subsidy[2]	2,205	1,915	1,724	4,006	2,717	2,608
Disabled facilities grant	90	90	157	162	168	180
Private sector renewal grant[3]	78	60	87	0	0	0
Starter homes initiative	0	0	0	0	0	450
Homelessness	0	0	0	0	9	0
Total	2,373	2,065	1,968	1,661	2,894	3,238

[1] The table excludes credit approvals (including those arising from the capital receipts initiative and the cash incentive scheme) as these represent permission to borrow. The financing of debt interest arising from this borrowing is already included in revenue support grant and HRA subsidy.

[2] Increases in 2001–02 and 2002–03 due to introduction of major repairs allowance.

[3] Up until 1 April 2000, Government met 60 per cent. of private sector renewal up to annual allocation limit. Since 1 April 2000, provision made within single capital pot.

[4] Figures relating to expenditure by Housing Corporation unavailable.

Local Government (Internet Access)

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many *(a)* district, *(b)* borough, *(c)* city, *(d)* county, *(e)* town and *(f)* parish councils do not have access to the internet and world wide web. [63927]

Mr. Raynsford: All district, borough, city and county councils have access to the internet and the world wide web. We do not collect information on internet access relating to town and parish councils.

Supporting People Programme

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to ensure that the *(a)* level and *(b)* distribution of the Supporting People special grant will ensure that London local authorities receive sufficient resources to meet their identified needs. [63959]

Mr. McNulty: Baseline allocations for 2003–04 will be based on current spend in 2002–03, plus an allowance for inflation. ODPM is providing guidance to assist local authorities in identifying current spend. Allocations for 2004–05 should be derived from the final report of the Supporting People Allocation Formula project, which is due by March 2003. The report will summarise the main features of the funding model, how it has been derived, target allocations and pace of change issues.

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on his assessment of the progress of London local authorities with the Supporting People programme in readiness for the launch of that programme. [63958]

Mr. McNulty: Progress of all authorities is monitored regularly by the Implementation team of the Supporting People Programme. Nationally there has been significant progress made, particularly in London, over the last year. A significant number of tasks remain to be delivered by April 2003, however, and close monitoring and support will continue.

ILD 2000

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to continue to provide transitional protection to local authorities in England affected by the introduction of the ILD 2000; and if he will continue to provide such relief until findings of the review of the method of determining that index are implemented. [63960]

Mr. McNulty: No decisions on the future on transitional protection have been made as yet. We will consider the implications of the work to explore developing and updating the Indices of Deprivation 2000 on transitional protection during the course of that project.

Concessionary Zones

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what funding was *(a)* provided for concessionary zones in the control total for Environmental, Protective and Cultural Services SSA and *(b)* received for concessionary zones for the EPCS SSA by each local authority in 2001–02. [63962]

Mr. Raynsford: An additional £54 million was provided for concessionary fares in 2001–02, including £8 million already announced in the Spending Review 2000. This funding was distributed using the District Services formula within EPCS. Funding for separate services within the block is not identified.

Leicester Mayor

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on proposals for an elected mayor for Leicester. [64225]

Mr. Raynsford: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Dr. Whitehead) on 1 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 795W. Further to that answer, having carefully considered the circumstances of Leicester, we decided that it would not be appropriate to direct a mayoral referendum and we understand the Council have now begun operating their new constitution, involving a leader and Cabinet.

Millennium Dome

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what estimate he has made of the commercial value of the site of the Millennium Dome if it were vacant. [63834]

Mr. McNulty: Independent advice from Jones Lang Lasalle satisfied us that demolishing the Dome would produce a lower return for the Government than retaining it and developing the site through the agreement with Meridian Delta Limited. Precise valuations are commercially confidential.

Draft Local Government Bill

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what consultation was undertaken on making the Draft Local Government Bill a web-based publication only. [63926]

Mr. Raynsford: No specific consultation took place. The decision to make this document a largely web-based publication is consistent with our e-government objectives. However, paper copies remain available on request for those that want them.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he will publish a consultation document on his proposals for a new system for the distribution of funding to local authorities. [62344]

Mr. Raynsford: As I announced to Parliament on 11 June, we intend to publish a consultation document containing our proposals for a new system for the distribution of general revenue funding to local authorities by mid-July.

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many reports have been made to his Department through the Government office of the north-east by the North East Assembly accounting for expenditure of money provided under the Strengthening Regional Accountability Initiative; and if he will publish them. [62549]

Mr. Raynsford: The Government office has arrangements in place which require the North East Assembly to submit quarterly reports accounting for expenditure of money provided under the regional chambers fund. The quarterly reports are followed by a meeting between the North East Assembly and the Government office for the north-east, to discuss the reports in more detail.

The North East Assembly has submitted one report, accounting for expenditure for the final quarter of 2001-02. This report was assessed and approved in line with guidance issued by the then Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions.

The report has not been published. The North East Assembly is a voluntary body and it is for them to decide whether to make their accounts available to the public.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Departmental Staff (Scotland)

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many and what percentage of *(a)* civil service, *(b)* executive agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public body jobs under the remit of her Department are located in Scotland; and how many of each have been relocated to Scotland since May 1997. [56316]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: There are approximately 590 jobs under the remit of my Department located in Scotland. They are all at the Student Loans Company, a non-departmental public body (NDPB) based in Glasgow since it was set up in 1990. This represents approximately 8 per cent. of NDPB jobs under the remit of my Department.

Graduates

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the lowest decile average annual earnings are of an employed graduate in each 10-year cohort over 25 years. [52917]

Margaret Hodge: The following table shows gross weekly earnings at the lowest earnings decile of individuals, in each age group, who hold a first degree or higher qualification and are in full-time employment. The figures are estimated from the Labour Force Survey (LFS).

Estimated gross weekly earnings at the lowest earnings decile, within each age group, for individuals who hold a first degree or higher qualification and are in full-time employment

Age group	*Gross weekly earnings at lowest earnings decile (£)*
25–34	270
35–44	340
45–54	310
55–64[1]	320
All aged 25–64[1]	300

[1] Includes women aged 60–64 who are in employment.

Source:

Labour Force Survey, spring 2001, GB figures.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the upper decile average annual earnings are of an employed non-graduate in each 10-year age cohort over 25 years. [52918]

Margaret Hodge: The following table shows gross weekly earnings at the highest earnings decile of individuals in each age group, for:

(a) all non-graduates qualified up to Level 3 or below; and

(b) non-graduates whose highest qualification is at Level 3.

The figures are for individuals who are in full-time employment, and are estimated from the Labour Force Survey (LFS).

Estimated gross weekly earnings at the highest earnings decile of full-time employees in each age band, for (a) non-graduates and (b) those who hold a Level 3 qualification

£

Age group	*All non-graduates*	*Non-graduates who hold a Level 3 qualification*
25–34	570	640
35–44	670	810
45–54	620	730
55–64[1]	570	730
All aged 25–64[1]	620	730

[1] Includes women aged 60–64 who are in employment.

Source:

Labour Force Survey, spring 2001, GB figures.

Average Weekly Earnings

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average weekly earnings were in the last year for which figures are available, of each decile of those whose highest educational qualification is *(a)* a higher degree, *(b)* a first degree, *(c)* A Level or equivalent, *(d)* GCSE/O Level or equivalent, *(e)* GCSE below grade C and *(f)* no qualification. [59115]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* The information requested is contained in the table.

Percentile gross weekly earnings (not seasonally adjusted) by level of highest qualification, 2001—England, full-time employees aged 16 to 59–64

£

	All full-time employees	*Level 5 (higher degree or equivalent)*	*Level 4 (first degree or equivalent)*	*Level 3 (2+ A—levels or equivalent)*	*Trade apprenticeships*	*Level 2 (5+ GCSEs at grades A*-C or equivalent)*	*Below level 2 (GCSE below grade C or equivalent)*	*Other qualification*	*No qualification*
Min (first percentile)	96	208	157	99	112	80	73	90	53
10th percentile	190	326	259	191	218	162	173	176	150
20th percentile	231	404	323	231	253	205	202	216	180
30th percentile	273	469	379	263	286	231	231	248	202
40th percentile	309	518	423	300	311	269	262	278	228
Median	350	572	480	341	345	299	293	313	250
60th percentile	404	621	531	384	396	337	329	349	283
70th percentile	470	691	600	433	448	384	369	399	308
80th percentile	558	854	702	507	507	448	428	473	350
90th percentile	715	1,110	900	643	613	577	525	614	450
Max (last percentile)	1,493	1,910	1,856	1,299	957	1,167	980	1,069	802

Notes:

1. Earnings data are based on information from about two fifths of all respondents.
2. Respondents whose hourly pay is £100 or more are excluded from the sample.
3. Gross weekly and hourly earnings data are known to be underestimated in the LFS, principally because of proxy responses.

Source:

Labour Force Survey (LFS), autumn (September 2001 to November 2001)

European Agency Workers Directive

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the effect of the European Agency Workers Directive on schools. [59364]

Mr. Miliband: An initial regulatory impact assessment of the proposed directive on agency workers prepared by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has been placed in the Library of both Houses.

The Commission's proposal would, as it stands, require that agency workers in schools did not receive less favourable basic working and employment conditions than comparable permanent workers. The proposal contains limited derogations from this requirement, which may be applicable in some cases. The proposal is subject to the co-decision procedure and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry remains in dialogue with other member countries and the Commission.

Refurbishment

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the refurbishment projects that *(a)* are in progress and *(b)* will start within the next six months; and what action is being taken to ensure that these will procure certified timber. [59767]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: My Department has no refurbishment projects in progress and no future plans that will call for the use of timber.

Further Education

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the *(a)* capital costs and *(b)* additional revenue cost involved in the creation of new dedicated 16 to 19 provision in (i) Hackney, (ii) Islington and (iii) Lambeth. [60042]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 11 June 2002]:* The information requested is estimated as follows:

£

Project	*Capital funding committed by LSC*	*Revenue funding committed by LSC*
Hackney	7,720,000	3,203,750
Islington	5,590,000	100,000
Lambeth	0	30,491

These figures relate to the Learning and Skills Council commitment at the time of reply to the new provision proposed after area inspections in the three boroughs.

Individual Learning Accounts

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many representations she has received in each month since August 2001 about *(a)* non-payments or delayed payments to ILA providers, and *(b)* imminent bankruptcy, liquidation or administration of ILA providers. [60230]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* The information requested, covering the period 1 August 2001 to 31 May 2002, is set out in the table. The table shows contact with providers by telephone, and through letter and email. Several of the telephone contacts may relate to one provider. While all correspondence is logged not all telephone calls have been recorded. This was particularly the case just prior to the closure and in the immediate aftermath when the level of incoming calls to the Department was very high. In addition, covering the same period, some 70,000 calls have been logged by the ILA centre in Darlington. These calls are not categorised and therefore are not included.

	Telephone representations		*Written representations*	
Month	*Payment query*	*Potential receivership*	*Payment query*	*Potential receivership*
2001				
August	—	—	3	—
September	—	—	—	—
October	14	—	1	6
November	33	—	9	3
December	42	1	29	4
2002				
January	29	1	16	—
February	16	1	12	1
March	40	8	15	1
April	45	8	15	1
May	19	5	23	2

Higher Education Students

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answers of 18 March 2002, *Official Report*, columns 113–14W, on higher education, if she will provide a further breakdown of the participation in higher education for each year group of those aged between 18 and 30, showing the percentage attending *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time and (i) degree and (ii) sub-degree courses of higher education. [60453]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* The individual year of age entry rates for 2000–01 broken down by mode of study are shown in the table.

Percentage

Age[1]	*Full-time entry rate*[2]	*Part-time entry rate*[2]	*Overall initial entry rate*[2]
18[3]	19.9	0.5	20.5
19	9.5	0.5	10.0
20	2.2	0.5	2.7
21	1.1	0.4	1.5
22	0.7	0.4	1.1
23	0.5	0.4	0.9
24	0.4	0.4	0.7
25	0.3	0.3	0.7
26	0.3	0.4	0.6
27	0.3	0.4	0.6
28	0.2	0.3	0.6
29	0.2	0.3	0.6
30	0.2	0.3	0.5
Total[4]	36.0	5.0	41.0

[1] Age as at 31 August 2000.

[2] HE entrants in 2000–01 as a percentage of separate age population; excludes entrants with previous HE experience and excludes courses of less than one year duration. The overall IER is the sum of the unrounded full-time and part-time initial entry rates, calculated using student records collected by HESA and LSC, and ONS population estimates. Note: as a result of the 2001 Census, the ONS are intending to release revised population estimates by early 2003. This could result in some changes to the figures shown in this table.

[3] Includes a small number of entrants aged 17.

[4] The individual rates are rounded to the nearest 0.1 per cent. and so do not sum exactly to the totals which are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Breakdowns of the initial entry rate by level of undergraduate course are not available. For the purposes of the IER calculation no distinction is made between initial entrants to first degree or other undergraduate courses of at least one year duration.

Performance Targets

Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the performance targets that her Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies are required to meet, apart from those set out in the public service agreements for 1999 to 2002 and 2001 to 2004; and if she will specify for each target *(a)* who sets it and *(b)* who monitors achievement against it. [60468]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The Department has a wide range of targets to deliver its agenda. High level targets are set out in "Delivering Results, A Strategy to 2006", available via the DfES website, www.dfes.gov.uk. These are cascaded through non-departmental public bodies, local education authorities and schools and reflected in their plans. Progress against targets is monitored by the Department, the Office for Standards in Education, the Adult Learning Inspectorate, and by non-departmental public bodies and local partners involved in the delivery of the education, training and skills agenda. The Department publishes information on performance against key targets in its departmental report, which is available from the House of Commons Library, and via the Department's website, www.dfes.gov.uk.

Computers

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what measures are *(a)* in place and *(b)* under discussion in her Department in order to ensure compliance with the WEE Directive. [60739]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Minister for Energy at the Department for Trade and Industry, on 12 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 1266W.

Entertainment Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the cost was of the Department's 2001 staff Christmas party; and how many people attended. [61652]

Estelle Morris: My Department held no centrally organised Christmas parties for staff in 2001. Some individual divisions or teams will have organised their own events, but these would have been funded by contributions from the staff themselves.

Members of Parliament (Personal Data)

Mr. Forth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what information is held by her Department on each hon. Member in relation to *(a)* personal relationships, both current and past, *(b)* financial status and dealings, *(c)* connections with companies and interest groups, *(d)* connections with Governments and *(e)* published works; and what was held in January 2002. [61834]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Ministers and officials in the Department for Education and Skills have access to published reference sources, as well as to the information about hon. Members made publicly available by the House authorities, for the purpose of parliamentary business.

Tuition Fees

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the levels of tuition fees are for overseas students attending universities in England and Wales in each year since 1996; and what concessions applied to students from *(a)* low income and *(b)* heavily indebted poor countries. [62027]

Margaret Hodge: The requested information is not held centrally. Universities are responsible for setting their own level of tuition fees for overseas students. Overseas fees are generally around £6,000 to £8,000 per year for an undergraduate course but can range from £4,000 to £17,000 per year depending on the institution, the level and the type of course. The UK Government and other UK organisations provide a number of scholarships and awards to help international students study in the UK. For example, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is providing up to 1,000 extra postgraduate and research places through the Chevening scholarship scheme. Universities also have flexibility in dealing with individual students' circumstances and waive or reduce fees where they consider appropriate: a number of universities are currently waiving overseas fees for students from Zimbabwe.

Wales

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the *(a)* date, *(b)* location and *(c)* purpose was of visits by Ministers in her Department to Wales since 1997; and when she next intends to visit Wales. [62070]

Mr. Stephen Twigg *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* From the information available to me, which does not date back to 1997, the following visits to Wales have been undertaken by Ministers in this Department and its predecessor the Department for Education and Employment. In all cases travel for these visits was undertaken fully in accordance with the guidelines set out in the Ministerial Code and Travel by Ministers, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

Minister	*Date*	*Location*	*Purpose*
Secretary of State for Education and Employment	27 April 2000	Llandudno	National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers conference
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Learning and Technology	7 March 2001	Cardiff	Part of a series of events for young people to discuss citizenship issues
Secretary of State for Education and Employment	23 March 2001	Abergavenny and Newport	School visit, and to address the Secondary Heads Association conference
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Young People and Learning	15 October 2001	Ewloe	Association of Youth and Community Workers conference
Secretary of State for Education and Skills	27 March 2002	Cardiff	Association of Teachers and Lecturers conference

No further visits are planned at present.

Sixth-form Provision

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what impact this year's funding proposals will have on the budgets of *(a)* community colleges, *(b)* sixth-form colleges and *(c)* sixth-form schools. [62253]

Margaret Hodge: Total funding for further education in 2002–03 allocated to the Learning and Skills Council is £4.25 billion. This is a £313 million, or 5 per cent., increase over expenditure in 2001–02. The allocations by the Department cover FE sector colleges and do not differentiate between sixth-form colleges and general FE colleges.

The LSC has a budget of £1.35 billion for the funding of LEAs for post-16 education in schools in 2002–03. Comparable figures for LEA spending in 2001–02 are not available. Every school has a Real Terms Guarantee figure based on spending in the baseline year, 2000–01. The overall budget for every school with a sixth form must contain an element which is at least equal to that amount. The 2002–03 LSC funding allocation for two thirds of school sixth forms is higher under the LSC formula than under the Real Terms Guarantee.

Community Colleges

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what action the Government are taking to improve the level of retention of academic staff in community colleges. [62254]

Margaret Hodge: Over £310 million is available to the further education sector over the period 2001–04 for the teaching pay initiative, specifically to recruit, retain and reward high quality teachers and lecturers. This is separate to any general pay increase a teacher or lecturer may receive. We have also introduced training bursaries, and from this autumn we will be introducing golden hellos and (subject to the approval of Parliament) the repayment of teacher loans. All are recruitment and retention initiatives which offer significant financial rewards both to students training to be teachers and lecturers, as well as to those taking up teaching posts in FE shortage subject areas.

Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the universities, founded before 1992, that will receive a developmental visit from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. [62457]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 18 June 2002]:* The relevant institutions are: the universities of Oxford, Durham, Newcastle Upon Tyne, London, Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds, Sheffield, Birmingham, Nottingham, Reading, Southampton, Hull, Exeter, Leicester, Keele, Sussex, York, East Anglia, Essex, Kent at Canterbury, Lancaster, Warwick, Aston, Bath, Bradford, Brunel, City, Loughborough, Salford, Surrey.

This represents all pre-1992 universities other than Bristol and Cambridge. These two universities will be subject to full institutional review in 2002–03.

Under the new quality assurance arrangements to be introduced by the QAA later in 2002, all institutions will be subject to full institutional review. If they are not scheduled for institutional review in 2002–03, they must undergo at least one development visit from the QAA.

Learning and Skills Councils

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the role and responsibilities of Learning and Skills councils in regard to funding private training providers which provide courses accredited by official examination boards. [62678]

Margaret Hodge: The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) is able to fund training providers who were not previously eligible for Further Education Funding Council funding and who offer courses accredited by examination boards. It has produced a manual 'Initial Assessment of New Provision' which gives guidance on how it will assess and approve any new providers.

Once a provider has been judged to be a suitable supplier of post-16 learning provision, it is eligible for LSC funds. However private training providers do not have an automatic right to direct funding by the LSC. Local LSCs, as part of their planning work, will carry out a strategic assessment of the adequacy and quality of local provision to determine areas that need to be strengthened or where there are gaps in provision. It is a matter for the local councils to arrange for the delivery of such provision from appropriate existing or new providers.

Local councils also monitor the results of inspections of private training providers. It is crucial that the highest standards are achieved and maintained and, where this is not so, the councils will take tough action to improve or replace the provision.

Performance Tables

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to develop value-added methodologies; and when she expects to publish value-added information in school performance tables. [62778]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The methodology to be used for the value added measures was discussed in the consultation document, Publication of School and College Performance Tables in 2002, issued in March, copies of which have been placed in the Library. Final decisions based on that consultation will be announced in July.

This year, we intend to publish value added measures in the secondary school performance tables of progress made from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 and from Key Stage 3 to GCSE/GNVQ for all secondary schools. We are also conducting a pilot programme for measures of progress made from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2 for primary schools, with full publication planned for 2003. We aim to pilot a measure of value added between Key Stage 2 and GCSE/GNVQ in 2003, and between GCSE/GNVQ and A/AS-level in 2004, prior to full publication the following year.

Infant Classes

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average teacher to pupil ratio was in each year since 1997 in infant classes. [62854]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 24 June 2002]:* The information requested is not available centrally.

Information for primary schools is shown in the table:

Pupil teacher ratio in primary schools[1] 1997–2002[2]
Position in January each year

	Pupil:teacher ratio
1997	23.4
1998	23.7
1999	23.5
2000	23.3
2001	22.9
2002[2]	22.5

[1] The pupil:teacher ratio within schools is the ratio of the full-time equivalent number of pupils (counting each part-time pupil as 0.5) to the full-time equivalent number of teachers.

[2] Provisional.

Special Educational Needs

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many children have been statemented in Buckinghamshire and (b) the Chesham and Amersham constituency in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available. [62856]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 24 June 2002]:* The information requested is shown in the table:

Pupils with a statement of special educational needs in Buckinghamshire local education authority and Chesham and Amersham constituency[1] 1993–2002[2]
Position in January each year

	Buckinghamshire[3]	*Buckinghamshire[4]*	*Milton Keynes[4]*	*Chesham and Amersham constituency*
1993	3,287	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—
1994	3,506	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—
1995	3,234	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—
1996	3,615	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—
1997	3,737	[5]—	[5]—	549
1998	[5]—	2,409	1,369	559
1999	[5]—	2,347	1,402	549
2000	[5]—	2,340	1,332	592
2001	[5]—	2,338	1,198	590
2002	[5]—	2,235	979	[6]—

[1] Includes maintained primary and secondary schools and maintained and non-maintained special schools.

[2] Provisiona

[3] Before local government re-organisation.

[4] After local government re-organisation.

[5] Not applicable.

[6] Not available.

Source:

Annual Schools' Census.

Departmental Contracts

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the contracts awarded by her Department since January 2000 for *(a)* the Fast Track Teaching Programme, *(b)* the Teachers' International Professional Development Scheme and *(c)* leasing laptop computers to teachers, stating in each case (i) the name of the successful contractor and (ii) whether the contracts were subject to open tender. [62957]

Mr. Miliband: Contracts have been let for:

the development and delivery of the Fast Track Teaching Programme to Interactive Skills, for the assessment and selection of applicants and the staging of three professional development events; and to the Centre for British Teaching, for the provision of on-going professional development and job-finding services. Contracts were subject to open tender;

the delivery of the Teachers' International Professional Development (TIPD) programme to the bodies listed below. The first three of these contracts were awarded to the organisations which had completed the relevant pilot work. The other four were subject to competitive tender to a number of selected providers:

1. British Council for the provision of short-term visits and exchanges
2. Technology Colleges Trust for the provision of short-term visits
3. League for the Exchange of Commonwealth Teachers for the provision of short-term visits
4. British Council for the provision of visits on the school determined element
5. National Foundation for Education Research for the evaluation of the TIPD programme
6. Technology Colleges Trust for the provision of short-term visits
7. League for the Exchange of Commonwealth Teachers for the provision of short-term visits;

the purchase of laptops under the Laptops for Teachers scheme to the suppliers listed below. Contracts were subject to open tender:

Acer UK Ltd.

Apple

Canon UK Ltd.

Compaq Computer Ltd.

Compusys

Computacenter

DELL Computer Corporation Ltd.

Egton Consulting and Technical

Ergo Computing UK Ltd.

European Electronique

Hi-Grade Computers plc

IBM UK Ltd.

Links Education Limited

Merseygrid

NEC Computers International

Novatech Direct Ltd.

PC World Business

Ramseys

RM plc

Teksys Ltd.

Tulip Computers

Viglen Ltd.

Watford Electronics

XMA Ltd.

Unpaid Advisers

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 23 May, *Official Report*, column 468W, on unpaid advisers, if she will list the steps that were taken to ensure no conflicts of interest arose as a result of this appointment. [62970]

Estelle Morris: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 19 June, 2002, *Official Report*, column 332W.

Children in Care

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many and what percentage of pupils living in *(a)* a residential care home and *(b)* with foster parents took (i) authorised and (ii) unauthorised absence in the last five years for which figures are available broken down by (A) Government Office region and (B) local education authority. [63115]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 19 June 2002]:* This level of detail is not available. Information on the number of pupils missing due to authorised and unauthorised absence is collected at school level and information on individual pupils cannot be identified from this data.

Appointments

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills who is responsible for appointing *(a)* the chair and *(b)* the board of trustees of the (i) British Educational Communications and Technology Agency, (ii) National College of School Leadership, (iii) Teacher Training Agency, (iv) Technology College Trust and (v) Centre for Information on Language Teaching. [63117]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 19 June 2002]:* The information requested is listed below:

(i) (ii) and *(iii)* my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills is responsible for the appointments of the chairs and board members of the British Educational Communications and Technology Agency (BECTA), National College of School Leadership (NCSL) and the Teacher Training Agency (TTA). Appointments to all three bodies are made in accordance with the guidance issued by the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments (OCPA).

(iv) The chair of the Technology Colleges Trust (TCT) is appointed by the Trust's Council of Management (Council). Members of the TCT's Council are appointed in accordance with the Trust's Articles of Association.

(v) The chair and governors of the Centre for information on Language Teaching (CILT) are appointed by the governors. The governors consult and involve a range of other bodies that have an interest in the work of the CILT, to assist in selecting suitable persons to appoint.

Royal Prerogative

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what decisions have been made by her Department in the last year under authority from the Royal Prerogative. [63128]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle on 25 October 2001, Official Report, column 328W.

ME

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what educational assistance is given to pupils with myalgic encephalomyelitis who miss schooling through illness. [63144]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: In November last year, the Department for Education and Skills jointly with the Department of Health published statutory guidance "Access to education for children and young people with Medical needs". The guidance sets out minimum standards of education for all children who are unable to attend school due to their medical needs, including those with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome/Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (CFS/ME).

Local Education Authorities' responsibilities towards pupils who are unable to attend school because of their medical needs should ensure that pupils are not at home without education for more than 15 working days and that children educated at home receive a minimum of five hours home tuition a week. The nature of the provision must be responsive to the demands of what can be a changing medical condition.

The Chief Medical Officer's report on Children and Young People with ME was published by the Department of Health in January this year, taking into account the recommendations of an independent working group. The report proposes ways in which clinicians and the National Health Service might improve the health and social care of those affected by CFS/ME. It also includes references to education provision.

Funded Initiatives

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the funded initiatives which have been introduced by her Department since 1997, stating *(a)* the level of funding in each year for each initiative and *(b)* whether those resources were provided direct to (i) schools, (ii) local education authorities and (iii) other bodies outside her direct control. [63939]

Estelle Morris *[holding answer 24 June 2002]:* Details of spending by my Department including new initiatives funded from 1997–98 and plans up to 2003–04 are presented in Table 4.2 of the departmental annual report issued 12 June 2002 (CM 5402, pages 35–36).

Schools funding is paid to local education authorities who are required to devolve the majority of funding to head teachers. Other funding is paid via other bodies including the Learning and Skills Council, the Higher Education Funding Council, Connexions partnerships, the Student Loans Company and the Sure Start programme.

Training Organisations

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many national training organisations have been wound up; how many have been replaced by skills sector councils; and how many will not be replaced. [63969]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: We have not wound up any national training organisations although we removed their formal recognition from 31 March 2002. National training organisations are independent bodies and are free to carry on as entities in their own right. The continued funding, operation and staffing of former national training organisations are decisions for the board of each organisation.

We are, however, establishing a smaller, stronger network of sector skills councils in sectors where employers can demonstrate their proposals meet stringent sector skills councils' standards. Former national training organisations may make proposals for a sector skills council licence although it has never been the intention to replace national training organisations with sector skills councils on a head to head basis.

We are working with five trailblazer sector skills councils and have recommended that a further four sectors move quickly to a development phase.

Teachers

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many trainee teachers have benefited from golden hellos in each year since 1998, broken down by Government office region. [64109]

Mr. Miliband: The Department has received claims from local education authorities for reimbursement of golden hello payments made post-training to teachers in the local Government office regions as follows:

	2000–01[1]	*2001–02*[1]
East Midlands	86	51
East of England	122	88
London	112	73
North East	29	16
North West	167	129
South East	168	61
South West	122	64
West Midlands	136	47
Yorkshire and the Humber	131	40

[1] Financial year

The decline in the number of golden hellos paid in 2001–02 is caused by teachers deferring to take their payment until after completion of induction under the new arrangements operating from September 2000. The number of payments is expected to rise significantly in 2002–03.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teachers working in schools in the Greater London area are between *(a)* 50 and 55 and *(b)* 55 years and over. [63588]

Mr. Miliband: The numbers of teachers in regular full or part-time service in the maintained schools sector in London Government office region at 31 March 2000 (the latest date for which provisional data are available) who were *(a)* aged 50 and 54 inclusive and *(b)* aged 55 or over were as follows:

	Full-time	*Part-time*	*Total*
50 to 54	6,800	1,400	8,200
55 and over	3,300	1,200	4,500

Some 10 per cent. to 20 per cent. of part-timers are not recorded on the Teacher's Pension Scheme, from which the data are obtained.

Standard Spending Assessment

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the change in standard spending assessment for education has been for *(a)* Wiltshire and *(b)* England in each year since 1987. [63831]

Mr. Miliband: The current funding system was introduced in 1990–91 and the following table provides the information requested since then.

Increased percentage (in cash terms)

	Wiltshire	*England*
1990–91	—	—
1991–92	16.4	16.2
1992–93	6.5	7.1
1993–94	—	—
1994–95	2.3	1.8
1995–96	1.6	1.2
1996–97	4.8	4.3
1997–98	—	—
1998–99	5.2	5.5
1999–2000	6.8	5.7
2000–01	5.9	5.4
2001–02	5.1	4.8
2002–03	6.5	6.0

Notes:

Figures for 1993–94 and 1997–98 are not shown because they do not reflect like for like comparisons:

1. From 1993–94 further education was no longer included in the SSA.

2. Following local government reorganisation, Swindon became an LEA in its own right in 1997–98 and was no longer included in Wiltshire's SSA.

3. In 1997–98 £527 million was taken out of the education SSA to fund the nursery voucher scheme.

4. The percentage increases expressed in the chart above are adjusted to reflect changes in LEA functions from 1998–99 onwards.

5. 2002–03 figures include the Learning and Skills Council allocation for post-16 education.

Education Policy

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what extra funding has been allocated within the SSA to carry out education policy initiatives during this financial year, broken down by local authority. [63601]

Mr. Miliband: The Education Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) is unhypothecated. It is therefore up to local education authorities to decide how much funding they should allocate for education policy initiatives: there is no specific allocation within Education SSA for 2002–03 at local level.

Special Grants

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what extra funding to schools in England she has provided in the form of special grants outside the SSA from 1999 to the present; how much has been provided; and for what purposes. [63602]

Mr. Miliband: The following table shows the Department's special grants paid under section 88B of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 from 1999–2000 to 2002–03. The table does not include specific grants provided by the Department such as the Standards Fund.

	1999–2000	2000–01	2001–02	2002–03
				£000
School Standards Grant	—	293,219	631,307	645,027
School Budget Support Grant	—	50,000	—	—
Education Budget Support Grant	—	—	52,394	—
Teachers Pay Grants	—	276,573	479,275	120,835
GM Transitional Grants	7,376	21,010	10,335	33
Post-Sixteen Budget Support Grant	—	—	—	20,100

Notes:

1. 2002–03 figures are provisional estimates/payments made to date and, as such, are likely to change.
2. Figures are in cash terms.

Regulation

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the work of the Better Regulation Task Force in reducing unnecessary regulations for which her Department is responsible. [63158]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: We have taken forward the recommendations in the Better Regulation Task Force's report "Red Tape Affecting Head Teachers" in April 2000. For those recommendations relating to deregulation, we have taken appropriate measures in the current Education Bill, in particular for deregulation of school governance arrangements, and the streamlining of some governance functions.

CABINET OFFICE

Public Appointments (Sikhs)

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many public appointments are held by Sikhs. [63610]

Mr. Alexander: My Department does not collect data on the number of Sikhs appointed to public appointments. It collects diversity data for public appointments on the following criteria: Bangladeshi; Black-African; Black-Caribbean; Black-any other; Indian; Pakistani; Chinese; mixed ethnic background; any other Asian; White; or any other ethnic background.

My Department publishes summary ethnic data covering all Government Departments in the 'Public Bodies' yearbook; the latest edition is 'Public Bodies 2001'.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Scottish Devolution

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many times his office has made representations to the Scottish Executive since May 1999 broken down by *(a)* Department approached, *(b)* subject and *(c)* date; [59528]

(2) what plans he has to transfer the administration of reserved powers and functions of the Department for Work and Pensions, its executive agencies and non-departmental public bodies within its remit from his Department to the Scotland Office; [59529]

(3) how many representations the Scottish Executive has made to his Department since May 1999 broken down by *(a)* Scottish Executive Department, *(b)* subject and *(c)* date. [59530]

Maria Eagle: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 24 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 600W.

NIRS2

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what effect problems with NIRS2 have had on their ability to produce research and statistics on pensions [61381]

Mr. McCartney: Data from NIRS fed into two regular pensions related national statistics publications issued by the Department. The publications were "Contributions and Qualifying Years for Retirement Pension" and "Second Tier Pension Provision". The most recent published data relates to the financial year 1995–96. NIRS2 is now able to produce the data required for the Department's statistical publications and departmental analysts are currently working on processing and investigating NIRS2 data covering the financial years up to 2000–01. It is intended that publication will resume later this year.

Royal Prerogative

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what decisions have been made by his Department in the last year under authority from the Royal Prerogative. [63141]

Maria Eagle: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Pendle by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State (Mr. Darling) on 24 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 243W.

Benefit Fraud (Sefton)

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he expects to publish the inspection report of the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate in respect of Sefton council. [64865]

Malcolm Wicks: The Benefit Fraud Inspectorate's (BFI) report on Sefton council was published today and copies of the report have been placed in the Library.

The BFI reports that the council has actively demonstrated a strong commitment towards raising standards within its benefits service and has many areas of good practice. The report also shows that Sefton has some scope for making improvements.

The report notes that a single housing benefit and council tax benefit claim form had been introduced and that this was broadly in line with BFI's national model.

Inspectors found that 94 per cent. of the claims examined had been assessed accurately and that the supporting evidence had been considered. A weakness was identified in the evidence gathered about earnings and capital.

There were some delays in processing renewal claims and inadequate checks on claims that were not renewed. BFI also found that the council did not have a benefit overpayment policy and lacked the necessary management controls to be assured that overpayments were dealt with correctly.

The council has taken positive steps to counter benefit fraud. The performance of the counter fraud team was found to be effective, systematically achieving successful prosecutions although the council had not offered administrative penalties or issued a caution since introducing its prosecution policy. Investigation work might also be targeted more effectively to increase the number of benefit frauds detected.

Following a best value review by the council of its benefits services, elected Members had approved new investment to increase the number of staff allocated to benefits and improvement to IT.

Sefton administered some £73 million in housing benefits in 2000–01.

The report makes recommendations to help the council address weaknesses and to improve the administration of housing benefit and council tax benefit, as well as counter fraud activities.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is now considering the report and will be asking the council for its proposals in response to the findings and recommendations of the BFI.

A BFI best value inspection report on the benefits service is also published today and has been placed in the Library. It examines the service from a customer service and value for money point of view. For best value, inspectors found that Sefton council provided a fair or one star benefits service, which would probably improve to be equal to that of high-performing authorities.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Royal Prerogative

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what decisions have been made by his Department in the last year under authority from the royal prerogative. [63048]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Records are not kept of the individual occasions on which powers under the royal prerogative are exercised, nor could it be practicable to do so.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Charities

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the Government's policy is on the voluntary registration of charities. [64866]

Beverley Hughes: The current regulations which made registration voluntary for charities connected with a number of religious bodies expire on 1 October 2002. My noble Friend Lord Filkin is today laying a new statutory instrument to extend those regulations until 1 October 2007. The Performance and Innovation Unit, as part of their review of the legal framework for charities, are considering the matter of exception and their report will be published in due course. The extension of the regulations will allow time for the implementation of any changes which the report may recommend.

Child Asylum Seekers

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the number of places required for children in accommodation centres *(a)* during the pilots, *(b)* in five years and *(c)* in 10 years. [51744]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 23 April 2002]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the reply my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle) gave my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Woodward) on 24 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 551W.

Ministerial Private Offices

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the running costs were of *(a)* his Ministers' private offices, separately identifying expenditure on staff and *(b)* his Department in each year from May 1997 to the nearest date for which the information is available. [40986]

Mr. Blunkett: Running costs for the Home Secretary's office, his Ministers' offices, the Private Office Management Support Unit and Parliamentary Secretariat for each year from 1997 were as follows:

Year	*Pay costs*	*Other running costs*
1997–98	1,551,644	572,622
1998–99	1,566,018	1,202,633
1999–2000	1,619,459	791,588
2000–01	1,223,794	841,809
2001–02[1]	1,643,622	943,022

[1] Figures are provisional as at year end

Running cost information for the Department for the period from May 1997 is published in the appropriation and resource accounts which are already in the public domain. Figures for 2001–02 will be published in due course.

European Arrest Warrant

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the United Kingdom definition is for the purposes of the proposed European arrest warrant of *(a)* swindling, *(b)* racism and *(c)* xenophobia. [63340]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The list in Article 2.2 of the Framework Decision on the European Arrest Warrant contains broad headings, designed to ensure that all serious offences are caught. It is for the requesting state to decide whether the conduct in question falls within one of the headings.

In the United Kingdom (UK), depending on circumstances, if issued by a judicial authority in the UK, "swindling" would include offences under the Theft Acts of 1968 and 1978.

The UK has a number of offences which could fall into the category of "racism" and "xenophobia". These include racial discrimination, incitement to racial hatred, possession and distribution of racially inflammatory material and publication of material intended to stir up racial hatred.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which offences in France for which British citizens could be extradited under the European arrest warrant are unknown to British law. [63366]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The Government are not responsible for the law of another European Union member state. It will be for the requesting state to establish that the offence in respect of which extradition is sought is one covered by the Framework Decision on the European arrest warrant.

The Government believe those who break the law of France while in that country should be returned to stand trial there, irrespective of whether the conduct is an offence under United Kingdom law. In the same way, we would expect France to return someone who had broken the law here even if the conduct was not contrary to French law.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether *(a)* non-British residents of, *(b)* British overseas territories citizens resident in and *(c)* UK citizens resident in (i) Gibraltar, (ii) Jersey, (iii) Guernsey, (iv) Alderney, (v) the Isle of Man, (vi) British sovereign bases in Cyprus and (vii) other British overseas and dependent territories will be subject to the proposed European arrest warrant. [63331]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The European arrest warrant system will operate in Gibraltar, as stated in Article 33 of the Council Framework Decision on the European arrest warrant and surrender procedures between member states. The Framework Decision does not apply to the jurisdictions of British overseas territories or the crown dependencies. The nationality of any resident has no bearing on the applicability of the proposals.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what safeguards he proposes to prevent the extradition of UK citizens under the European arrest warrant for offences which are unknown to English or Scots law. [63365]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The Government believe that those who break the law of another European Union (EU) member state while in that country should be returned to stand trial there, irrespective of whether the conduct is an offence under United Kingdom law, in the same way that we would expect our EU partners to return someone who had broken the law here even if the conduct was not illegal in the person's country of nationality.

However, the legislation to give effect to the European arrest warrant will provide that no one can be extradited from the United Kingdom for conduct which takes place in this country and which is not contrary to United Kingdom law.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what safeguards he proposes to prevent the extradition of UK citizens under the European arrest warrant without there being a proper case to answer. [63367]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Currently extradition between Council of Europe countries, which includes all European Union member states, is governed by the European Convention on Extradition (ECE).

Under the terms of Article 12 of the ECE, extradition requests have to be accompanied by an arrest warrant (or certificate of conviction, in conviction cases), a statement of the offences for which extradition is requested and a copy of the relevant enactments.

Requests do not have to be accompanied by material establishing that there is a case against the person whose extradition is sought. That will not be changed by the introduction of the European arrest warrant.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which jurisdiction it is proposed will determine, under the European arrest warrant, whether the property in the UK of British residents may be seized as evidence. [63339]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: As is currently the case with extradition requests, in European arrest warrant cases decisions on seizure of property in the United Kingdom (UK) for use as evidence will be taken by the British police in accordance with UK law.

Work Permits

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many work permits were awarded to persons from *(a)* India, *(b)* South Africa, *(c)* Bangladesh and *(d)* Jamaica recruited to UK police forces in the last five years. [62633]

Beverley Hughes: The number of work permits issued to United Kingdom police forces are listed in the table.

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
India	0	0	0	0	0	2
South Africa	0	0	0	1	0	0
Bangladesh	0	0	0	0	0	0
Jamaica	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	0	1	0	2

None of these were for non-European economic area nationals to be employed as a police officer. The occupations in question were an intelligence analyst and two analyst programmers.

Computers

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures are *(a)* in place and *(b)* under discussion in his Department in order to ensure compliance with the WEE Directive. [60755]

Beverley Hughes: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to him by my hon. Friend, the Minister of State for Energy and Construction (Mr. Wilson) on 12 June 2002, *Official Report,* column 1266W.

Asylum Accommodation Centres

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has received the interim report by Mr. Stephen Moore into the Yarl's Wood disturbances; and if he will make a statement. [60288]

Beverley Hughes: The final report of Mr. Moore's inquiry will be published as soon as practicable after the completion of the investigation into the events at Yarl's Wood removal centre. The timing for this will be dependent upon the progress of the separate inquiries being conducted by Bedfordshire police, Bedfordshire fire and rescue service, Bedfordshire county council and Group 4.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the nature of the educational facilities and curriculum he plans for asylum accommodation centres. [59275]

Beverley Hughes: Children in accommodation centres will receive an education which will mirror that provided in schools, suitably tailored to their needs, and which will prepare them for entry to school if necessary.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what provision he has made with his Department's budget for the construction and running of asylum accommodation centres in each of the next three financial years. [59076]

Beverley Hughes: Spending plans and priorities for all Home Office areas, including accommodation centres for asylum seekers, are under discussion with Treasury as part of Spending Review 2002 which covers the period 2003–04 to 2005–06.

Alcohol

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the answer of 16 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 842W, on alcohol, if he will place in the Library a copy of the letter to chief police officers and chief executives of local authorities regarding the measures relating to alcohol consumption in public places contained in the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001. [62195]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: A copy of the letter of 24 August 2001 to all chief executives of local authorities and chief officers of police has now been placed in the Library.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter to him dated 22 April 2002 from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Miss H. Abdi. [61762]

Mr. Blunkett: I wrote to my right hon. Friend on 25 June 2002.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter to him dated 28 March 2002 from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mr. A Abu-Jazad. [61682]

Mr. Blunkett: I wrote to my right hon. Friend on 21 June 2002.

Drugs

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what recent discussions he has had with medical professionals about the possible dangers of taking cannabis; what their advice on the matter was; and if he will make a statement; [61945]

(2) what recent discussions he has had with chief police officers about the level of drug-motivated crime being committed; and if he will make a statement; [61947]

(3) what recent discussions he has had with the Crown Prosecution Service about the prosecuting of people found in possession of cannabis; what form the discussions took; and if he will make a statement; [61943]

(4) what recent discussions he has had with chief police officers about the arresting of people found in possession of cannabis; what form those discussions took; and if he will make a statement; [61944]

(5) if he will estimate how much crime is committed, motivated by *(a)* cannabis and *(b)* other illegal drugs; and if he will make a statement. [61946]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The problem of drug misuse and the amount of crime associated with it, such as crime committed to help fund a drug habit or organised crime involving the supply of illicit drugs motivated by financial gain, are central to the Government's drugs and crime reduction strategies. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and other Home Office Ministers have regular and frequent discussions with chief police officers on these and related matters.

Additionally, representatives from the Association of Chief Police Officers and officials from the Crown Prosecution Service are regularly involved in discussions with Home Office officials on these and related issues, such as arrest referral and offences of cannabis possession.

Regarding levels of crime motivated by cannabis, Home Office Research Study 205 "Drugs and Crime: The results of the second developmental stage of the NEW-ADAM programme" by Bennett, T. (2000), copies of which are in the Library, states that there is some suggestion that, for offenders in general, cannabis use is associated with a slight inflation of criminal involvement. However, for offenders who use heroin and crack/cocaine, whether or not they also use cannabis makes little difference to their considerably higher level of offending. Regarding levels of crime motivated by all illegal drugs, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) on 22 May 2002, *Official Report,* column 450W.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has met Professor Sir Michael Rawlins, the Chairman of the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs, to consider the possible dangers of taking cannabis and related issues relevant to the drug's classification under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. The advice he received is contained in the Advisory Council's report, "The classification of cannabis under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971", which was published on 14 March 2002, copies of which are in the Library.

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has to strengthen sentencing measures in relation to people who deal drugs in close proximity to schools. [62904]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Severe penalties are already available to the courts for people convicted of supplying drugs. The maximum penalty for supplying class A drugs is life imprisonment, the maximum penalty for supplying class B drugs is 14 years imprisonment and the maximum penalty for supplying class C drugs is five years imprisonment.

It is vitally important to protect young people from the harm that can be caused by drugs. Officials are currently looking into this matter, bearing in mind the discretion that the courts already have to take into account all the circumstances of the offence and the offender, including all aggravating and mitigating factors.

There are no specific proposals at this time.

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were *(a)* arrested and *(b)* successfully prosecuted for drugs-related offences in (i) Telford and (ii) the United Kingdom in 2001–02. [62907]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The available information, relating to persons arrested for offences involving drugs (trafficking, supplying, possession, etc.) and those proceeded against and found guilty of such offences in England and Wales in 2000 is shown in the table.

Statistics for 2001 will be available in the autumn.

Figures for Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for the Scottish Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly respectively.

Persons arrested, proceeded against and convicted of drug offences in 2000

	Telford petty sessional area	*West Mercia police force area*	*England and Wales*
Number of persons arrested	[1]—	1,451	[2]107,700
Number of persons proceeded against	73	716	51,251
Number of persons convicted	[3]77	660	44,621

[1] Not available centrally

[2] Estimated

[3] May include persons proceeded against in earlier years.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the views of the people of Lambeth and Brixton on the experiment to treat cannabis possession as a non-arrestable offence. [63334]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has noted carefully the findings of the report carried out by the Police Foundation on the community's response to the Lambeth cannabis policing experiment. He recognises that while the report records high levels of support for the scheme, for many that support is conditional upon police officers spending more time dealing effectively with serious crime in the borough.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will answer the question tabled by the hon. Member for Solihull on 11 April concerning witnesses attending identification parades. [61816]

Mr. Denham: With apologies for the delay in replying to the hon. Member's question, I refer him to the answer I gave on 24 June 2002 on this issue, *Official Report,* column 697W.

Immigration and Nationality Directorate

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the budget was for IND in 1990; and what the current budget is for IND. [62200]

Mr. Denham: The budget for the Immigration and Nationality Directorate IND for 2002–03 is £1,031 million. This figure is provisional and any proposed changes will be notified to Parliament though supplementary estimates. This figure is also on a resource basis and no comparable budget figures are available for 1990. However, IND expenditure for the two financial years covering 1990, on a cash basis, was as follows:

	Actual expenditure £ million
1989–90	78.7
1990–91	90.9

A significant portion of the overall budget for 2002–03 relates to asylum support, which before 1999–2000 was assigned to the Departments of Health and Social Security not the Immigration and Nationality Directorate.

Asylum Seekers

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for asylum have been made in each year since 1994. [61331]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* The information requested is shown in the table.

Applications[1,2] received for asylum in the United Kingdom, excluding dependants, 1994–2001

Year	*Applications received (principal applicants only)*	*Applications received (including dependants)[3]*
1994	32,830	42,200
1995	43,965	55,000
1996	29,640	37,000
1997	32,500	41,500
1998	46,015	58,500
1999	71,160	91,200
2000[4]	80,315	98,900
2001[4]	71,700	88,300

[1] Figures rounded to the nearest five.

[2] May exclude some cases lodged at Local Enforcement

[3] Offices between January 1999 and March 2000.

[4] Provisional data.

Information on asylum applications is published quarterly. The next publication will be available from 30 August 2002 on the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate web site at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Advertising Campaigns

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much was spent on press and advertising campaigns in 2001–02; and what the planned expenditure is for 2002–03. [60917]

Beverley Hughes: Spend on press and advertising campaigns for 2001–02 was £14.4 million exclusive of VAT.

The campaigns covered:

Vehicle crime reduction
Police recruitment
Electoral issues
Drug misuse
Child protection on the internet.

Planned expenditure for 2002–03 has not yet been finalised.

Passport/Visa Fraud

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans there are to make passports and visa information better protected against fraud; what assessment has been made of the viability of biometrics; and if he will make a statement. [63066]

Beverley Hughes: The British digital passport is one of the most secure in the world. It is machine readable and complies with the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) standard for passports. It contains a digital photograph and a digital signature of the holder, and the personal identification page is protected by a clear plastic laminate incorporating a holographic device which further protects the portrait. The personal identification page is also protected by a series of laser perforations. The use of special paper and printing techniques provide added security. The security features in the passport document remain under continuing review in case a feature is compromised by fraudsters.

The United Kingdom Passport Service (UKPS) is considering the use of biometrics (fingerprints, iris, facial recognition) in passport books and cards both to further enhance security and to prevent the issue of multiple passports in the same identity. It is keeping in close touch with work being undertaken by ICAO post September 11 to develop an international standard for the use of biometrics in passports. In addition and in support of the concept of an entitlement card the UKPS has commissioned a study from the National Physical laboratory on the application of biometrics in an entitlement scheme. This study will look at iris, fingerprint and facial recognition templates and their application within large databases.

The issue of visas at diplomatic posts overseas, is the responsibility of UKvisas, a joint Home Office and Foreign and Commonwealth Office Department. Visas are issued on specifically designed vignettes that contain various security features in a common European Union format. A revised European Union common format vignette is being designed and should be brought into use in April 2004. The new format will incorporate space for a digital photograph of the applicant. There are no plans to use biometrics as part of the visa process but UKvisas is monitoring developments in this area including the Immigration Service trial at Heathrow.

Performance Targets

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the key targets set for his Department are for each of the next three years; and if he will make a statement. [56223]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* The Department's key targets are set out in its Public Service Agreements published in 2000, which are available on the Home Office's website.

The Department is setting targets for the next three years as part of the 2002 Spending Review process. The new targets will be published in the Treasury's White Paper in the summer.

HEALTH

Doctors (Suspensions)

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will estimate the cost to the national health service of the salaries of doctors on suspension and absent on special leave during the most recent year for which figures are available; [45728]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 12 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 692W, on doctors (suspensions), what the total cost was to the NHS of the suspensions; and what the costs were in *(a)* doctors' and dentists' salaries, *(b)* payments to locum replacements and *(c)* legal fees. [57150]

Mr. Hutton: The Department routinely collects information quarterly in regard to the suspension of hospital medical and dental staff and reported costs incurred. This information is not broken down into salary or locum costs or legal fees. Of the 30 doctors and community dentists currently suspended for more than six months, 22 are consultants. No such information is held regarding doctors on special leave.

NHS Finance

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money is owed within the NHS; and *(a)* by whom and *(b)* to whom it is owed. [45852]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested will be placed in the Library.

Smallpox Vaccine

Mr. Kevan Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if Powderject has applied for a licence for the smallpox vaccine; and if such a licence was included in the specification provided by his Department. [53951]

Mr. Hutton: The Department has bought an unlicensed smallpox vaccine. It is anticipated that the company will seek a licence at an appropriate time in the future. The company has agreed to abide by the new European Union guidelines, as set out by the European agency for the evaluation of medicinal products for the development of vaccinia based vaccines against smallpox. Currently, there are no smallpox vaccines available that are licensed.

GP Out-of-hours Co-operatives

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many GP out-of-hours co-operatives there are; and how many of these are connected to the NHS intranet. [54267]

Mr. Hutton: There are estimated to be about 240 general practitioner (GP) out-of-hours co-operatives in England. But they are not national health service organisations and as such the Department does not therefore collect or hold comprehensive data on them. For similar reasons GP co-operatives are not connected to the NHS intranet.

Overseas Doctors

Mr. Cameron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to make it easier for doctors from Australia and New Zealand to practise in the UK; and if he will make a statement. [57962]

Mr. Hutton: The Department of Health is working closely with the Joint Committee on Postgraduate Training for General Practice, Specialist Training Authority and medical Royal Colleges to enable suitably qualified and experienced doctors from overseas wishing to enter the UK medical practice to do so as quickly as is possible.

In November 2001, we removed the funding bar that has prevented overseas doctors being funded for training in general practice. We expected to see even more applications this year as a result.

Design Champions

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the appointment of design champions with NHS trusts. [59857]

Mr. Lammy: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State appointed my noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (the Lord Hunt of Kingsheath) as the Ministerial Design Champion for the Department. My noble Friend wrote to all national health service trusts including primary care trusts on 16 May 2002, asking the chair to nominate a design champion accountable to the trust board. The nominated design champion will take the lead in ensuring that capital schemes reflect the principles of good design at every stage of the procurement process.

Departmental Sponsors

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) which hon. Members have been appointed as sponsors to his Department since 7 June 2001; and when each of them were appointed; [59969]

(2) what the duties are of hon. Members appointed as sponsors to his Department; and what assistance is given by officials in his Department to them in carrying out these duties. [59982]

Mr. Lammy: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) on 10 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 1105W.

Computers

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures are *(a)* in place and *(b)* under discussion in his Department in order to ensure compliance with the WEE Directive. [60759]

Mr. Lammy: My hon. Friend is referred to the answer given by the Minister of State (Mr. Wilson) at the Department of Trade and Industry on 12 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 1266W.

Performance Targets

Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the performance targets that his Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies are required to meet, apart from those set out in the public service agreements for 1999 to 2002 and 2001 to 2004; and if he will specify for each target *(a)* who sets it and *(b)* who monitors achievement against it. [60471]

Mr. Lammy: The key performance targets for the Department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies are set by Ministers and are published as part of their business plans. Achievement against the targets is reported on by the agencies in their annual report and accounts. Copies of these documents are available from the Library.

For each agency or non-departmental public body, monitoring of performance against the targets during the year is carried out by a senior official of the Department who is responsible for the performance management of the body concerned. For the agencies further scrutiny is carried out by the non-executive ministerial advisory boards.

In addition the Department is committed to six standards for the delivery of public services to meet the needs of citizens. These standards are called Service First and include:

1. Answering correspondence (includes letters, faxes and emails) within twenty working days;
2. Seeing callers with an appointment within 10 minutes of that appointment time; and seeing callers without an appointment within 20 minutes;
3. Answering telephone calls quickly and helpfully within 10 rings;
4. Provide clear and straightforward information about its services and those of related providers;
5. Have a complaints procedure; and
6. Do everything reasonably possible to make its services available to everyone.

These targets are monitored by corporate affairs within the Department.

Ministerial Cars

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost of ministerial cars for his Department was in each year from 1995 to 2001 and from 1 January 2002 to date. [61428]

Mr. Lammy: The information requested is shown in the table.

Ministerial car costs—by year

£

	Actual costs
April 1995 to March 1996	289,733
April 1996 to March 1997	297,691
April 1997 to March 1998	316,572
April 1998 to March 1999	317,209
April 1999 to March 2000	400,792
April 2000 to March 2001	372,090
April 2001 to March 2002	358,661
January 2002 to date	169,018
of which included in 2001–02 year:	135,989
of which 2002 year to date:	33,029
Total	2,385,776

The increase from 1999 has been partly due to an additional ministerial post.

Health Care Design Teams

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 16 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 857W, on the design champion, what form Lord Hunt of Kings Heath's personal mentoring of four health care design schemes takes. [61526]

Mr. Lammy: My noble Friend, the Lord Hunt of Kings Heath is mentoring four national health service schemes. He has already met with two trusts; visiting the site and meeting with the chief executive, chairman, project director and key members of the team including the trust design champion.

He will support the trust in ensuring that design excellence is considered at all stages of the procurement process, and in addition will support the team, understand the scheme proposal and raise the profile of design excellence.

Hip Replacements

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many elective primary hip replacements were performed in 2000–01. [61437]

Mr. Hutton: There were 35,287 elective primary hip replacements carried out in the national health service in England in 2000–01.

Note:

OPCS (operation) codes used were W37–39 and W46–48, excluding W37.3, W38.3, W39.3, W46.3, W47.3 and W48.3. And also excluding those episodes with a primary diagnosis of S72.0-S72.2 (fractured neck of femur).

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health.

Prescriptions

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he and Ministers have had with NICE regarding the prescription of *(a)* irinotecan and *(b)* oxaplatin. [61457]

Ms Blears: None. As part of routine business, the Department has responded to the National Institute for Clinical Excellence in the normal way as a consultee in the appraisal process.

General Practitioners

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many GPs he expected the NCAA to validate in its first year when he established it. [61439]

Mr. Hutton: The National Clinical Assessment Authority (NCAA) does not validate doctors. The Government expected the NCAA to develop assessment frameworks for doctors in hospital and community and primary care organisations in its first year. During this period, the NCAA also managed nearly 200 referrals from trusts and health authorities for advice and support in local handling of performance issues.

Monitoring

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether his Department has a mechanism for monitoring *(a)* health authorities' and *(b)* primary care trusts' compliance with their statutory obligations to provide NICE recommended (i) drugs, (ii) treatments and (iii) technologies. [61077]

Mr. Lammy: We expect all health authorities and primary care trusts to meet their statutory obligations to provide appropriate funding for treatments recommended by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence. The new strategic health authorities will manage the performance of their constituent national health service bodies in meeting these commitments.

Circulars

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many circular documents have been sent by his Department and by the NHS Executive to the chief executives of NHS trusts since 1 June 2001; how many pages there were in each such document; and if he will make a statement. [61495]

Mr. Lammy: The Department has issued 43 formal referenced circulars to chief executives of national health service trusts since 1 June 2001. A list of these circulars, showing the number of pages of each one, has been placed in the Library.

Entertainment Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost was of the Department's 2001 staff Christmas party; and how many people attended. [61663]

Mr. Lammy: The Department did not hold a corporate Christmas party for staff in 2001. Christmas parties paid for by staff at no expense to the public purse have been excluded from this answer.

Broadband

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of the benefits of access to broadband services for improving patient care; and if he will make a statement; [61801]

(2) what targets he has set for the roll out of broadband services in *(a)* GP surgeries and *(b)* hospitals; and if he will make a statement. [61802]

Ms Blears: As set out in the NHS Plan, the national health service in England will have the most up-to-date information technology systems to deliver services faster and more conveniently for patients, including:

electronic booking of appointments for patient treatment;

access to electronic personal medical records for patients;

electronic patient record systems in hospitals and primary and community trusts;

electronic prescribing of medicines giving patients faster and safer prescribing as well as easier access to repeat prescriptions;

facilities for telemedicine allowing patients to connect with staff electronically for advice.

To deliver these services will require the provision of a robust and high capacity networking information technology (IT) infrastructure with sufficient capacity and broadband connectivity. We are taking action by introducing a new national programme and implementation plan for IT in the NHS which will significantly step up the pace of getting modern IT in place to support front line patient care and ensure that IT both drives change and gets the best from the extra resources the NHS is now getting.

There are no specific targets for the roll out of broadband services to general practitioner (GP) surgeries and hospitals in England. However, a significant number of NHS organisations are already using broadband links to NHSnet, the NHS managed networking service.

At least 30 per cent. of NHS trust sites currently have broadband connections where broadband is defined as transmission capacity of 256,000 bps or higher. GP practices in England are being encouraged to take up broadband services. Former health authorities were each invited to nominate two practices for centrally funded broadband connections. To date funding has been made available to 40 practices.

Health Statistics

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on the basis of the findings of the high level performance indicators and clinical indicators, what the *(a)* death rate, *(b)* death rate for cancer, *(c)* rate of admissions for serious injury and *(d)* teenage conception rate was (i) in each former health authority or present primary care trust area in the Government office north east area and (ii) on average in England; and if differences are widening in each case. [62202]

Mr. Lammy: The death rate, death rate for cancer, rate of admissions for serious injury and teenage conception rates can be found in the "Compendium of Clinical and Health Indicators 2001" in the Library.

In addition for teenage conception, new data for the year 2000 were published by the Office for National Statistics in Health Statistics Quarterly 13 (February 2002). This is also available in the Library.

These sources contain the rates for England, Government office regions (GOR) and at former health authority level. Data are not currently available for primary care trusts.

The data show that:

Death rates have fallen considerably during the 1990s for both England and the north east GOR. The absolute difference between the death rates for England and for north east GOR has narrowed over this period. In 1990 the average mortality rate in north east GOR was 15 per cent. higher than the average for England, in 2000 it was 13 per cent. higher.

Death rates for cancer have fallen considerably during the 1990s for both England and the north east GOR. The absolute difference between the death rates for England and that for the north east GOR has narrowed over this period. However in relative terms there has been little change (it was 16 per cent. higher in both 1990 and 2000).

Overall, hospital admission rates for serious injury have increased between 1995–96 and 1999–2000, although the number of years for which these data are available is not sufficient to establish a clear trend. The north east GOR has higher admission rates than the England average throughout this period and the gap has widened between England and the north east GOR both in absolute and relative terms (from 9 per cent. higher in 1995–96 to 15 per cent. higher in 1999–2000 in relative terms).

The teenage conception rate for girls and young women under 18-years-old in the year 2000 was 6.2 per cent. lower in England and 10.0 per cent. lower for the north east GOR than in 1998. Although the rate for the north east was still higher than for England in 2000, the gap between the two areas was less both in absolute and relative terms than it was in 1998 (21 per cent. higher in 1998 and 16 per cent. higher in 2000 in relative terms).

Ministerial Meetings

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which Ministers and officials had meetings with representatives of *(a)* the Confederation of British Industry, *(b)* the Engineering Employees Federation, and *(c)* the Engineering Marine Training Authority during the last year; who they met; and what the subjects and outcomes of their discussions were. [62209]

Mr. Lammy: Ministers and civil servants have meetings with a wide range of organisations and individuals as part of the process of policy development and analysis.

As with previous Administrations it is not this Government's practice to provide details of all such meetings. All such contacts are conducted in accordance with the Ministerial Code, the Civil Service Code and Guidance for Civil Servants: Contacts with Lobbyists.

Members of Parliament (Personal Data)

Mr. Forth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information is held by his Department on each hon. Member in relation to *(a)* personal relationships, both current and past, *(b)* financial status and dealings, *(c)* connections with companies and interest groups, *(d)* connections with Governments and *(e)* published works; and what was held in January 2002. [61827]

Mr. Lammy: Ministers and officials in this Department have access to published reference sources, as well as to the information about hon. Members made publicly available by the House authorities, for the purpose of parliamentary business.

EEA Doctors

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what period of training doctors from the EEA are required to complete before being eligible for consultant positions in the NHS; and if he will make a statement. [62673]

Mr. Hutton: Doctors with European Economic Area (EEA) free movement rights who hold qualifications listed in the European Specialist Medical Qualifications

Order (1995) are automatically entitled to entry to the specialist register. No further training is required. Doctors on the specialist register are entitled to apply for consultant posts in the United Kingdom, in open competition. There is no automatic entitlement to a consultant post in the national health service for UK or EEA doctors.

Doctors from EEA states who do not hold recognised qualifications would otherwise have to obtain a certificate showing they have fully completed training in the UK.

Nationals of EEA member states undertaking medical training in the UK, leading to the award of a certificate of completion of specialist training, are subject to the same conditions and standards as UK medical trainees.

UK Biobank

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the ownership of patent rights following the identification of individual gene sequences from blood samples donated to the project Biobank UK. [62276]

Ms Blears: The UK Biobank represents a database that can be used to investigate the combined effects of genotype, lifestyle and environmental exposures on the risk of developing the common multi-factorial diseases of later life. Policies on the ownership of intellectual property arising from research using the data contained within the UK Biobank have yet to be finalised, and are the subject of on-going consultation. Current thinking is that ownership of such intellectual property will reside with the organisation that hosts the workers undertaking the research. A key issue to be resolved is whether either the funding bodies or the hub should seek to retain any control over the intellectual property and whether this would be acceptable to the organisations hosting such research. A condition of using the UK Biobank is that, after a short period of time to allow for the preparation of publications or filing of patent applications, all results generated from analysis of the samples or data held must be added to the central databases and hence be made available to other researchers.

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to allow the disclosure of personal genetic information from Biobank UK and NHS sources to third parties. [62274]

Ms Blears: Only anonymised genetic information and linked clinical data from the UK Biobank will be released to third parties. An independent monitoring body, separate from the UK Biobank funders, will be established to develop the detailed policies regarding access to anonymised samples and data. These proposals are in accord with the recommendations made by the Human Genetics Commission in their report on the use of personal genetic data. All proposals to use the information contained within the UK Biobank will also have ethics committee approval and will be reviewed by the scientific management committee. Arrangements for any commercial use of the samples or data will be explained to participants when their consent is sought.

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to commission an independent review of value-for-money of the genetic record project Biobank UK. [62275]

Ms Blears: International scientific peer review of the protocol for the UK Biobank project was used to inform the recent funding decisions of the Medical Research Council, Wellcome Trust and the Department. It is anticipated that recruitment to the UK Biobank will not begin until at least the middle of 2003 and it will then be several years before the first outputs are obtained. The work of the UK Biobank will be subject to at least annual review by the funding partners. It is too early to consider commissioning an independent value-for-money review of this initiative.

Myeloma

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what recent grants the Government have made available to treating and finding a cure for myeloma; [62687]

(2) what recent research and studies the Government have undertaken to find the cause of multiple myeloma. [62683]

Ms Blears: The main Government agency for research into the causes and treatments for disease is the Medical Research Council (MRC) which receives its funding via the Department funds research to support policy and the delivery of effective practice in the national health service.

The MRC is currently funding a clinical trial directly aimed at the treatment of multiple myeloma. The project is entitled 'Myeloma IX Trial' and is being carried out at the university of Leeds by Dr. J. A. Child, at a total cost of £1.5 million over eight years.

The Department is funding a project entitled targeted treatment of multiple myeloma using gene and protein expression profiling. This is being carried out at the university of Leeds by Dr. F. E. Davies at a total cost of £463,000 over five years.

Other research projects into the causes and treatment of cancer may also be relevant to myeloma. There have been no Government grants for the treatment of myeloma, other than in national health service allocations, and these are not separately identified.

Debt

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how much debt each primary care trust had at the beginning of the 2002–03 financial year; [62844]

(2) if he will list the amount of inherited debt for each strategic health authority. [62845]

Mr. Hutton: The transfer of assets and liabilities from health authorities to primary care trusts and strategic health authorities will not be known until the audited accounts are available for financial year 2002–03.

E-medicine

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to develop electronic referral and discharge letters. [62351]

Ms Blears: The information management and technology target sand strategy for the national health survey are set out in "Building the Information Core" published in January 2001. Copies have been placed in the Library.

The strategy includes specific targets for booked admissions, electronic record systems and provision of pathology and discharge summaries over the NHS net. The work to achieve these targets will provide the capability for relevant information about the purpose of the referral, and the results of treatment, to be transferred using structured electronic messages from general practitioner to hospital, hospital to hospital and hospital to social care systems.

Waiting Times

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on trends in waiting times for *(a)* orthopaedic out-patients appointments and *(b)* orthopaedic operations at the Royal United hospital, Bath in the last 12 months. [62649]

Ms Blears: Action to verify data supplied by the trust in relation to waiting times is still under way.

There is so far no indication that waiting times for orthopaedic appointments or procedures have been adversely affected by the discovery of the manipulation of the in-patient treatment waiting lists at the trust.

Neurologists

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many neurologists were practising in the NHS in each year since 1995; and what the projected numbers are for each year to 2005. [62544]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the table. There has been a 38 per cent. increase in the number of neurologists working in the national health service between 1995 and 2001.

Hospital medical consultants within the neurology speciality, England as at 30 September

	Number
1995	260
1996	260
1997	280
1998	300
1999	300
2000	330
2001	360

Note:

Figures are rounded to the nearest ten

Source:

Department of Health medical and dental workforce census

The Department's current projections show the number of additional trained specialists who will be available to take up consultant posts in the neurology specialty, over the 2000 baseline. The figures in the following table are approximations.

Supply projections for the neurology specialty (based on 2000 census basement) Additional numbers of trained specialists available to take up consultants posts in the specialty

Year	Headcount
2002	30
2003	70 (390)
2004	80 (400)
2005	80 (410)

Notes:

Figures are rounded to the nearest 10.

The baseline projections take into account outputs from training and retirements.

Other recruitment and retention measures include international recruitment, conversion of staff in other grades and delayed retirements. The projections assume that retirement patterns return to current levels after the NHS plan period.

Psychiatric Illness (Ethnic Minorities)

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 3 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 1045W, on Asian women, when he intends to launch the consultation on the national suicide prevention strategy; if he will list those organisations to whom it will be sent; and if he will make a statement on the findings of the national survey of ethnic minority psychiatric illness rates in the community and on the action he intends to take as a result. [63047]

Jacqui Smith: The national suicide prevention strategy for England was launched for public consultation on 26 April 2002. A copy of the consultation document has been placed in the Library.

Copies of the document were sent to the following organisations:

Health and local authorities

Strategic health authorities

National health service trusts

Primary care trusts

Government Departments

Royal colleges

Voluntary organisations

Independent healthcare hospitals and providers

plus a broad range of organisations and individuals with an interest in suicide prevention.

The national survey of ethnic minority psychiatric illness rates in the community (EMPIRIC study) was a major survey of psychiatric illness rates in the community among ethnic minority adults aged 16–74 living in England. The survey was used to make comparisons with the prevalence of psychiatric morbidity in the general population.

Findings of the EMPIRIC study are informing the black and minority ethnic mental health strategy.

Pharmacists

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will implement a compulsory obligation for pharmacists to undertake and document their continuing professional development. [63111]

Mr. Lammy: We are working with the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain to bring forward an order under section 60 of the Health Act 1999 in 2003 to modernise the professional regulation of pharmacy, which is expected to include the necessary powers to implement a compulsory obligation for pharmacists to participate in continuing professional development.

Correspondence

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she will reply to the letters of the honourable Member for West Derbyshire of 1 February, 1 March and 5 April concerning NHS Direct. [63184]

Mr. Lammy: The Department has no record of receiving this correspondence. The Department's ministerial correspondence unit is seeking a copy of this correspondence.

Appointments (Membership of Secret Societies)

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to require applicants for posts in health authorities, hospital trusts and primary care trusts to disclose membership of secret societies; and if he will make a statement. [63329]

Mr. Hutton: We have recently issued a health service circular on pre and post appointment checks for all persons working in the NHS in England (HSC 2002/008). The circular instructs national health service employers to carry out a range of checks on applicants for posts in the NHS, including the taking up of references, criminal record checks where appropriate and occupational health checks. We have no plans to extend these checks.

Ionising Radiation (Medical Exposure) Regulations 2000

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the one-off compliance costs to the NHS in real terms are of replacing the Ionising Radiation (Protection of Persons Undergoing Medical Examination or Treatment) Regulations 1988, with the Ionising Radiation (Medical Exposure) Regulations 2000. [63202]

Ms Blears: No data have been collected on the one-off compliance cost to the national health service in real terms of replacing the Ionising Radiation (Protection of Persons Undergoing Medical Examination or Treatment) Regulations 1988, with the Ionising Radiation (Medical Exposure) Regulations 2000. However, the new regulations formalised many features of good practice believed largely to be already present in the NHS.

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the annual compliance cost was to the NHS in real terms, of the Ionising Radiation (Protection of Persons Undergoing Medical Examination or Treatment) Regulations 1988. [63201]

Ms Blears: The annual cost to the national health service in real terms of compliance with the Ionising Radiation (Protection of Persons Undergoing Medical Examination or Treatment) Regulations 1988 has not been estimated. The additional cost, however, compared with the overall costs of providing imaging and radiotherapy services is negligible. The regulations laid down basic measures for the radiation protection of persons undergoing medical exposures. These regulations were replaced by the Ionising Radiation (Medical Exposure) Regulations 2000.

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many lives he estimates were saved as a result of the introduction of Ionising Radiation (Medical Exposure) Regulations 2000; and if he will make a statement. [63204]

Ms Blears: It is not possible to estimate how many lives were saved as a result of the introduction of the Ionising Radiation (Medical Exposure) Regulations 2000, which came fully into force 1 January 2001. These regulations implement the European Community Directive 97/43/Euratom that was introduced following reappraisal of the risks of exposure to ionising radiation. The regulations revoke and replace the Ionising Radiation (Protection of Persons Undergoing Medical Examination of Treatment 1988 (POPUMET) which implemented an earlier EC Directive. However, the new Regulations formalised many features of good practice believed largely to be already present in the national health service under POPUMET.

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the annual compliance cost is to the NHS of the Ionising Radiation (Medical Exposure) Regulations 2000. [63203]

Ms Blears: The annual compliance cost to the national health service of the Ionising Radiation (Medical Exposure) Regulations 2000 has not been estimated. The regulations that came fully into force on 1 January implemented European Community Directive 97/43/Euratom. The regulations replaced earlier legislation in force since 1988 that laid down basic measures for the radiation protection of persons undergoing medical exposures.

Consultant Neurologists

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many posts for NHS consultant neurologists are unfilled; and if he will make a statement; [63468]

(2) how many people are being trained to become consultant neurologists; and how many were being trained in May 1997; 63470]

(3) what the approved number of posts for consultant neurologists was in the national health service in each of the last five years; [63467]

(4) how many consultant neurologists were employed by the national health service in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [63466]

Mr. Hutton: As at 30 September 2001, there were 122 staff within the senior house officer training grade and 162 staff within the registrar group training grade in neurology. Census data are collected every September; the corresponding number of staff in 1997 was 141 and 159 respectively.

The number of consultant neurologists employed in the national health service in each of the last five years is shown in the following table. There has been a 29 per cent. expansion in consultant numbers since 1997.

Hospital medical consultants within the neurology specialty

England as at 30 September	*Number*
1997	280
1998	300
1999	300
2000	330
2001	360

Notes:

Figures are rounded to the nearest 10

Source:

Department of Health medical and dental workforce census

The NHS vacancy survey has been conducted in March each year since 1999. The survey collects information on the number of posts, which trusts are actively trying to fill, which have been vacant for three months or more.Neurology speciality data were not collected in the March 2001 survey. However, the data were collected in this year's survey, the results of which will be available for publication in July 2002.

Overseas Nurses

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses from overseas were working in United Kingdom hospitals in 2001. [63474]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not collected centrally.

In order to practice as a nurse overseas applicants must register with the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC), formerly the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing Midwifery and Health Visiting. Overseas nurses registered with the NMC do not necessarily work in the national health service. The number of entrants to the register in the last three years are in the table.

Overseas trained nurses and midwives registering with the UKCC.

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Overseas nurses registered with the UKCC	3,621	5,945	8,403

Heart Transplants

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people had heart transplants in the United Kingdom in 2001. [63473]

Mr. Lammy: The total numbers of heart transplants performed in the United Kingdom in 2001 are listed in the table.

	Number
Cadaveric heart	156
Domino heart[1]	10
Heart/lung	32
Kidney/heart	4
Heart/liver	1
Liver and heart/lung	1

[1] A "domino" transplant is when one person has both heart and lungs transplanted for lung disease and their original heart is transplanted into another person.

Vaccines

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Lewes of 11 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 823W, on vaccines, what response he has received from *(a)* Glaxo Smith Kline and *(b)* the National Institute for Biological Standards and Control; and if he will place a copy of replies received in the Library. [49883]

Ms Blears *[Holding answer 15 April 2002]:* Glaxo SmithKline has confirmed that based on still available information that it is highly probable that batches 3741 and 3732 were issued in this country. Unfortunately they no longer have details of the quantities of vaccine or the places where the vaccine was supplied. Since vaccines were not centrally purchased and distributed at that time, there are not central records either. Information on individuals who received these vaccines will only exist if the general practitioner at the time of the immunisation recorded the batch number, and the patients' notes are still available.

At the time that batches 3741 and 3732 were issued, the National Institute for Biological Standards and Control (NIBSC) only routinely assayed potency of pertussis vaccine using the Kenrick test. The mouse weight gain test, that was suggested to give high toxicity results for the two batches used in Eire, was not used in the release tests for pertussis vaccine by NIBSC at that time.

Cancer Treatment

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what mechanisms are in place to monitor the use of resources earmarked for cancer treatment. [50803]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 18 June 2002]:* We have already asked health authorities how much of the growth money they are planning to spend on cancer. In May 2002, we will ask them to provide an outturn stating how much they have actually spent during 2001–02, to set alongside information on progress with implementing the NHS Cancer Plan.

We will continue to monitor progress, including the use of earmarked funds via primary care trusts in 2002–03.

Overseas Recruitment

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from foreign Governments about recruitment for the NHS of *(a)* nurses and *(b)* doctors in their countries; and if he will place copies in the Library. [58034]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 21 June 2002]:* In the past year we have received representations from the following countries concerning recruitment to the national health service:

Austria
Bulgaria
China
Czech Republic
Egypt
Georgia
Germany
Ghana
Greece
India
Indonesia
Iran
Italy
Japan
Philippines
Poland
Spain
Switzerland
Taiwan.

It is not our policy to publish the contents of written representations received from foreign Governments.

Management Information

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the written answer of 15 May 2002, ref 56282, for what reason basic management information in respect of the 2001–02 outturn figures is not available; and if he will make a statement on the steps he intends to take to ensure that up-to-date management information is available to the NHS Executive and to Ministers. [58341]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 21 June 2002]:* The information required by the Department is confined to that needed to manage its overall spending limits and the performance of individual bodies against their key financial duties. The audited annual accounts for 2001–02 of the national health service bodies will be published locally and will be available centrally in the autumn.

Drug Users (Treatment and Rehabilitation)

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the average waiting time is from GP referral to initial treatment for users of illegal drugs, broken down by each statutory drugs service in England; and if he will make a statement; [62407]

(2) what the waiting time is from referral to initial consultation for users of illegal drugs, broken down by each statutory drugs service in England; and how many such services have met the Government target of a two week waiting time limit from GP referral to initial consultation. [62408]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 19 June 2002]:* Estimated figures for waiting times for referral to initial consultation are listed in the following table. These figures were compiled to assist the national treatment agency in setting targets for reducing overall waiting times and are the latest currently available. Figures for 2000–01 are currently being collated and will be available shortly.

The targets for treatment services are as follows. This information relates to the local authority area, not for each individual agency.

weeks

	Average baseline waiting time	*Maximum acceptable lengths of wait*	
Treatment modality	*1999–2000*	*2002–03*	*2003–04*
Inpatient detoxification	6.1	4	2
Community prescribing-specialist	10.2	6	3
Community prescribing GPs	5	4	2
Structured counselling	4	4	2
Structured day-care programme	3.3	4	3
Residential rehabilitation	5.4	4	3

The information that is available to the Government are the longest wait for different modalities of treatment in each drug action team (DAT) area. DATs reported these figures in December 2001 as part of the routine planning process for treatment at local level. The National Treatment Agency will publish more comprehensive data later this year.

Cardiac Units

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to set up a new programme for the development of cardiac units in the UK. [63606]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 21 June 2002]:* The expansion plans for cardiac units in England are part of the comprehensive programme of development in cardiac services set out in the national service framework for coronary heart disease. The expansion programme is being pursued to ensure that heart patients are treated according to need rather than location. Consequently, investment is being focused on those parts of England with historically low capacity in cardiac surgery. Capital developments are taking place in Papworth, Wolverhampton, South Tees, Bristol, Sheffield, Blackpool, Liverpool, Central Manchester, South Manchester, Leeds and Plymouth. These developments will be completed in 2006. Any further expansion in capacity will be considered in terms of its ability to deliver the standards of care set out in the national service framework. In addition, from 1 July, patients who have been waiting for more than six months for a heart operation will be offered the choice of treatment elsewhere, which will enable more patients to be treated more quickly.

Bed-blocking

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what steps he has taken to ensure that money provided to East Sussex county council social services to relieve bed-blocking in local hospitals has been used for that purpose; [63549]

(2) if he will make a statement on the incidence of bed-blocking in east Sussex. [63550]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 24 June 2002]:* The Government recognise that delayed transfers of care are a problem across the south east and east Sussex has been acutely affected. East Sussex county council, in consultation with Surrey and Sussex health authority and the local national health service trusts, is currently exploring all possible options for reducing these delays.

Local authorities were required to provide a written statement of their proposed use of additional funding and the targets for reductions of delayed transfers. Progress towards targets has been monitored by the Department through the weekly reporting process and the capacity maps submitted to the Department.

MRSA

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many lives were lost in NHS hospitals as a result of MRSA in the last year. [63812]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 24 June 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to his previous question, on May 2002, *Official Report*, column 403W.

Bilateral Ministerial Meetings

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when Ministers in his Department have held meetings with Ministers and officials of the Irish Government since 1 June 2000; when and where each meeting took place; which Ministers were involved in each meeting; which Irish Government Departments were involved in each meeting; and which Ministers and officials from the Irish Government attended each meeting. [63086]

Mr. Lammy: My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham Edgbaston (Gisela Stuart), the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State met the Irish Health Minister (Michael Martin) on 18 July 2000 in Dublin. She also met the chief executive of the Irish Food Standards Agency (Dr. Patrick Wall). No other meetings have taken place.

Elderly People

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which general practitioner practices in *(a)* the Chesham and Amersham constituency and *(b)* Buckinghamshire were participants in the trial for assessing the assessment and management of elderly people. [62793]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 24 June 2002]:* I have been advised that this is a local project, organised by Chilton and south Buckinghamshire primary care trust, involving general practitioner practices in the Chesham area. For that reason, no information is held centrally.

Macular Disease

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what estimate he has made of the number of persons affected by wet age-related macular degeneration in one eye only who will pay privately to be treated by photodynamic therapy; [63900]

(2) how many persons have a treatable form of wet age-related macular degeneration; [63892]

(3) what plans he has to introduce speedy treatment of those with early wet age-related macular degeneration; [63899]

(4) what advice he intends to issue on restricting the treatment of *(a)* cataracts, *(b)* glaucoma and *(c)* diabetic retinopathy to persons in whom both eyes are affected; and if he will make a statement; [63895]

(5) what assessment he has made of draft NICE guidance that those with an eye in which the sight is worse than 6/36 should not be treated by photodynamic therapy for wet age-related macular degeneration; and if he will make a statement as to the number of persons who would go blind as a result of its implementation; [63896]

(6) how many persons NICE recommends should be treated by photodynamic therapy for wet age-related macular degeneration; and if he will make a statement; [63893]

(7) what advice he intends to issue to ophthalmologists concerning the treatment of patients with wet age-related macular degeneration in one eye only; [63894]

(8) what assessment he has made of the increased risk to a person with sight in one eye only of *(a)* injury and *(b)* disease leading to blindness; [63897]

(9) what steps he intends to take to ensure early diagnosis of wet age-related macular degeneration affecting the other eye of a person in whom one eye is already affected. [63898]

Mr. Lammy: *[holding answers 24 June 2002]:* A study sponsored by the Macular Disease Society in 2001 estimated that there were 182,000 people with age-related macular degeneration with a best eye visual acuity below that judged appropriate for certification as blind or partially sighted. It is estimated that 10 to 15 per cent. of those will have the "wet" type of the condition, for which photodynamic therapy is intended as a treatment. However, it is not possible to say how many of those are affected in only one eye.

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) published their final appraisal determination (FAD) on the use of photodynamic therapy as a treatment for age-related macular degeneration on 12 June. The appraisal process has not yet been completed and NICE have not made any recommendations on photodynamic therapy. NICE are seeking the views of consultees during the appeal process and will consider carefully any points that are made.

NICE's recommendations may change as a result of the appeal process; it would therefore be inappropriate for the Department to comment at this time. The Department will consider the implications of the final NICE guidance. The earliest guidance could be available to the NHS is at the end of July or early August, providing there are no appeals.

The NICE guidance on photodynamic therapy will not have implications for the treatment of cataracts, glaucoma or diabetic retinopathy.

Cancelled Operations

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the latest average figures he has for the number of operations cancelled each week broken down by each NHS trust. [63878]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 24 June 2002]:* Figures for cancelled operations are published on a quarterly basis. The latest available figures are shown in the table.

Cancelled operations for non clinical reasons, NHS trusts in England, 2001–02, quarter 4

Trust	*Number of last minute cancellations for non clinical reasons in the quarter*	*Cancellations as a percentage of elective admissions*
Addenbrooke's NHS Trust	114	1.1
Aintree Hospitals NHS Trust	82	1.0
Airedale NHS Trust	29	0.6
Ashford and St. Peter's Hospitals NHS Trust	16	0.2
Barking Havering and Redbridge Hospitals NHS Trust	506	3.8
Barnet and Chase Farm Hospitals NHS Trust	384	4.9
Barnsley District General Hospital NHS Trust	41	1.0

Cancelled operations for non clinical reasons, NHS trusts in England, 2001–02, quarter 4

Trust	*Number of last minute cancellations for non clinical reasons in the quarter*	*Cancellations as a percentage of elective admissions*
Barts and the London NHS Trust	211	2.1
Basildon and Thurrock General Hospitals NHS Trust	46	0.8
Bedford Hospital NHS Trust	152	3.1
Birmingham Children's Hospital NHS Trust	42	1.1
Birmingham Heartlands and Solihull NHS Trust	111	1.1
Birmingham Women's Healthcare NHS Trust	25	2.5
Blackburn Hyndburn and Ribble Valley Health Care NHS Trust	154	1.9
Blackpool Victoria Hospital NHS Trust	234	2.4
Blackpool Wyre and Fylde Community Health Services	4	2.0
Bolton Hospitals NHS Trust	97	1.7
Bradford Hospitals NHS Trust	84	0.7
Brighton Health Care NHS Trust	86	1.3
Bromley Hospitals NHS Trust	174	2.3
Burnley Healthcare NHS Trust	61	1.1
Burton Hospitals NHS Trust	93	1.7
Bury Health Care NHS Trust	16	0.4
Calderdale and Huddersfield NHS Trust	5	0.0
Cardiothoracic Centre Liverpool NHS Trust	65	2.5
Central Manchester and Manchester Children's University Hospitals	143	1.1
Chelsea and Westminster Healthcare NHS Trust	51	0.9
Chesterfield and North Derbyshire Royal Hospital	63	1.1
Chorley and South Ribble/Preston Acute Hospitals NHS Trusts	107	1.0
Christie Hospital NHS Trust	3	0.0
City Hospitals NHS Trust	119	1.7
City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Trust	78	0.7
Countess of Chester Hospital NHS Trust	125	2.3
Dartford and Gravesham NHS Trust	26	0.9
Dewsbury Health Care NHS Trust	152	3.7
Doncaster and Bassetlaw Hospitals NHS Trust	116	0.9
Dudley Group of Hospitals NHS Trust	106	1.3
Ealing Hospital NHS Trust	98	3.4
East and North Hertfordshire NHS Trust	162	1.9
East Cheshire NHS Trust	77	3.3
East Gloucestershire NHS Trust	144	1.6
East Kent Hospitals NHS Trust	35	0.3
East Somerset NHS Trust	20	0.6
Eastbourne Hospitals NHS Trust	78	1.8
Epsom and St. Helier NHS Trust	20	0.2
Essex Rivers Healthcare NHS Trust	199	3.1
Frimley Park Hospital NHS Trust	58	0.8
Gateshead Health NHS Trust	22	0.5
George Eliot Hospital NHS Trust	25	0.5
Gloucestershire Royal NHS Trust	71	1.1
Good Hope Hospital NHS Trust	34	0.6
Great Ormond Street Hospital For Children NHS Trust	71	1.6
Guy's and St. Thomas's Hospital NHS Trust	71	0.5
Hammersmith Hospitals NHS Trust	201	1.8
Harrogate Health Care NHS Trust	11	0.3
Hastings and Rother NHS Trust	181	6.1
Heatherwood and Wexham Park Hospitals NHS Trust	75	0.8
Hereford Hospitals NHS Trust	1[illegible]4	2.9
Hillingdon Hospital NHS Trust	130	2.9
Hinchingbrooke Healthcare NHS Trust	88	2.1
Homerton Hospital NHS Trust	11	0.5
Hull and East Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust	301	2.2
Ipswich Hospital NHS Trust	52	0.7
Isle of Wight Healthcare NHS Trust	1	0.1
James Paget Healthcare NHS Trust	65	1.7
Kettering General Hospital NHS Trust	78	1.3
King's College Hospital NHS Trust	172	2.0
Kings Lynn and Wisbech Hospitals NHS Trust	80	1.4
Kingston Hospital NHS Trust	54	1.1
Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust	172	0.7
Leicestershire and Rutland Healthcare NHS Trust	5	3.0
Lewisham Hospital NHS Trust	46	1.2
Liverpool Women's Hospital NHS Trust	27	0.9
Luton and Dunstable Hospital NHS Trust	187	3.3
Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust	76	0.9
Mayday Health Care NHS Trust	210	4.8
Medway NHS Trust	24	0.5
Melton Rutland and Harborough PCT	12	2.3
Mid Cheshire Hospital NHS Trust	170	3.3
Mid Essex Hospitals NHS Trust	62	0.9
Mid Staffordshire General Hospitals NHS Trust	146	2.0
Mid Sussex NHS Trust	59	2.9
Milton keynes General Hospital NHS Trust	179	4.7

Cancelled operations for non clinical reasons, NHS trusts in England, 2001–02, quarter 4

Trust	*Number of last minute cancellations for non clinical reasons in the quarter*	*Cancellations as a percentage of elective admissions*
Moorfields Eye Hospital NHS Trust	33	0.5
Morecambe Bay Hospitals NHS Trust	142	2.0
Newbury and Community PCT	8	1.5
Newcastle Upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Trust	260	1.1
Newham Healthcare NHS Trust	106	3.5
Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital NHS Trust	76	0.5
North Bristol NHS Trust	171	1.6
North Cheshire Hospitals NHS Trust	128	1.6
North Cumbria Acute NHS Trust	167	1.9
North Devon Healthcare Trust	5	0.1
North Dorset PCT	3	0.5
North Durham Health Care NHS Trust	63	1.5
North Hampshire Hospitals NHS Trust	44	0.9
North Manchester Healthcare NHS Trust	146	2.3
North Middlesex Hospital NHS Trust	26	0.6
North Staffordshire Hospital NHS Trust	306	2.3
North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Trust	26	0.4
North West Anglia Healthcare NHS Trust	11	1.3
North West London Hospitals NHS Trust	121	1.2
Northallerton Health Services NHS Trust	1	0.0
Northampton General Hospital NHS Trust	313	3.9
Northern Lincolnshire and Goole Hospitals NHS Trust	85	0.7
Northumbria Healthcare NHS Trust	40	0.4
Nottingham City Hospital NHS Trust	324	3.6
Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre NHS Trust	12	0.7
Oldham NHS Trust	144	2.0
Oxford Radcliffe Hospitals NHS Trust	428	3.6
Papworth Hospital NHS Trust	5	0.1
Peterborough Hospitals NHS Trust	114	1.9
Pinderfields and Pontefract NHS Trust	333	3.5
Plymouth Hospitals NHS Trust	209	1.8
Poole Hospital NHS Trust	142	2.1
Portsmouth Hospitals NHS Trust	183	1.5
Princess Alexandra Hospital NHS Trust	196	3.7
Princess Royal Hospital NHS Trust	33	1.0
Queen Elizabeth Hospital NHS Trust	15	0.3
Queen Mary's Sidcup NHS Trust	237	6.0
Queen Victoria Hospital NHS Trust	18	0.8
Queens Medical Centre NHS Trust	20	0.2
Riverside Community Health Care NHS Trust	9	n/a
Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic and District Hospital	13	0.7
Rochdale Healthcare NHS Trust	85	2.0
Rotherham General Hospitals NHS Trust	31	0.5
Royal Berkshire and Battle Hospitals NHS Trust	80	0.9
Royal Bournemouth and Christchurch Hospitals NHS Trust	76	0.6
Royal Brompton and Harefield NHS Trust	69	1.4
Royal Cornwall Hospitals NHS Trust	295	2.5
Royal Devon and Exeter Healthcare NHS Trust	108	0.9
Royal Free Hampstead NHS Trust	27	0.3
Royal Liverpool and Broadgreen University Hospitals	99	1.0
Royal Liverpool Children's NHS Trust	60	1.5
Royal Marsden Hospital NHS Trust	19	0.2
Royal National Orthopaedic NHS Trust	40	2.3
Royal Orthopaedic Hospital NHS Trust	18	0.6
Royal Shrewsbury Hospitals NHS Trust	163	2.4
Royal Surrey County and St. Lukes Hospital NHS Trust	118	1.6
Royal United Hospital Bath NHS Trust	207	3.0
Royal West Sussex NHS Trust	76	1.7
Royal Wolverhampton Hospitals NHS Trust	28	0.4
Salford Hospitals NHS Trust	64	1.1
Salisbury Health Care NHS Trust	139	2.3
Sandwell Healthcare NHS Trust	52	0.9
Scarborough and North East Yorkshire Health Care	36	0.7
Severn NHS Trust	3	0.5
Sheffield Children's Hospital NHS Trust	7	0.3
Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust	149	0.7
Sherwood Forest Hospitals NHS Trust	209	3.3
Shropshire's Community and Mental Health Services NHS Trust	2	1.5
South Buckinghamshire NHS Trust	3	0.1
South Devon Healthcare NHS Trust	71	0.9
South Durham Health Care NHS Trust	54	0.8
South Manchester University Hospitals NHS Trust	498	5.6
South Tees Acute Hospitals NHS Trust	143	1.0
South Tyneside Health Care NHS Trust	31	0.8
South Warwickshire General NHS Trust	57	1.1
South West Dorset PCT	1	0.3

Cancelled operations for non clinical reasons, NHS trusts in England, 2001–02, quarter 4

Trust	*Number of last minute cancellations for non clinical reasons in the quarter*	*Cancellations as a percentage of elective admissions*
Southampton University Hospitals NHS Trust	116	0.9
Southend Health Care NHS Trust	97	1.1
Southern Derbyshire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust	88	0.7
Southport and Ormskirk Hospital NHS trust	14	0.3
St. George's Healthcare NHS Trust	256	3.1
St. Helens and Knowsley Hospital NHS Trust	226	2.8
St. Mary's Hospital NHS Trust	21	0.3
Stockport NHS Trust	93	1.3
Stoke Mandeville Hospital NHS Trust	24	0.7
Surrey and Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust	63	1.1
Swindon and Marlborough NHS Trust	70	1.0
Tameside and Glossop Acute Services NHS Trust	421	11.4
Taunton and Somerset NHS Trust	133	1.5
Trafford Healthcare NHS Trust	37	1.0
United Bristol Healthcare NHS Trust	453	3.4
United Lincolnshire Hospitals NHS Trust	159	1.1
University College London Hospitals NHS Trust	56	0.7
University Hospital Birmingham NHS Trust	119	1.1
University Hospital of Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust	136	1.5
University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust	175	0.6
Walsall Hospitals NHS Trust	31	0.5
Walton Centre for Neurology and Neurosurgery NHS Trust	42	3.8
West Dorset General Hospital NHS Trust	256	4.4
West Hertfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust	173	1.8
West Middlesex University NHS Trust	17	0.6
West Suffolk Hospitals NHS Trust	145	2.5
Weston Area Health NHS Trust	35	1.5
Whipps Cross University Hospital NHS Trust	270	4.7
Whittington Hospital NHS Trust	72	2.6
Winchester and Eastleigh Healthcare NHS Trust	26	0.6
Wirral Hospital NHS Trust	61	0.8
Worcester Acute Hospitals NHS Trust	63	0.7
Worthing and Southlands Hospitals NHS Trust	16	0.2
Wrightington Wigan and Leigh NHS Trust	77	0.8
York Health Services NHS Trust	13	0.2
England	19,973	1.5

London Medical Schools

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the role of redundancy committees at London medical schools. [61467]

Margaret Hodge: I have been asked to reply.

The role of redundancy committees is set out in the University Commissioners' Model Statutes which arises from the Education Reform Act 1988. Academic staff in medical schools who are employees of a university will be covered by statutes adopted in line with the model.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 26 June 2002

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

G8 Summit

7. **Mr. Viggers:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the outcome of the G8 summit in Canada as it relates to trade with developing countries. [62474]

Clare Short: The G8 leaders are meeting in Kananaskis today and tomorrow so it is too early to be able to comment on the outcome of discussion of the G8 Action Plan for Africa. The UK is putting forward specific proposals in the key areas of conflict, education, health, development assistance, debt and trade.

18. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the G8 summit in respect of international aid. [62485]

Clare Short: The G8 Summit is addressing a number of issues of vital significance to developing countries. These include: conflict reduction; trade; debt relief; universal primary education; health, including affordable essential medicines; the effectiveness of development assistance; and support for Afghanistan. A G8 Action Plan for Africa is being drawn up, with the aim of responding to African countries' own efforts to pursue policies aimed at the elimination of poverty and reverse the economic marginalisation of their continent.

International aid in support of these initiatives should be available from the additional money promised by G8 countries, and the European Union, at the International Conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey last March. But G8 action in support of poverty elimination requires more than just additional aid. Significant progress also needs to be made in areas such as free-trade access and the reduction of G8 countries' agricultural subsidies. It is essential that G8 countries meet all the commitments they made at Monterrey.

Cuba

8. **Michael Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the provision of bilateral aid to Cuba. [62475]

Clare Short: We do not have a bilateral aid programme to Cuba, we provide small scale support. The Scheme is appreciated by the Cuban authorities and has recently supported financial management training, export promotion environmental management and organic agriculture. Our share of the EC development programme is $2.6 million per annum which is drawn from the Department for International Development budget.

Belarus and Ukraine

9. **Andrew Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on how much funding her Department provides to Belarus and the Ukraine. [62476]

Clare Short: This year, we plan to provide £16 million to Ukraine, of which half will be through our direct programme and half as our contribution to multilateral agencies, particularly the European Commission Tacis programme. In Belarus, where our programme is limited due to poor government, we expect to provide £0.8 million mostly as our share of the EC Tacis programmes.

Famine (Africa)

10. **Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on famine in Africa north of the Limpopo. [62477]

Clare Short: The causes of food shortages in Southern Africa this year are drought and misgovernment. In Zimbabwe, which accounts for over half of the region's food aid requirements, economic mismanagement and grossly misorganised land reform have massively exacerbated the effects of the drought.

The World Food Programme will next week launch a regional appeal for food for Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique, Lesotho and Swaziland. They estimate that four million tons of cereal imports will be needed. 2.8 million to be provided by private sector and government imports, and 1.2 million tons through food aid will be distributed free.

13. **Mr. Weir:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much food aid her Department has earmarked for the World Food Programme to be distributed in southern Africa from the year beginning September 2002. [62480]

Clare Short: We have allocated £18.75 million in response to the World Food Programme regional appeal for six countries in southern Africa for immediate food purchases. This is part of an overall allocation of £45 million through international organisations and NGOs for food and inputs for the next planting season. We will review our commitment as the relief programme proceeds.

24. **Mrs. Betty Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps she is taking to tackle food shortages in southern Africa. [62492]

Clare Short: I refer my hon. Friend to the replies I gave to the hon. Member for Banbury on 17 June 2002, *Official Report*, columns 58–59W.

29. **Hugh Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on famine in southern Africa. [62497]

Clare Short: I refer the hon. Member to the replies I gave to the hon. Member for Banbury on 17 June 2002, *Official Report*, columns 58–59W.

Debt Relief

11. **Mr. Plaskitt:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how her Department is working with the EU to reduce delays in delivering debt relief due under the HIPC initiative to poor countries. [62478]

Clare Short: In 1999, the UK helped to secure, through the European Union, a pledge of 1 billion euros towards debt relief for the heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC), from the European Development Fund (EDF). This was to be provided in the form of 680 million euros for the HIPC trust fund and 320 million euros in debt relief for the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries' debts owed to the European Investment Bank (EIB). To date 650 million euros have been spent, with a further 300 million euros planned for disbursement this year.

17. **David Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how her Department will ensure that poor countries which do not qualify for the opportunity of HIPC debt relief achieve sustainable debt funding. [62484]

Clare Short: Countries that are not eligible for debt relief under the heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC) initiative can still achieve sustainable debt levels through the traditional debt relief mechanisms available. This includes a stock-of-debt operation under Naples terms (up to 67 per cent. cancellation of debt) by the Paris Club and comparable treatment by non-Paris Club official bilateral and commercial creditors. To qualify for HIPC relief, a country must be judged to have an unsustainable debt after the full application of traditional debt relief measures, and to have met the other HIPC requirements. It is therefore possible for countries, as in the case of the Comoros, the Gambia and Malawi, to be added to the list of HIPC countries, depending on their circumstances.

20. **Mr. MacDougall:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what progress is being made on debt relief for poor countries; and if she will make a statement. [62488]

Clare Short: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden) on 21 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 583W.

Ms Munn: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how her Department is working with the European Union to reduce delays in delivering debt relief due under the HIPC Initiative to poor countries. [62487]

Clare Short: In 1999, the UK helped to secure, through the European Union, a pledge of 1 billion euros towards debt relief for the heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC), from the European development fund (EDF). This was to be provided in the form of 680 million euros for the HIPC trust fund and 320 million euros in debt relief for the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries' debts owed to the European Investment bank (EIB). To date 650 million euros have been spent, with a further 300 million euros planned for disbursement this year.

Palestinian Authority

12. **Mrs. Ellman:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps she is taking to ensure that development funding for the Palestinian Authority is not used to support terrorism. [62479]

Clare Short: Our bilateral development programme in the west bank and Gaza Strip is largely technical assistance, funded through, and managed by, a range of local and international organisations on behalf of Palestinian beneficiaries. Commissioner Patten has stressed that the Commission has investigated Israeli claims about European Commission (EC) support and found no evidence to corroborate the allegations that EC funds have been misused to finance terrorist activities; or for anything other than their original purpose. The EC attach strict conditionality to the budgetary assistance provided to the Palestinian Authority (PA). The conditions mainly reinforce the need for transparency of the PA's public finances, strengthening the prudent management of the budget, and encouraging progress on overall financial and administrative reform. We are satisfied that the EC, with the assistance of the IMF, is ensuring the conditions are met.

Pharmaceutical Provision

14. **Ian Lucas:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps she is taking to improve pharmaceutical provision in the developing world. [62481]

Clare Short: The Government are committed to addressing the four key factors which are recognised by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as affecting the provision of pharmaceuticals in the developing world. These are sustainable financing, affordable pricing, reliable health and supply systems and the rational selection and use of existing drugs.

On sustainable financing, we have pledged $200 million over five years to the Global fund to fight AIDS, TB and malaria. The fund will support increased coverage of proven interventions for these diseases by providing developing countries with resources to purchase key commodities, and strengthen systems to procure and deliver them.

The Working Group on Access to Medicines, which I chair, is working with the pharmaceutical industry and foundations, developing countries, the World Health Organisation, the World Trade Organisation and the European Commission to bring about more affordable pricing. The Group will report to the Prime Minister after its final meeting in July.

We have committed over £1 billion since 1997 to strengthening developing countries' health systems, building their capacity both to deliver medicines to the poor and to make effective choices about the selection and use of drugs.

Zimbabwe

15. **Mr. Blunt:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether UK development assistance to Zimbabwe is administered by Zimbabwe Government authorities. [62482]

Clare Short: UK development assistance is delivered through international, non-Government and parastatal organisations. Some commodities provided through our HIV/AIDS and emergency medical supplies programmes are distributed through public health service outlets. The bulk of our assistance is for food aid which is delivered outside Government channels.

Sustainable Development Summit

16. **Mr. Tom Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what she aims to achieve at the world summit on sustainable development in Johannesburg in respect of reduction of poverty. [62483]

Clare Short: The UK's strategic objective is to make globalisation work for sustainable development, especially for the poorest. At the summit, the UK would like to build on other processes, including the Doha Development Agenda and Financing for Development conference in Monterrey, to focus the efforts of Governments, international institutions, business and civil society on delivering the sustainable development necessary to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. The summit is a critical opportunity to bring the development and environment movements together in a systematic attempt to both reduce poverty and pursue sustainable development. I also refer my right hon. Friend to the speech I gave on the summit in London on 20 June, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

UN Aid Target

19. **Kevin Brennan:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what progress she has made since June 2001 towards meeting the UN target for percentage of gross domestic product devoted to international aid. [62486]

Clare Short: In 2001, UK official development assistance was 0.32 per cent. of gross national income (GNI)—up from 0.26 per cent. in 1997. The Government are committed to the target of raising development assistance to 0.7 per cent. of national income, and will significantly raise the amount of our development assistance and its share in national income, in the next spending round. This will be announced soon, and will cover the years up to 2005–06.

The UK played a major role in securing the commitment by the European Union at the Financing for Development conference in Monterrey to raise its average official development assistance as a share of national income to 0.39 per cent. (from 0.32 per cent.) by 2006. This will mean an extra $7 billion of official development assistance per year from Europe.

EU Development Assistance

21. **Mr. David Stewart:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on her role in achieving a sharper poverty focus in EU development assistance. [62489]

Clare Short: DFID has worked hard since 1997 to improve the overall effectiveness of EC development assistance in contributing to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals by improving its poverty focus and quality. There have been some steps in response to our efforts to reform EC development assistance. We are pressing the EC to pursue its reform efforts vigorously in order to implement the November 2000 EC Development Policy, which for the first time makes poverty reduction the central objective of EC development programmes. We are also working for agreement that a much greater share of EC aid should be allocated to low income countries where it will have the greatest impact on poverty reduction. In 2000, only 38 per cent. of EC aid was spent in low-income countries compared to 70 per cent. in 1990. Last year we secured a substantial increase in the external actions budget for Asia. This year we hope to see the budget share for Asia maintained and further increased where possible.

Great Lakes

22. **Ann McKechin:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what Britain's contribution is towards the UN OCHA appeal for aid across the Great Lakes region. [62490]

Clare Short: DFID's contribution to the 2002 OCHA appeals for the Great Lakes are as follows:

£

	Contribution
OCHA Emergency Humanitarian Initiative	500,000
OCHA Coordination	400,000
Office for the High Commission of Human Rights	250,000
UN Security	400,000
UN OCHA Emergency Humanitarian Initiative[1]	500,000

[1] Part of the United Nations Flash Appeal for the Goma eruption.

Former Yugoslavia

23. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has to increase aid to former Yugoslavia for reconstruction. [62491]

Clare Short: From 1991 to 2000, the UK's total contribution to the former Yugoslavia, comprising our share of EC funding and bilateral aid, including humanitarian aid, was £972 million.

EC aid committed to the states of the former Yugoslavia through the CARDS and other programmes between 2000 and 2006 is £3.19 billion, of which the UK share, which is funded from DFID's budget, is £600 million. In addition, we are providing support to economic and social reform through our bilateral programmes, through which we are providing £16.1 million this year. We also contribute to the other multilateral agencies assisting the states of the former Yugoslavia, including the World bank and EBRD.

We do not propose to increase these commitments.

Tanzania

25. **Valerie Davey:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when she expects a response from the Civil Aviation Authority in respect of its assessment of Tanzania's military air traffic control system. [62493]

Clare Short: The International Civil Aviation Organisation has produced a report looking at the Government of Tanzania's (GoT) civil air navigation requirements. This is now being considered by the GoT and we are awaiting their response.

Afghanistan

26. **Mr. John Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussion she has had with the Ministry of Defence about co-ordinating activities in supporting nation building in Afghanistan. [62494]

Clare Short: A reformed security sector is vital to the future stability of Afghanistan.

My Department, in consultation with both the Ministry of Defence and Foreign and Commonwealth Office, is contributing to the creation of accountable national military and police forces subject to the rule of law and under central and civilian control; anti-narcotics activities; and the re-establishment of an appropriate judicial system. The UK has in principle committed £22 million to this process for this financial year. My Department has worked closely with British forces serving in the International Security Assistance Force on the identification and implementation of quick impact projects in Kabul and its environs. These projects contribute to stability, thus allowing political processes and development activities to take root.

Health Services

27. **Mr. Khabra:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on her support for basic health services for poor people. [62495]

Clare Short: My Department is engaged in efforts to strengthen developing countries' health systems to deliver effective services for poor people and to address the priority health problems of the poor. Since 1997, the Government have committed over £1 billion to health systems strengthening. The UK has also committed $200 million over five years to the Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB and malaria, which will help pay for increased coverage of proven interventions for these diseases and some associated health systems strengthening to ensure drugs and commodities are delivered safely, effectively and equitably.

Millennium Development Goals (Africa)

28. **Tony Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her assessment is of the challenges faced by Africa in reaching the millennium development goals. [62496]

Clare Short: Unlike the rest of the world, on present trends Africa will not meet the MDGs and halve poverty by 2015:

> economic growth needs to be more than twice as high, at 7 per cent., to meet the income poverty target.
>
> 20 per cent. of Africans are affected by conflict costing the continent 2 per cent. a year of growth on average.
>
> maternal mortality has got worse, not better, over the last decade. over 25 million Africans are living with HIV/AIDS (70 per cent. of the global total).
>
> as a result, life expectancy has fallen by up to 20 years in some countries.

If this continues, it will be a tragedy for Africa's people and a threat to the future safety and stability of the world.

But this fate is not inevitable. Africa faces an enormous challenge in meeting the MDGs. But that challenge is not insurmountable. First, it requires that African nations commit to fundamental reform and a process of learning from one another. Second, it needs the developed world to alter the nature of its partnership with Africa, not just by increasing and improving aid but by tackling the whole range of policy constraints which affect Africa's development. NEPAD and the G8 can play a critical role in both.

Science and Technology

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps she is taking to ensure information arising from scientific breakthroughs in *(a)* medicine, *(b)* agriculture and *(c)* other technologies, are shared for the benefit of the developing world; and if he will make a statement. [63915]

Clare Short: DFID places great importance on improving the access to research results to poor people who could benefit. DFID ensures that appropriate dissemination strategies are an essential and integral component of all research activities we support. We also recognise the need to facilitate interaction between researchers, policy makers and other users of research, not just in respect of research funded by DFID.

DFID uses a range of mechanisms for knowledge sharing. These include all the usual mechanisms—books, journal and newspaper articles, conference proceedings and technical bulletins, leaflets and manuals, posters, videos, training and exposure through workshops and research partnerships. DFID will continue to support these and innovative mechanisms for knowledge sharing, including the use of information and communication technologies. Current information and communication technologies initiatives include health communications, distance education, empowerment and conflict reduction, science for development, a policy research institute network in conjunction with the World bank and a website which disseminates highlighted summaries of research that can help reduce poverty.

Research outputs are promoted through packaging them into policies, strategies or technologies relevant to the needs of the poor. Promotion is usually managed in collaboration with target institutions, often locally based. Working with local agencies helps to foster long-term relationships for the successful transfer and adoption of research outputs that can help poor communities to prosper.

A review of DFID's dissemination practices is currently under way and will feed into future work.

Parliamentary Questions

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will place in the Library a copy of the departmental guidance for officials on answering parliamentary questions. [63808]

Clare Short: I will place a copy of the guide, which was written by officials for officials, in the Library of the House.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Redundant Churches (Greater London)

Mr. Cox: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, how many churches in the Greater London area have been made redundant in each of the last five years. [63586]

Mr. Bell: A total of 15 Greater London churches have been declared redundant in the last five years, broken down as follows:

Year	*Number*
1997	4
1998	5
1999	2
2000	2
2001	2

In eight of these cases, a new church or place of worship was provided.

TRANSPORT

New Roads and Street Works Act

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) pursuant to the answer of 17 October 2001, from the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, *Official Report*, column 1228W, on road works, what assessment has been made of the pilot schemes in the London borough of Camden and in Middlesbrough; how many daily charges have been made; what assessment has been made of the disruption to road users; and if he will make a statement; [61839]

(2) pursuant to the answer of 17 October 2001, from the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, *Official Report*, column 1227W, on the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991, if he will place the interim report in the Library; if the further report has been completed; and if he will make a statement. [61838]

Mr. Jamieson: Consultants—Halcrow—were appointed by the Government last year to measure the effectiveness of the powers under section 74 of the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991 by which highway authorities are able to impose charges on utility companies, where the latter dig up the highway and these works are not completed by an agreed deadline. These powers were activated on 1 April 2001.

An interim monitoring report, covering the first few months of the new powers was produced by Halcrow in March. I am arranging for copies of this to be placed in the Libraries of the House. However, a full report, covering the first 12 months of the operation of the scheme, is due to be delivered to my Department shortly.

Pilot schemes to test further powers under which local authorities can charge utility companies "lane rental", whenever the latter dig up highways to install or maintain their apparatus, began on 4 March 2002 in Camden and Middlesbrough. We do not yet have reliable data on the effect of the pilots. However, the Government also appointed Halcrow to measure the impact of lane rental, both in terms of the effect on the disruption caused by utility works and the costs which it imposes on those utilities. Halcrow are due to deliver their first report to my Department, covering the first few months of the scheme, later this year.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many local authorities by 31 March, had *(a)* shown intent to fine and *(b)* fined utility companies under the powers given in section 74 of the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991; and if he will make a statement. [61378]

Mr. Jamieson: To date 112 local authorities have notified my Department that they are using or intend to use the section 74 powers to charge utility companies. We understand that all, or nearly all, of those have already imposed charges for overstaying.

Nuclear Material (Rail Accidents)

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about the recent accident involving a train carrying nuclear material; and if he will make a statement on the performance of the emergency services in response. [62150]

Mr. Jamieson: The recent incident at Brookland crossing in Kent on 11 June involved a train carrying an empty nuclear fuel flask destined for Dungeness nuclear power station. The collision is estimated to have occurred at less than 5 mph. There was no damage to the flask, and minor damage to the front of the locomotive and the heavy goods vehicle, which it struck. Emergency services and specialist support from the nearby nuclear power station attended and information suggests that the response was adequate to deal with this incident.

The UK is currently undergoing an audit, at our request, by the International Atomic Energy Agency under the auspices of its Transport Safety Appraisal Service (TranSAS). The audit team is formed from expert participants and observers from several countries and international bodies. The audit is intended to examine the regulatory and enforcement infrastructure in the United Kingdom related to the transport of radioactive material. This incident occurred while the TranSAS audit team were examining emergency response arrangements. The team visited Dungeness nuclear power station on 18 June and investigated the effectiveness of the response to the incident. The final report of the TranSAS mission is due later this year and copies will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Silverstone Bypass

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the *(a)* circumstances, *(b)* sum involved and *(c)* purpose of the expenditure for which a direction was sought, relating to when an accounting officer sought direction from the Minister for Transport, Local Government and the Regions before authorising expenditure relating to the Silverstone bypass. [62148]

Mr. Jamieson: The Silverstone Bypass was due to open in time for this year's Formula 1 British Grand Prix but progress was severely delayed due to last year's foot and mouth outbreak and exceptionally wet autumn.

In previous years there have been serious problems with access to the Silverstone Circuit with resulting traffic congestion. The FIA, motorsport's governing body, had threatened to remove the British Grand Prix from future Formula 1 seasons and a major factor behind their agreeing to retain the British Grand Prix was the commitment by the Government that the access difficulties would not arise this year.

Authority was sought to pay for different working methods to recover lost time and to guarantee a temporary use of part of the bypass for the Grand Prix to be held this July. This was done in recognition of the wider national interest in ensuring the security of the British Grand Prix for future years.

The cost of accelerating the works is £8.064 million. This covers the cost of additional dry materials suitable for winter working; out of hours working at quarries, bituminous material production sites and the associated additional cost of transporting those materials; additional earthworks to remove the saturated material and provide accelerated drainage, and additional contractor's costs.

Tram and Light Rail Schemes

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* published on the respective costs and benefits of tram and light rail schemes compared to schemes to promote greater bus use. [62805]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department has commissioned a number of research projects which have looked at the impacts of particular light rail and bus schemes, but have not sought to compare alternatives. There are many published studies which seek to compare the respective cost and benefits of the two modes. These include 'Bus or light rail: making the right choice' (Environmental and Transport Planning, 2000), for which my Department was among the funders.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the average public subsidy per journey is for *(a)* tram and light rail schemes, *(b)* bus routes and *(c)* underground railway schemes. [62810]

Mr. Jamieson: Relevant statistics are published in "Transport Statistics Bulletin", from which the following are extracts:

Local bus services, Great Britain, 2000–01

A. Concessionary fare reimbursement—£468 million

B. Fuel duty rebate—£362 million

C. Total subsidy (A+B)—£830 million

D. Number of passenger journeys—4,309 million

E. Subsidy per passenger journey (C/A)—£0.19.

In addition, public transport support of £386 million was paid by local authorities mainly to support local bus services which were socially necessary but were not commercially viable. This includes Rural Bus Subsidy grant, Rural Bus Challenge, payments to operators, professional and technical services, and Pension Increase Act costs.

For tram and light rail schemes and Glasgow Underground, the only public subsidy is concessionary fare reimbursement, the figures for which cannot be disaggregated from those for ferries. The combined figures for this expenditure are in Table 21 of "Transport Statistics Bulletin".

For London Underground, concessionary fare reimbursement was £26 million in 2000–01, and passenger journeys 970 million, giving a figure per journey of 3p.

Transport Strategies

Mr. Best: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what measures he is taking to ensure that integrated transport systems receive high priority from local planners; [63575]

(2) what measures he is taking to ensure that local people are fully involved in consultation processes when transport strategies are being drawn up by a local authority. [63576]

Mr. Spellar: Our guidance to local authorities on local transport plans (LTPs) and LTP annual progress reports (APRs) makes clear the importance of public participation not only in the development of the strategies and measures proposed within the plan but also on-going consultation during implementation. Evidence of participation is considered as part of the assessment of LTPs and APRs in determining the annual local transport capital settlement for authorities.

We have also made clear in our guidance the need to demonstrate consistency between an authority's local transport plan and its local development plan. Guidance issued to local authorities on planning policies further emphasises the role of land use planning in delivering our integrated transport strategy. It is for the local authority to determine its local priorities but we have, as part of the planning Green Paper published last December, put forward proposals to improve the planning processes.

Traffic Reduction Targets

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what guidance he has issued to steering groups and local authorities on how road traffic reduction targets should be considered in multi-modal studies. [63503]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department issued guidance in April 2002 on the way in which multi-modal studies should assess the contribution of strategies to the eight public service agreements set out in the 10-year plan for transport, published in July 2000, including the target

> "to reduce road congestion on the inter-urban network and in large urban areas in England below current levels by 2010".

The guidance is a supplement to the DETR publication "Guidance on Methodology for Multi Modal Studies", dated March 2000. These documents can be found on the Department's website at ww[illegible]ov.uk.

Green Ministers

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport who the designated Green Minister is for his Department. [63506]

Mr. Jamieson: I am the Green Minister.

Rail Regulator

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the future of the Office of the Rail Regulator. [63763]

Mr. Jamieson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport made a statement on 12 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 1261W.

Network Rail

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will be represented on the board of Network Rail. [63761]

Mr. Jamieson: No.

National Air Traffic Services

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what rates of interest apply to the short-term loan made available to NATS by the Government. [62994]

Mr. Jamieson: This matter is commercially confidential.

West Coast Main Line

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the role of *(a)* Bechtel and *(b)* other contractors on the West Coast Main Line. [64097]

Mr. Jamieson: Railtrack plc announced on 13 February that they had appointed Bechtel to lead a strengthened delivery team for the West Coast route modernisation. Railtrack employ a wide range of other companies in connection with the project.

Railway Crime

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent discussions he has had with the railway industry with regard to railway crime; and if he will make a statement. [64141]

Mr. Jamieson: Regular discussions are held with the railways industry on a variety of matters that effect the operation and safety of the railway, including the prevention of crime. For example, my right hon. Friend the Minister for Transport launched a scheme on Monday 24 June involving Connex Trains who are sponsoring their staff to become Special Constables with the British Transport police by giving them time off work for their police duties and an annual bonus payment.

Train Operating Companies

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what reward payments have been given to each train operating company in each year since 1994; and if he will make a statement. [64145]

Mr. Jamieson: The annual reports of the Strategic Rail Authority and its predecessors (the Shadow Strategic Rail Authority and Office of Passenger Rail Franchising—OPRAF) contain tables showing, for each franchise, the amounts paid and received as basic (non-incentive) payments and incentive regime payments. These documents are in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made in re-franchising in respect of each train operating company; and if he will make a statement. [64211]

Mr. Jamieson: The information requested has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Rail Industry

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what *(a)* representations he has received and *(b)* discussions he has had with (i) the SRA, (ii) the Rail Regulator, (iii) ATOC and (iv) the rail industry with regard to the conditions of carriage; and if he will make a statement. [64095]

Mr. Jamieson: None.

Roundabout, Hunter's Cross

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will publish the Highways Agency study into the construction of a roundabout at the junction of the A35 and the B3165 at Hunter's Cross, Raymond's Hill, Devon. [63801]

Mr. Jamieson: The Highways Agency has commissioned a study to consider the options for improving the junction between the A35 trunk road and the B3165 at Raymond's Hill near Axminster in Devon. A number of options are being investigated, including the provision of a roundabout. I will ask the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member with details of the study's conclusions when they have completed their investigations. This is expected to be in the autumn.

Disabled Parking Scheme

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, (1) pursuant to the answer of 17 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 73W, on disability vehicle stickers, how many local authorities collect data on the number of charges and convictions for misuse of disabled persons' parking cards; [64449]

(2) pursuant to the answer of 17 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 73W, on disability vehicle stickers, why records on the number of charges and convictions for the misuse of disabled persons' parking cards are not kept centrally; and how trends in the misuse of disabled persons' parking cards are recorded. [64450]

Mr. Jamieson: There is no legal requirement for local authorities to hold such records and the Department does not currently ask for that information as part of its annual blue badge statistical survey of local authorities in England. The devolved Administrations are responsible for the scheme in other parts of the UK.

The issues of misuse and abuse of badges are being considered as part of the review of the scheme which is currently under way.

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what action he is taking to prevent able-bodied drivers using disabled parking spaces; [64356]

(2) what powers *(a)* the police and *(b)* local authorities have to deal with the abuse of disabled parking bays by able-bodied drivers. [64394]

Mr. Jamieson: The Blue Badge scheme only applies to on-street parking. There is a wide variety of powers to tackle abuse available to local authorities, who are responsible for administering the Blue Badge scheme. It is an offence under section 47 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 to park a vehicle which is not displaying a badge in a designated disabled person's parking bay.

Off-street car parks are private property and charges and conditions of use are a contractual matter between the owner and the motorist. In these car parks, spaces marked for badge holders only are in most cases not legally enforceable, but depend on the courtesy and consideration of other drivers. Car park operators could ask a non-disabled driver to move their car from a space set aside for disabled people but they might not be in a position to insist upon it.

The Department has, however, given its full support to the 'Baywatch' campaign run by a coalition of disability organisations (including the Disabled Drivers Association and the Disabled Drivers' Motor Club). They are committed to encouraging greater protection of disabled persons' parking bays in retail car parks from abuse by non-disabled drivers.

The issues of abuse and misuse of badges are a key part of the major review of the Blue Badge scheme that we are currently undertaking.

In the meantime, it is open to anybody to bring instances of fraudulent use to the attention of the police, traffic wardens, the appropriate local authority or car park operators and we will continue to work with these bodies and stakeholder groups to minimise the potential for abuse and misuse.

Eye Tests

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the DVLA research project into visual field eye tests will be completed; and when the results of the study will be published. [64348]

Mr. Jamieson: Two complementary research studies are in progress.

One study uses subjects with peripheral visual field defects and assesses their performance in a range of tasks that may be relevant to driving impairment. The report on this study is likely to be available in mid 2003.

The other study is similarly examining the effect of visual field loss in the central area of the field. The report of this study is likely to be available towards the end of 2003.

Station Accessibility

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what additional funds the Strategic Rail Authority plans to make available to *(a)* train operating companies and *(b)* Connex South East to upgrade stations to conform with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995; [64253]

(2) when the Strategic Rail Authority will have completed its review of train operators' disabled people's protection policy to identify where station facilities need to be improved. [64252]

Mr. Jamieson: Although it is the responsibility of the station facility operators to ensure that their stations meet the requirement of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995, the Strategic Rail Authority has said in its strategic plan that it will make available additional funding to ensure train operating companies are resourced, where necessary, to implement the requirements of the DDA on access to stations. Until the review of the Disabled People's Protection Policy for each train operator has been completed—the SRA expects by the end of this year—the full scope of the work required will not be known and priorities will then have to be applied to implementation.

Manchester-Waterloo Rail Link

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the proposed direct rail link from Manchester to Waterloo. [64350]

Mr. Jamieson: The train operator Wales and Borders currently provides one direct service between Manchester Piccadilly and London Waterloo via Leominster, but there is no requirement under the terms of the franchise for any such service.

Home Working

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps his Department has taken to encourage employees to work from home; and if he will make a statement. [64532]

Mr. Jamieson: Working at or from home is one option for working flexibly which is available to staff in my Department. At present over 350 staff currently have remote access to out IT systems to enable them to work from home or on the move.

South London Metro

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals the Government have to develop a south London Metro. [64286]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 25 June 2002]:* Implementation of the Strategic Rail Authority's plan will deliver increased frequency of suburban services and substantial investment in stations. Many stations in south London already receive high frequency services but more will be done to improve journeys and make better use of the established network in south London. Improvements will be delivered via franchise replacement, major projects such as the East London Line extension, and specific programmes for station improvements. The SRA is considering fares integration in London as part of its wider review of fares policy. It is also working with stakeholders to develop improved journey information and branding.

Pelican Crossing (Chelmsford)

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to revise the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 1994; when his Department will give approval for the operation of the pelican crossing in Chelmer Village Way, Chelmsford; and if he will make a statement. [63940]

Mr. Jamieson: We expect to introduce revised and updated Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions in the autumn. My officials received an application on 6 June to authorise signals for a Toucan (pedestrian and cycle crossing) in Chelmer Village Way and the authorisation was issued on 20 June.

Thames River Crossing

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what cost estimate his Department made of a new Thames river crossing from Cliffe Marshes in Kent to Canvey Island. [63797]

Mr. McNulty: I have been asked to reply.

There are no proposals with detailed cost estimates at this time for a new Thames crossing between Cliffe Marshes and Canvey Island that my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister is considering.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to consult local hon. Members, local councils and Essex county council on the possibility of a new Thames river crossing. [63792]

Mr. McNulty: I have been asked to reply.

Consultation with local hon. Members and local councils, including Essex county council, is currently taking place in relation to the Government's London Orbital multi modal study (Orbit). Consultants published a provisional strategy for Orbit on 11 June 2002. This includes recommendations for further work on a lower Thames crossing. Details of the provisional strategy are included in an Orbit newsletter sent out to 3,000 key stakeholders in June. The content of the provisional strategy has not been formally considered by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister or his officials at this time.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what meetings, and on what dates, his Department *(a)* has had and *(b)* are planned with the Thames Gateway South Essex on a possible new Thames crossing; and what the agenda for these meetings was. [63796]

Mr. McNulty: I have been asked to reply.

The Department has not had any meetings with the Thames Gateway South Essex Partnership about this specific issue. Furthermore no such meetings are planned at this time.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with the Thames Gateway South Essex on possible new Thames river crossings. [63795]

Mr. McNulty: I have been asked to reply.

No discussions about this specific issue have taken place with the Thames Gateway South Essex Partnership.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what options he has discussed for a new Thames river crossing to the east of the existing crossing at Dartford. [63794]

Mr. McNulty: I have been asked to reply.

There are no proposals at this time for a new Thames river crossing east of the existing crossing at Dartford that my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister is considering.

Electoral Arrangements

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much public expenditure was incurred in organising the 2001 general election in *(a)* the UK, *(b)* Greater London and *(c)* Enfield; and if he will make a statement. [58967]

Yvette Cooper: I have been asked to reply.

The funds made available to acting returning officers to conduct the 2001 general election were as follows:

(a) England and Wales—£27 million;

(b) Greater London—£5 million; and

(c) Enfield—£153,000.

These figures represent advances made; when final accounts are submitted and paid they are expected to rise. In addition in England and Wales, around £18 million was paid for the delivery of candidates' election material and for electoral equipment. No further breakdown of this figure is available in the form requested. The responsibility for funding parliamentary elections in Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for the Secretaries of State for Scotland and Northern Ireland, respectively.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Broadband

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of benefits of access to broadband services for SMEs; and if she will make a statement. [61791]

Mr. Timms: The Government have conducted studies of the benefits of ICT and e-commerce to business and SME's. Other organisations have conducted studies which suggest that broadband has a range of benefits, with the potential to bring about productivity improvement e.g. lower transaction costs when communicating with customers and suppliers.

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what comparative research she has commissioned on the delivery of broadband in *(a)* other European countries and *(b)* the US. [63665]

Mr. Timms: UK Online: the broadband future published in February 2001 sets out our research activities. The UK also has bilateral contacts with countries in the EU and around the world, and has a memorandum of understanding on co-operation with the US Federal Trade Commission. This allows us to benchmark progress more qualitatively.

We are also keeping in close touch with analysis of developments in broadband markets being carried out by the OECD.

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent discussions she has had with business leaders regarding broadband; and what was the result of those discussions. [63667]

Mr. Timms: I have recently met with a number of business leaders, including representatives of several mobile telecommunications firms, BT, Cable companies and Tesco.com. I hope to meet shortly with several other major players, both from within and outside the telecoms sector. I have also met Keith Todd, the chairman of the Broadband Stakeholder Group, to hear the views and comments of the 250 members of the Stakeholder Group.

The Government have worked closely with business and other stakeholders to develop and take forward the UK broadband strategy and will continue to do so. Latest developments in this strategy can be found at www.e-envoy.gov.uk, and my speeches and press notices on broadband can be found at www.dti.gov.uk

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made on the target set in February 2001 to make the UK the most competitive and extensive broadband market in the G7 by 2005. [63666]

Mr. Timms: The UK Online annual report of December 2001 stated that the UK had the fifth most extensive market and the fourth most competitive market in the G7.

Since then the market has continued to develop, with prices falling, coverage increasing and take-up accelerating. Around 66 per cent. of the population are now able to access one or more of ADSL, cable or wireless technologies, with nearly 40 per cent. having a choice.

BT has now enabled 1,115 exchanges to deliver broadband services, and has given customers the ability to register their interest with a promise to make broadband available when the level reaches a specified figure. This allow more than 40 resellers of BT's wholesale ADSL to offer broadband to customers.

The Government have set out a comprehensive programme of action, including a £30 million fund to help the regional development agencies develop innovative schemes to extend broadband networks, as well as measures to tackle competition, supply, demand and content.

We will shortly be announcing the next steps for public sector procurement, with a view to maximising the buying power of the public sector and ensuring that broadband is bought in a cost-effective, joined-up manner.

Freepost Services

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if she will make a statement about the Consignia freepost service for services for the blind; [63178]

(2) if she will make a statement on the continuation of the Freepost service to the blind. [63674]

Mr. Timms: I refer the hon. Friend to the answer given on 28 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1560W.

Prize Draws

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information her Department has collated regarding unsolicited prize draws sent from foreign addresses. [63492]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Department have received a large amount of correspondence from the public about unsolicited prize draws, many of which originate from overseas, making it difficult for consumers to identify the source of mailings.

The Office of Fair Trading currently have over thirty cases of mailings from overseas under investigation. In response, the OFT is gathering intelligence on each deceptive mailing in order to trace the originators and to actively pursue those responsible.

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions her Department has had with relevant authorities in other countries regarding unsolicited prize draws sent by mail to addresses in this country. [63493]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Department works closely with enforcement bodies, such as the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) and the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA), who work with their European and other international counterparts on unsolicited mailings.

The OFT has the status of a "Community qualified entity", which enables it to bring proceedings under the Injunctions directive (98/27/EC), in other European Community member states in order to protect UK consumer interests.

The OFT raised the issue of misleading mailings at the most recent European meeting of the International Marketing Supervision Network (IMSN), with a view to co-ordinating Europe-wide action against such mailings. The OFT has also held discussions on misleading mailings with north American law enforcement agencies, including Industry Canada, the Ontario Ministry of Consumer and Business Affairs, the Ontario provincial police and the US federal trade commission.

The ASA supervises the British Codes of Advertising and Sales Promotion and works with national and international regulators. Where misleading mailings may have originated outside of the UK, the ASA liaises with regulatory bodies in the EU via the European Advertising Standards Alliance (EASA).

Post Offices (Fraud)

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many post offices were temporarily closed because of suspected fraud within their premises in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the rest of the United Kingdom in each year since 1995. [63488]

Mr. Timms: These are matters which fall within the operational responsibilities of Post Office Limited and I have asked the Chief Executive to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Military Exports

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many export licences for military supplies to *(a)* India and *(b)* Pakistan have been granted which are still being used by supplying companies. [63347]

Nigel Griffiths: Because the granting of an export licence does not necessarily translate into an actual export, it would entail disproportionate cost to contact all exporters with current licences to India and Pakistan to establish which, if any, are still being used by supplying companies.

Small Business Service

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many *(a)* small and *(b)* medium size companies have contacted the Small Business Service since 2000; and if she will make a statement on future operational activity of the SBS. [63670]

Nigel Griffiths: The Small Business Service (SBS) was set up in April 2000. It works through 45 local Business Links to deliver business support services to SMEs. Small businesses are able to access these services via a number of channels—by calling the Business Link National Enquiry Line on 0845 600 9006; by logging on to the www.businesslink.org website; or by directly contacting their local Business Link. These channels became operational in April 2001.

Although we do not hold comprehensive information on the size of the companies that have contacted us, statistics for the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002, are as follows:

Number of SMEs that were provided with information or advice by their local Business Link—244,685

Number of calls to the Business Link National Enquiry Line—68,053

Number of e-mail inquiries generated via www.businesslink.org—4,989.

Prior to April 2001 comprehensive contact statistics were not recorded.

In addition, from April 2000 until the end of May 2002 the SBS National Enquiry Line (0114 259 7788) has dealt with over 11,860 inquiries.

SBS future operational activity

The SBS Business Plan for 2002–03 will be available on the website www.sbs.gov.uk in July. This sets out the operational priorities.

Engineering

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to make engineering more attractive as a career to students. [63664]

Alan Johnson: The Department supports a number of activities that are intended to encourage the young to appreciate the benefits of careers within the engineering sector. The individual programmes are as follows:

Through SETNET, the Science, Engineering, Technology and Maths Network, DTI supports the 53 SETPoints across the UK with delivery into schools of activities intended to enhance the curricula. Each SETPoint is in the second year of a three-year Business Plan through which they will ensure that every child under 16 has the opportunity at least once in each Key Stage, or the equivalent, to participate in an appropriate activity. This is bolstered by our support for the Science Engineering Ambassadors (SEAs) programme, which encourages people working in STEM based careers to pass on their experiences to those in school.

The Department is also supporting the Engineering Technology Board one of whose core aims is to reverse the downward trend of people, including students, with appropriate qualifications and skills taking up Engineering and Technology based careers.

In addition, there are a number of smaller programmes, which the Government support. These include:

The WISE (Women in Science and Engineering) Programme which aims to encourage more women to enter these fields;

Work being done by Forum for the Future to link engineering sector with sustainable development;

Part of our grant in aid to the Royal Academy of Engineering is used to support a range of educational programmes, collectively known as BEST;

The Engineering and Physical Research Council (EPSRC) funds a large schools programme, which is aimed, in part, to future engineers;

The Copus grant scheme aims to make engineering more attractive as a career to students funded by the Office of Science and Technology and the Royal Society; and

A number of programmes aimed at encouraging engineering in specific sectors.

Total funding is approximately £10,500,000 per annum.

Arms Sales (Israel)

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on export controls on UK companies selling arms to Israel. [63970]

Nigel Griffiths: Companies exporting arms and other items controlled for strategic reasons from the UK to Israel require an export licence from the Department of Trade and Industry's Export Control Organisation.

I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary to the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) on 15 April 2002, *Official Report*, columns 722–23W.

Office for Civil Nuclear Security

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent appointments have been made from her Office for Civil Nuclear Security to advisory bodies of the Director-General of the International Atomic Energy Agency. [63846]

Mr. Wilson: The Deputy Director of the Office for Civil Nuclear Security (OCNS) has been appointed to the IAEA's Advisory Group on Nuclear Security which held its first meeting in February this year. Advisory group members are appointed by the Director General and are recruited in their own capacity as recognised experts in the field of nuclear security.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on paragraph 4 of the report of the Director of Civil Nuclear Security, covering the period October 2000 to March 2002. [63838]

Mr. Wilson: The Director of Civil Nuclear Security, the security regulator for the UK civil nuclear industry, stated in paragraph 4 of his first annual report on the "State of Security in the Civil Nuclear Industry and the Effectiveness of Security Regulation" that it is essential that stringent security precautions are taken by the civil nuclear industry in view of the consequences that the misappropriation of nuclear material or a successful sabotage attack on a nuclear facility might have. It is not our policy to disclose details of security measures taken at civil nuclear sites. I am satisfied by the assurances the director has given me about the security measures in place which are kept under continuing review.

Civil Nuclear Industry

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the development of design basis threat planning documents for the civil nuclear industry. [63841]

Mr. Wilson: I cannot add to the information about the key planning document known as the design basis threat (DBT) which the Director of the Civil Nuclear Security referred to in his recent annual report on the "State of Security in the Civil Nuclear Industry and the Effectiveness of Security Regulation", placed in the Libraries of the House on 11 June 2002. The assessment is classified and no further details can be published. The Director of Civil Nuclear Security assures himself that a site operator's ability to protect against the DBT is adequate and is tested.

Wave Power

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to establish a publicly owned wave power production company. [63857]

Mr. Wilson: None. The Government's renewable energy programme includes £5 million to support demonstration and testing of wave and tidal technology projects.

Terrorist Threats

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when her Office for Civil Nuclear Security contacted the United States and Japanese regulatory authorities in respect of the security arrangements to deal with the potential terrorist threats to plutonium mox fuel in transit by sea. [63842]

Mr. Wilson: Regarding the MOX fuel that was exported to Japan in 1999 to be returned to the UK, the Office for Civil Nuclear Security maintains regular contact with the Japanese Government and regulatory authorities, most recently in January this year to consult on security arrangements for the return shipment. They have not been in direct contact with authorities in the United States in this context; any business with the US Government is normally carried out through the embassy in Washington.

Staff Transfers

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will extend the Redundancy Payments (Continuity of Employment of Local Government etc.) (Modification) Order 1999 to cover staff transferred from a local authority to a private contractor undertaking a contract longer than five years. [64310]

Alan Johnson: Employing bodies who wish to be included on future amendments to the Redundancy Payments (Continuity of Employment in Local Government etc.) (Modification) Order 1999 should write to the Department's Employment Relations Directorate, giving full particulars of their organisation and its functions. All such requests are considered in the context of the employing bodies' connection with or involvement in the public sector.

Copyright

Mr. Cameron: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what representations she has received in the last 12 months asking that trading standards officers should take responsibility for enforcing copyright offences; and if she will make a statement; [64307]

(2) what plans she has to introduce section 107A of the Copyright Designs and Patents Act 1988; and if she will make a statement. [64306]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The industry umbrella group, the Alliance Against Counterfeiting and Piracy, has lobbied for section 107A of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 to be brought into force. The specific investigatory tools to enforce the copyright offences that would be given to trading standards officers by section 107A would be in addition to the ones they have under related trade marks and trade descriptions laws. The delay in bringing section 107A into force arises from concerns about possible resource implications that we are seeking to resolve.

Energy Policy

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps are being taken to explain to UK electricity consumers the proportion of their energy costs due to the Renewables Obligation. [64347]

Mr. Wilson: In the statutory consultation on the Renewables Obligation, published in August 2001, it was estimated that its introduction would result in a maximum increase in average electricity prices of just under 5 per cent. by 2010 in comparison with 1999 prices. Actual costs arising from the Obligation will depend on what suppliers actually pay for any additional renewable energy supplies or for Renewables Obligation Certificates (ROCs).

In a competitive electricity market, it is for individual electricity suppliers to determine the price of the electricity which they provide to consumers. In determining those prices, suppliers will have to take account of a wide range of influencing factors, including any arising from the Renewables Obligation.

The buy-out mechanism operates to ensure that any extra costs arising from the Obligation do not reach an unacceptable level. Recycling of buy-out receipts will provide an incentive to further investment in renewables—thus helping suppliers to work towards reducing overall costs.

NETA

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the workings of NETA during its first complete year. [64344]

Mr. Wilson: Ofgem, the gas and electricity regulator, is currently preparing a report on the operation of NETA in its first year. This is due to be published in July 2002.

Selby Coal Mine

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will publish the report prepared for the Department on the economic and geological prospects of the Selby coal mine complex. [64584]

Mr. Wilson: It is my intention to publish this report after we have received the final version.

Press Office

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many *(a)* full-time equivalents were employed by her press office and *(b)* secondees were placed in the press office in the last five years; and if she will make a statement. [64583]

Ms Hewitt: The number of press officers was as follows:

As at 1 January	*Press officers*
1998	17
1999	24
2000	25
2001	23
2002	23

There have been a number of short-term loans to the press office from other Government Departments and agencies, but none over this period from the private sector or non-Government bodies. We do not keep records of the number of loans from Government bodies to the press office.

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Scientific and Technical Committee for the Community Fund for Tobacco Research and Information is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [61722]

Mr. Morley: I have been asked to reply.

The Scientific and Technical Committee for the Community Fund for Tobacco Research and Information is a scientific committee set up to assist the European Commission in the management of the Community Tobacco Fund. The Community Tobacco Fund finances action in the areas of improving public awareness of the harmful effects of tobacco consumption and identifying specific measures to help tobacco growers switch to other crops or other economic activities.

The Scientific and Technical Committee for the Community Fund for Tobacco Research and Information is not attended by officials of Her Majesty's Government and does not give rise to costs to UK public funds.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General which inspectorates have been involved in the thematic inspections undertaken by the HMCPSI; and what the title was of each thematic inspection. [60208]

The Solicitor-General: HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate has participated in six joint inspectorate thematic inspections since April 1999. The names of the other inspectorates and titles of each inspection are as follows:

How Long Youth Cases Take. A joint inspection by HM Inspectorate of Constabulary, HM Magistrates' Courts Service Inspectorate and HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (published May 1999).

Casework Information Needs within the Criminal Justice System. A joint review by HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate, HM Magistrates' Courts Service Inspectorate, HM Inspectorate of Constabulary, HM Inspectorate of Prisons, HM Inspectorate of Probation and the Social Services Inspectorate (published April 2000).

The Implementation of section 1 of the Magistrates' Courts (Procedure) Act 1998. A joint inspection by HM Magistrates' Courts Service Inspectorate, HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (published November 2000).

Report on the Joint Inspection of the Progress made in Reducing Delay in the Youth Justice System. A joint inspection by HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate, HM Magistrates' Courts Service and HM Inspectorate of Constabulary (published February 2001).

Report on the Joint Inspection into the Investigation and Prosecution of Cases Involving Allegations of Rape. A joint inspection by HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate and HM Inspectorate of Constabulary (published April 2002).

Report on the Joint follow-up Inspection of the Progress made in Reducing Delay in the Youth Justice System. A joint inspection by HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate, HM Magistrates' Courts Service Inspectorate and HM Inspectorate of Constabulary (published May 2002).

A joint inspection of Discharged Committals in the West Midlands Area has just been completed by a team of inspectors drawn from HMCPSI, HMIC and HMMCSI. This is the first joint inspection of any part of the work of the same CPS, Police and Magistrates' Court Service area. The report is expected to be published in July 2002.

In addition, work is continuing on two other thematic reviews. One is a review into Listing Procedures in the magistrates and Crown courts in conjunction with HMIC and HMMCSI and the other is a review, entitled "Joint Inter-Agency inspection of Safeguards for Children", examining the protection afforded to children by the relevant agencies. This latter is being undertaken by HMCPSI and seven other inspectorates:

(i) Social Services Inspectorate

(ii) HM Inspectorate of Education and Schools (Ofsted)

(iii) Commission for Health Improvement (CHI)

(iv) HM Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC)

(v) HM Inspectorate of the National Probation Service for England and Wales

(vi) HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMI Prisons)

(vii) Her Majesty's Magistrates' Court Service Inspectorate (HMMCSI).

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General what criteria the HMCPSI uses to determine the quality of CPS casework. [60209]

The Solicitor-General: HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate assesses the quality of CPS casework by a careful evaluation of how the CPS performs its four key functions: the provision of pre-charge advice to the police; reviewing cases following the commencement of proceedings; preparing cases for court; and presenting cases in court.

Inspectors focus on a number of main themes under each of these functions. Under pre-charge advice and case review, inspectors assess whether the law, the tests set out in the Code for Crown Prosecutors, and charging standards agreed between the CPS and police nationally are all being correctly interpreted and applied; and whether all actions and decisions regarding cases are being taken at the right time. Inspectors pay particular attention to special categories of cases, including those involving racist incidents, child abuse and domestic violence cases.

The evaluation of case preparation is more process based. Inspectors consider how the CPS discharges its duties of disclosure, the timeliness of its source of material upon the defence and the court, how the CPS prepares cases for trial, file management and endorsements, and the effectiveness of specific processes such as the monitoring of custody time limits.

In relation to case presentation, inspectors assess whether prosecuting advocates have the appropriate skills to present cases fairly, thoroughly and firmly and to test defence cases rigorously, and whether they exercise these skills to enable courts to reach just decisions.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General what action has been taken by the HMCPSI to ensure that scrutiny is consistent across the areas to provide objective assessment and comparisons between areas. [60210]

The Solicitor-General: HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate ensures that scrutiny is consistent across all areas by applying the same methodology in all its area inspections, but with a balanced approach that takes into account different practices and characteristics between the areas. Therefore, inspectors always examine key aspects of an area's performance, such as the application of the tests contained in the Code for Crown Prosecutors and the area's compliance with the duties of disclosure of unused material and the standard of advocacy. These findings are always published in a table of performance measures in the report, and compared with performance data of other CPS areas inspected to date. Key issues peculiar to the area are highlighted and discussed elsewhere in the report.

Assessing the quality of legal decision-making is difficult as decisions frequently turn on legal or evidential issues that are essentially matters of professional judgment. Inspectors therefore assess whether a decision or an action by a prosecutor was one which was properly open to a reasonable prosecutor having regard to the principles set out in the Code for Crown Prosecutors and other relevant guidance. The application of this objective test means that inspectors do not "disagree" with a decision unless it is wrong in principle, and not merely because an individual inspector may have come to a different conclusion.

The Inspectorate is not a large organisation, and guidance has been formulated, and training opportunities used, to help develop a uniformity of approach. Each inspection team consists of several inspectors. They will have worked on different areas and with different colleagues. This allows the exchange of ideas and opinions before conclusions are drawn, and so the risk of different standards being applied are minimised. Finally, the scrutiny given to the draft report by the relevant Group Director and the Chief Inspector, together with discussions about the emerging findings and the draft report with senior area managers, help to ensure a consistent approach and the fair and objective assessment of the performance of each area.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General if she will list the reports which have been produced by HMCPSI since the inception of the service for the DPP and the Law Officers. [60212]

The Solicitor-General: HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate has carried out a total of 86 CPS branch and area inspections since 1997. A list appears at the conclusion of this answer.

47 branch reports and one report on a complete area (London) were published between 1997 and 1999 when the Crown Prosecution Service comprised 13 large areas with over 90 branches.

In April 1999 the CPS was reorganised into 42 areas and restructured in accordance with the recommendations of the Review of the CPS (the Glidewell report). Since that time, 37 area inspection reports have been published. The inspections of the remaining five areas are currently at different stages of completion and all reports should be published by September 2002.

HMCPS Inspectorate has also published nine thematic reports and has participated in six joint inspections.

The Chief Inspector for the time being of HMCPSI has, in addition, published four annual reports. Three were on a non-statutory basis. The inspectorate, which had previously been part of the CPS itself, was placed on an independent statutory basis on 11 October 2000 when the Crown Prosecution Service Act 2000 came into effect. The first statutory annual report was laid before Parliament on 2 May 2002.

Branch reports (August-July 1999)

Branch office	*Date*	*Number*
Dorset	August 1997	1/97
Exeter	August 1997	2/97
Leeds, North	September 1997	3/97
West Kent	September 1997	4/97
Liverpool, South	October 1997	5/97
Derbyshire	October 1998	6/97
Cambridgeshire	November 1997	7/97
Gloucestershire	November 1997	8/97
Teeside	November 1997	9/97
London (area report)	December 1997	
Norfolk	January 1998	1/98
Humberside	January 1998	2/98
Leicestershire	January 1998	3/98
Warwickshire	February 1998	4/98
Wiltshire	February 1998	5/98
Hertfordshire	March 1998	6/98
Surrey	March 1998	7/98

Branch reports (August-July 1999)

Branch office	*Date*	*Number*
Lincolnshire	March 1998	8/98
Bedfordshire	April 1998	9/98
North Yorkshire	April 1998	10/98
Gwent	May 1998	11/98
Northants	May 1998	12/98
West Mercia	June 1998	13/98
Durham	June 1998	14/98
Suffolk	June 1998	15/98
Cumbria	July 1998	16/98
Chester	July 1998	17/98
Brent, Harrow and Uxbridge	August 1998	18/98
Bolton and Wigan	August 1998	19/98
North Staffordshire	September 1998	20/98
Highbury	September 1998	21/98
North-Wales	October 1998	22/98
Portsmouth	October 1998	23/98
Camberwell	November 1998	24/98
Stockport/Sale	November 1998	25/98
Wearside	November 1998	26/98
Marylebone/West London	December 1998	27/98
Coventry	January 1999	01/99
Humberside	January 1999	02/99
Enfield/Waltham Forest	January 1999	03/99
Fylde	February 1999	04/99
South Glamorgan	February 1999	05/99
London Youth Branch	March 1999	06/99
Bristol	March 1999	07/99
Barking	April 1999	08/99
Manchester, South	May 1999	09/99
Birmingham 1	May 1999	10/99
Central Casework	July 1999	11/99
Area reports		
Area office		
Dorset	May 2000	01/00
Merseyside	May 2000	02/00
Gloucestershire	July 2000	03/00
West Mercia	July 2000	04/00
Northumbria	September 2000	05/00
Derbyshire	September 2000	06/00
Essex	September 2000	07/00
Nottinghamshire	September 2000	08/00
Cambridgeshire	November 2000	09/00
Durham	November 2000	10/00
Lancashire	November 2000	11/00
South Wales	January 2001	01/01
Suffolk	January 2001	02/01
South Yorkshire	February 2001	03/01
Cheshire	February 2001	04/01
Kent	February 2001	05/01
West Midlands	March 2001	06/01
Hampshire IoW	March 2001	07/01
Northamptonshire	March 2001	08/01
Cleveland	April 2001	09/01
Norfolk	April 2001	10/01
Gwent	May 2001	11/01
Lincolnshire	June 2001	12/01
Gloucestershire (re-insp)	June 2001	13/01
West Yorkshire	July 2001	14/01
Humberside	September 2001	15/01
Staffordshire	September 2001	16/01
Warwickshire	November 2001	17/01
North Yorkshire	November 2001	18/01
London	December 2001	19/01
Bedfordshire	January 2002	01/02
Thames Valley	January 2002	02/02
Dyfed Powys	March 2002	03/02
North Wales	March 2002	04/02
Greater Manchester	March 2002	05/02
Leicestershire	April 2002	06/02
Cumbria	April 2002	07/02
Hertfordshire	May 2002	08/02
Thematic reports		
Cases involving Child Witnesses	January 1998	01/98
Cases involving Domestic Violence	May 1998	02/98
Advice Cases	September 1998	03/98
Adverse Cases	June 1999	01/99
Evaluation of Lay Review and Lay Presentation	August 1999	02/99
Advocacy and Case Presentation	February 2000	01/00
Disclosure of Unused Material	March 2000	02/00
Performance Indicator Compliance and Case Outcomes	July 2000	03/00
Casework with a Minority Ethnic Dimension	May 2002	01/02

Joint Inspections

Subject	*Date*
How Long Youth Cases take (with HMIC and HMMCSI)	May 1999
Casework Information Needs within the CJS (with HMIC, HMMCSI, HMI Prisons, HMI Probation, SSI)	April 2000
Implementation of Section 1 of the Magistrates' Courts (Procedure) Act 1998 (this was an HMMCSI report assisted by HMCPSI and HMIC)	November 2000
Progress Made in Reducing Delay in the Youth Justice System (with HMIC and HMMCSI)	February 2001
Cases Involving an Allegation of Rape (with HMIC)	April 2002
Joint Follow-up Inspection of the Progress Made in Reducing Delay in the Youth Justice System (with HMIC and HMMCSI)	May 2002

HMCPSI annual reports

1997–98

1998–99

1999–2000

2000–01.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General if she will make a statement on the use of lay inspectors within HMCPSI inspections; and if she will list the nominating bodies. [60218]

The Solicitor-General: HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate has used one or more lay inspectors in each area inspection undertaken (save for one in which the lay inspector was unable to attend through illness). Lay inspectors observe and assess the efficiency and effectiveness of the Crown Prosecution Service through a process of observation, inspection and evaluation, primarily in relation to the service's dealings with the public and its ability to assess and interpret the public interest in its decision-making under the Code for Crown Prosecutors.

Lay inspectors help to:

assess the extent to which the CPS undertakes the care and treatment of victims and witnesses;

assess the extent to which prosecutors comply with the Code for Crown Prosecutors specifically in relation to the application of the public interest test;

assess the effectiveness of the relationship between the CPS and the local community; and

assess the effectiveness of the CPS in dealing with complaints.

Lay inspectors bring the broad perspective of an informed member of the public to the CPS inspection process. They contribute to the inspection of CPS areas and assist in formulating recommendations to improve performance where necessary. While lay inspectors are governed by strict rules of confidentiality in relation to individual cases, they play an important part in helping to promote people's awareness of the work undertaken by both the CPS itself and the Inspectorate.

Most lay inspectors have been nominated by:

the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders;

the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux; and

Victim Support.

Some have been nominated by diverse local groups, such as:

local Racial Equality Councils;

the Terence Higgins Trust; or

established local community groups.

In practice, lay inspectors will observe trials in both the magistrates courts and the Crown court and speak to prosecution witnesses when they have finished giving evidence; consider a number of complaints made to the CPS area; consider some files which have been the subject of contentious or borderline decisions, either to proceed or to discontinue the case, under the public interest test in Code for Crown Prosecutors; and, if possible, to join in some interviews both with CPS staff and local representatives of other organisations. Wherever possible, lay inspectors join in the evaluation of the performance of the area, contribute a short report on their observations and findings, and comment upon the draft report.

The Law Officers who held office at the time the first cycle of area inspections was commenced and encouraged the use of lay inspectors and I support the continuation and development of their role.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General which HMCPSI inspections have reviewed discontinuance rates in magistrates' courts since 1999. [60204]

The Solicitor-General: Every HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate Report contains the comments of inspectors on the discontinuance rate in the area inspected. The discontinuance rate is a comparative calculation of case outcomes in the magistrates courts collected by each CPS area.

The Inspectorate publishes in its area reports its assessment of whether decisions to discontinue cases examined during the inspection comply with the Code and compares this with the assessments made in all the areas inspected in the current cycle to date. Inspectors examine the timeliness of the decisions to discontinue, and analyse the reasons for discontinuance of cases and assess the quality of decision-making in a sample of cases, that is whether these decisions are taken in accordance with the law, the Code for Crown Prosecutors, and other relevant guidance.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General if she will make a statement on *(a)* the number of women and numbers of minority-ethnic groups working at SCS level within the HMCPSI and *(b)* the number of men working in an administrative or secretarial capacity with HMCPSI. [60217]

The Solicitor-General: On 24 June 2002 there were no women or members of a minority ethnic group at SCS level within HMCPSI.

HMCPSI employs one male at administrative assistant grade and four males at administrative officer grade. There are four secretaries (including one agency staff), all of whom are female.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General what changes in inspection methodology have been undertaken by HMCPSI following publication of the report entitled Review on Evaluation of HMCPSI Programme and Methodology 2001. [60222]

The Solicitor-General: Changes in inspection methodology following publication of the Report, Review and Evaluation of HMCPSI programme and methodology (2001) include:

a small reduction in the numbers of files requested from CPS areas for examination;

streamlining of file examination to focus on key aspects of decision-making and case management;

adjustment of the inspection timetable to allow extra time for evaluation and report writing;

a more consultative approach with areas, in particular over the draft report;

an increased use of questionnaires for external consultees;

the development of a report template to help consistency, concision, and presentation of information.

In the medium-longer term, the Inspectorate currently has working groups examining its methodology in relation to both casework and management and operational issues with a view to developing more focused and flexible arrangements for the next inspection cycle. These will have greater emphasis on the business excellence model principles, greater use of risk management, and the encouragement of self-review and performance measurement within the CPS itself.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General if she will make a statement on, and explain the variation in, the annual budget allocated to staff training in each CPS area, with specific reference to *(a)* Warwickshire and *(b)* Northamptonshire, in 2001–02. [59349]

The Solicitor-General: CPS areas allocate elements of their administration budgets to fund training courses on the basis of locally determined factors and priorities. The sums allocated, which were set out in my reply to the hon. Member on 6 March 2002, exclude the opportunity cost of backfilling front-line staff when attending courses, and also associated travel and subsistence costs. They also exclude the costs of national training initiatives funded centrally from within the CPS HQ allocation or from the allocations to the service's 10 service centres.

CPS Warwickshire, being the smallest area in the country, is proportionately resourced and elected to set its training budget to reflect only the costs of external courses and fees for admission to conferences. Other expenditure on training was subsumed within its allocation of administration costs. Apparent variations can be misleading and it is significant that in a recent inspection, HM Chief Inspector commended the area on its approach and delivery of training.

CPS Northampton has focused resources on leadership training building on its recent Investors in People accreditation and as part of its application to the Business Excellence Model, particularly to assist in its establishment of a co-located Criminal Justice Unit with the Northamptonshire police. The area's budget is also distorted by an additional allocation that the area bid for separately to undertake a specific project designed to improve advocacy skills. In the event, the project was deferred because the coincidence of its timing with other national training initiatives would have adversely affected operations. The area subsequently reduced its allocation to training accordingly.

Significant funding was set aside centrally for the delivery of a number of national training initiatives over the period which included legislative and procedural training on the implementation of the Human Rights Act; diversity and equality issues; advocacy training for higher court advocates and designated caseworkers; and, more recently, computer literacy training to complement the rollout of the CPS connect 42 infrastructure. Both Warwickshire and Northamptonshire benefited from this training. This funding, amounting to £1.34 million in 1999–2000; £1.53 million in 2000–01; and £3.70 million in 2001–02, cannot be directly associated with each of the 42 CPS area budgets.

DEFENCE

Atomic Weapons Establishments

Mr. Salter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will make a statement on the status of proposals to close AWE Burghfield; [63456]

(2) if he will place in the Library the documents pertaining to proposals to close AWE Burghfield. [63453]

Dr. Moonie: AWE plc, which manages AWE on behalf of the Ministry of Defence, has conducted a feasibility study into whether it would be cost-effective to undertake all operations at a single site. However, this is simply a feasibility study—no decision has been made and no proposals exist to move to a single site, consequently there is no documentation pertaining to the closure of AWE Burghfield.

Air Tankers

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the remaining life expectancy is of the existing air-to-air refuelling tankers. [63630]

Dr. Moonie: The existing Royal Air Force refuelling fleet is made up of two aircraft types comprising 19 VC10s and six TriStars. On current plans, all the VC10s are due to go out of service by the end of this decade with the TriStars leaving service shortly afterwards. Precise dates can be amended as necessary to ensure a smooth transition to the new air-to-air refuelling capability to be provided by the future strategic tanker aircraft when it enters service.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Hercules C-130Js are capable of air-to-air refuelling. [63631]

Dr. Moonie: Each of the Hercules C-130Js can be refuelled in the air as and when necessary.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many air-to-air refuelling operations occurred in each of the last 12 months. [63594]

Dr. Moonie: The table shows the number of air-to-air refuelling sorties that have occurred in each of the last 12 months since June 2001. These figures exclude 456 sorties where no fuel was transferred, including sorties carried out for training purposes.

Air-to-air refuelling sorties

Month/year	*Number*
2001	
June	198
July	179
August	269
September	165
October	264
November	252
December	198
2002	
January	200
February	177
March	132
April	162
May	152

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the A340 air tanker project will have a helicopter refuelling capability. [63595]

Dr. Moonie: I presume that the hon. Member is referring to the future strategic tanker aircraft project for which the potential aircraft solutions are the Airbus A330 and the Boeing 767. The future strategic aircraft will provide air-to-air refuelling capability in support of our fast jet and large aircraft fleets. It will not be a suitable platform from which to undertake helicopter refuelling.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the expected cost of the A340 air tanker project is. [63596]

Dr. Moonie: I presume that the hon. Member is referring to the future strategic tanker aircraft project for which the potential aircraft solutions are the Airbus A330 and the Boeing 767. We are evaluating the potential for the future strategic tanker aircraft capability to be provided via a PFI service based contract. Under such an arrangement costs will depend upon usage of the service. Based on our expected usage over the anticipated 27-year duration of the contract, we currently estimate the whole life cost of the capability to be around £13 billion at outturn prices.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with the Treasury about the A340 Air Tanker project. [63598]

Dr. Moonie: I presume that the hon. Member is referring to the Future Strategic Tanker Aircraft project for which the potential aircraft solutions are the Airbus A330 and the Boeing 767. Officials of the Ministry of Defence regularly discuss the project with their counterparts in the Treasury as a matter of routine. Ministers of the two Departments have not recently discussed the project.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) when he will have completed negotiations with the bidders for the A340 Air Tanker project; when he will announce the preferred bidder for the project; when production of the A340 Air Tanker project will commence; and when it will be fully operational; [63593]

(2) what savings he expects from the 12-month delay to the Air Tanker project; [63599]

(3) for what reason the A340 Air Tanker project is to be delayed. [63597]

Dr. Moonie: I presume that the hon. Member is referring to the Future Strategic Tanker Aircraft project for which the potential aircraft solutions are the Airbus A330 and the Boeing 767. This prospective PFI project is currently in a competitive assessment phase and two consortia have submitted bids for the contract. I announced to the House on 17 June 2002 that commercial discussions with industry are taking longer than anticipated to complete. It is not yet possible to confirm when we will be in a position to announce the preferred contractor and move to financial close on the contract. We are working closely with industry to ensure that sound decisions are taken as quickly as possible. In the meantime, we have delayed the planned introduction of the PFI service until 2008. This will allow further time for these complex negotiations to be completed. The service is expected to be fully operational by 2012. We do not expect to achieve any overall cost saving as a result of the delay.

Shoeburyness

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many compensation payments were made for damage caused by range activities at Shoeburyness in each of the last 20 years. [63786]

Dr. Moonie: The following compensation payments were made in each of the years in question.

	Number of payments
1982	9
1983	6
1984	19
1985	17
1986	12
1987	18
1988	17
1989	15
1990	17
1991	8
1992	16
1993	17
1994	77
1995	34
1996	54
1997	24
1998	46
1999	55
2000	36
2001	36

QinetiQ

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the effect the change in ownership of QinetiQ will have on the number of ranges and range activities; and if he will make a statement. [63782]

Dr. Moonie: These matters are among a number of subjects currently under discussion between the Ministry of Defence and QinetiQ. We will announce the outcome at the earliest opportunity.

Health Spending

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for increased spending on health provision in the armed forces. [64316]

Dr. Moonie: As a consequence of the Strategic Defence Review, an additional £140 million over four years was invested in the Defence Medical Services. We will be considering the conclusions of the recent Medical Quinquennial Review in our next planning round, which I announced in a written answer on 11 April 2002, *Official Report,* column 558W to my hon. Friend the Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Wright).

Oil and Pipelines Agency

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the Quinquennial Review of the Oil and Pipelines Agency will take place. [65179]

Mr. Ingram: The Quinquennial Review of the Oil and Pipelines Agency (OPA) has started. The aim of the review is to examine how the OPA has performed against the Managing Agency Agreement instituted between the Ministry of Defence and the OPA, and to recommend whether there is any potential to improve the cost-effectiveness of its service to its customers.

The review will proceed in two phases. In the first phase a number of 'framework' issues will be examined, including whether its present position as a non-departmental public body (NDPB) is the most appropriate arrangement for delivery of the required services. It will also examine whether existing Government arrangements require adjustment. The report of this first phase of the review is expected in August 2002.

In the second phase, the review will address, in the light of the answers to the 'framework' issues examined in the first phase, a number of questions concerning the operational efficiency of the OPA, including the scope for Strategic Partnership and further streamlining of business processes both within the OPA and between the OPA and the Ministry of Defence. The report of the second phase of the review is expected in September 2002.

The review will be carried out by a small team, which will consult closely with the OPA management and other stakeholders, including the OPA's customers. The Ministry of Defence is interested also to hear the views of other organisations or individuals who would like to make a contribution to the review. Those wishing to do so should send their contributions to the OPA QQR Team, Room 24, DFG HQ, West Moors, Wimborne, Dorset BH21 6QS.

Astute Class Submarines

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence where the Astute class submarines will be based. [65180]

Mr. Ingram: Both the first and second batches of Astute class submarines will be at based HM Naval Base Clyde. The first batch is already on order and a decision on the procurement of the second batch of up to three further Astute class submarines is expected later this year.

Medical Treatment

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the average *(a)* in-patient waiting time and *(b)* out-patient waiting time was for armed forces personnel in (i) 2000, (ii) 2001 and (iii) 2002 treated in (A) the NHS and (B) the private sector; and if he will make a statement. [54136]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 7 May 2002]:* Service patients in the United Kingdom are mainly treated in Defence Secondary Care Agency (DSCA) administered Ministry of Defence Hospital Units (MDHUs) situated in NHS trusts. The DSCA measures treatment waiting times for service personnel at the MDHUs against its Outpatient and Inpatient Key Targets. Details of the Agency's Outpatient and Inpatient Key Targets for 2000–01 and 2001–02 and the Agency's performance against these are given in the tables:

Table 1—2000–01

Key target	*Outcome*
Out-patients	
45 per cent. of service patients to be offered a first out-patient appointment within four weeks of receipt of a referral and 85 per cent. within 13 weeks	34 per cent. within four weeks and 89 per cent. within 13 weeks
In-patients	
75 per cent. of service patients to be offered a treatment date which is within 13 weeks of the decision to give in-patient treatment	68 per cent

Table 2—2001–02

Key target	*Outcome*
Out-patients	
45 per cent. of service patients to be offered a first out-patient appointment within four weeks of receipt of a referral and 90 per cent. within 13 weeks	33 per cent. within four weeks and 68 per cent. within 13 weeks
In-patients	
80 per cent. of service patients to be offered a treatment date which is within 13 weeks of the decision to give in-patient treatment	73 per cent.

Table 1 covers referrals to MDHUs Derriford, Frimley Park, Northallerton and Peterborough and to the Royal Surrey County Hospital (for oral and maxillofacial surgery only). Table 2 also includes referrals to MDHU Portsmouth, which was created on 1 April 2001.

Service personnel can opt to be treated in other NHS hospitals and are referred to these where there is a need for specialised care not available in the Defence Medical Services (DMS) or for geographical reasons. This patient activity is subsumed in overall NHS waiting lists.

The DMS do not maintain a central record of treatment waiting times for the service personnel that they refer to the independent health care sector. Such referrals are made under a variety of schemes managed by either the DSCA or the single services.

Armoured Personnel Vehicles

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans his Department has to consider the replacement of armoured personnel vehicles in use by the UK armed forces. [62901]

Dr. Moonie: Planning for a replacement armoured personnel carrying capability includes the Future Rapid Effect System, the Armoured Battlegroup Support Vehicle and the Multi-Role Armoured Vehicle. We continue to review existing armour personnel vehicle programmes to ensure that they remain coherent with evolving United Kingdom strategic requirements.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Ministerial Salaries

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the annual cost was of ministerial salaries in her Department in *(a)* 1997–98 and *(b)* 2001–02. [60940]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The level of ministerial salaries are recommended by the Senior Salaries Review Body. From May 1997, in this Department's predecessor, the Department for Education and Employment, there was one Cabinet Minister, at an annual salary of £43,991; three Ministers of State, two in the Commons paid at an annual salary of £31,125, and one in the Lords paid at an annual salary of £51,838; and three Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of States, at an annual salary of £23,623. From June 2001, there was one Cabinet Minister, at an annual salary of £68,157; two Ministers of State, at an annual salary of £35,356; and three Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State, two in the Commons paid at an annual salary of £26,835 and one in the Lords paid at an annual salary of £60,961.

Staff Training

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much the Department has spent on staff training and development in each of the last five years. [61052]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The Department for Education and Skills is responsible for encouraging and supporting learning and development throughout the UK. It has set itself the objective of becoming an exemplar learning organisation. To this end it has established leading edge e-learning facilities and continues to develop this and other learning solutions for its staff.

As currently constituted, the Department is barely one year old, following a Machinery of Government change. The figures for 1997–98 to 1999–2000 below relate to the Department for Education and Employment. Figures for 2000–01 and 2001–02 have been adjusted to reflect the Department's current responsibilities.

As a percentage of all staff costs the figures are:

Year	
1997–98	1.5
1998–99	1.5
1999–2000	2.0
2000–01	[1]1.8
2001–02	[1]2.6

[1] Estimated

These figures represent the more formal aspects of learning and development. They do not, for example, capture such areas as coaching by line managers, interchange, secondment, mentoring and self-managed learning.

School Exclusions

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many and what percentage of pupils living in *(a)* a residential care home and *(b)* with foster parents were (i) in special schools and (ii) excluded from school in the last five years for which figures are available, broken down by (A) Government office region and (B) LEA. [62658]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The information is not currently collected centrally in the form requested. Information collected by the Department of Health shows that 1.5 per cent. of children who had been looked after continuously for at least 12 months at 30 September 2000 had received a permanent exclusion during the 1999–2000 school year.

From January 2003, the Annual Schools Census will identify children who are or have been in care, though the type of care will not be recorded.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many fixed-term exclusions from schools in England there were in *(a)* 1990, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000 and *(e)* 2001. [63656]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested is not available centrally.

Fixed term exclusions have been collected for the first time this year on a trial basis. A more regular collection is being considered.

Training Organisations

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the cost has been of national training organisations in each year since coming into existence. [63968]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The first NTO recognitions were in 1997. NTO recognition was withdrawn as of 31 March 2002. The totality of payments recorded for each financial year since April 1997 made by the Department in respect of work contracted to NTOs is as follows:

	£ million
1997–98	4.158
1998–99	8.136
1999–2000	15.008
2000–01	13.214
2001–02	11.948

Bullying

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent representations she has received to make it a statutory obligation for schools to allow pupil participation when *(a)* drawing up and *(b)* reviewing the school's anti-bullying strategy. [63655]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Bullying is a serious problem which can put the emotional well-being and educational achievement of young people at risk. From September 1999 head teachers of maintained schools have been under a duty to draw up measures to prevent all forms of bullying among pupils; these need to be reviewed regularly.

We have not received recent representations to make it a statutory obligation to allow pupil participation when drawing up or reviewing a school's anti-bullying policy. We recommend such participation, although it is for schools to decide whether this is appropriate particularly if they have very young pupils. In our pack for schools "Bullying: don't suffer in silence" we mention that schools which involve pupils have found their suggestions practical and sensitive to the school's ethos.

We are currently funding new research by ChildLine to obtain young people's views on schools' anti-bullying policies as part of a project on what works in combating the problem. The results should be available early next year.

Independent Television Commission

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if members of the Independent Television Commission are appointed on a regional basis. [64582]

Dr. Howells: I have been asked to reply.

Members of the Independent Television Commission are appointed in accordance with the provisions of the 1990 Broadcasting Act. Schedule 1 to that Act provides that three of the members of the Commission, other than the chairman and deputy chairman, shall be persons who appear to the Secretary of State to be suited to make the interests of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland respectively, their special care.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Pets

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to introduce licensing for *(a)* cats and *(b)* dogs that breed. [54695]

Mr. Morley: Under the Breeding of Dogs Act 1973 as amended by the Breeding and Sale of Dogs (Welfare) Act 1999 anyone who is in the business of breeding and selling dogs will require a licence from the local authority. There are no plans to extend this legislation to cats.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on how many occasions between 31 March 2001 and 31 March 2002 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity; what places were visited; and how much each visit cost. [58721]

Mr. Morley: DEFRA was created on 7 June 2001, and since then up to 31 March 2002, our special advisers travelled abroad in an official capacity, including accompanying the Secretary of State on nine occasions, at an average cost of £1,788 per trip. The countries visited were Belgium x 2, France, Luxembourg, Morocco, USA, Poland, India and South Africa.

All travel by special advisers is undertaken fully in accordance with the guidelines set out in the "Ministerial Code" and the "Civil Service Management Code".

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when and where she advertised the positions for special adviser in her Department. [63644]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 24 June 2002]:* The Government's position on advertising special adviser posts remains as set out in the Government's response to the report of the Public Administration Select Committee on special advisers published in December 2001.

Computers

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many computers were replaced in her Department in each of the past three years; how the replaced units were disposed of and by which companies; and at what cost. [60756]

Mr. Morley: DEFRA, created on 8 June 2001, has recently completed the roll out to all staff of a replacement office system started for the former Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in 1999. During this roll out, the following numbers of desktop computers were replaced for staff in the core Department.

June	*MAFF*	*DEFRA*
1999–2000	119	—
2000–01	1,650	—
2001–02	—	2,878

Where appropriate, existing computers have been re-used elsewhere in the Department, including to enable flexible working arrangements for staff, but surplus redundant equipment has been disposed of as follows:

In 1999–2000, the Ministry had a considerable backlog of 1,265 computers for disposal and arranged for ICL (now Fujitsu) to carry out a one-off exercise to clear this before the roll out of the new office system, at a cost of £46,000 plus VAT.

In 2000–01, 1,172 and in 2001–02 3,361 computers were disposed of by Northern Realisations Limited, Bolton, Lancashire at no cost to the Department, but a gain to the Exchequer of £35,000. The contractual arrangement provides for units to be sold on at auction, passed to schools or charities or scrapped according to the terms of all the relevant legislation and regulations.

Banned Pesticides/Plant Treatments

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps are being taken to ensure that traces of *(a)* pesticides and *(b)* other plant treatments which are banned in the United Kingdom are not found on fresh imported produce. [60835]

Mr. Morley: There are a large number of substances which are not approved as pesticides in the UK but may be used in other countries. Differences in approvals between countries can arise because different approval conditions are applied or because commercial approvals are not sought in all countries. The fact that a compound is not approved in the UK does not mean that residues of that compound in imported produce are unsafe.

The Government conduct a wide-ranging annual surveillance programme for pesticide residues in food including imported food. Some 4,000 samples are analysed annually and the programme generates results for over 100,000 pesticide/commodity food combinations. All the results are published on a website: www.pesticides.gov.uk/committees/PRC/prc.htm.

The surveillance programme includes monitoring for some of the compounds among the 21 banned throughout the EU.

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much and what proportion of the departmental expenditure limit for 2002–03 will be accounted for by staff costs; what the figures were for 2001–02; and if she will make a statement. [61025]

Mr. Morley: Reliable figures for 2002–03 are not yet available as staff costs and total expenditure are dependent on the outcome of pay negotiations, which are currently under way.

For 2001–02 the pay bill cost is estimated as £495 million which represents 18 per cent. of the departmental expenditure limit.

National Scrapie Plan

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) when she intends to bring forward legislation to place the national scrapie plan on a statutory basis; [61536]

(2) by what date she intends to make compliance with the national scrapie plan compulsory. [61537]

Mr. Morley: In addition to provisions relating to foot and mouth disease, the Animal Health Bill provides for enabling powers to make for the genotyping of sheep compulsory. This would accelerate the development of a national flock which is resistant to TSEs. These powers would provide a legal-enabling basis for making it compulsory to comply with, and participate in, the national scrapie plan. As part of the original consultation it was made clear that these measures would be compulsory at some stage. We will continue to discuss timescales with the sheep industry and we are progressing with the scheme on a voluntary basis.

A motion was passed in another place on 26 March 2002 that postpones further consideration on the Animal Health Bill in its entirety until the Government have published their response to the consultation on implementation of powers in the Bill, and published the findings of the Royal Society inquiry into foot and mouth disease and the National Audit Office value for money evaluation. These two studies are due to report this summer.

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Welfare is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [61693]

Mr. Morley: The Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Welfare (SCAHAW) is an advisory committee established under Council Decision 97/579/EC of 28 August 1997.

The committee has six scheduled plenary meetings a year. In addition there are also six scheduled sub-committee meetings dealing with animal health and animal welfare. The 16 members of the Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Welfare do not represent their countries; rather they attend as individual experts.

The committee has no legislative function; it provides authoritative scientific advice to the Commission. This advice is published.

The members' travel expenses and travel costs are reimbursed by the European Commission.

The sub-committee on animal health deals with scientific and technical questions concerning all aspects of animal health, hygiene, animal diseases and therapies, including zones of non-food origin and zootechnics. The sub-committee on animal welfare deals with scientific and technical questions concerning the protection of animals, notably in regard to animal husbandry, herd management, transport, slaughter and experimentation.

Information relating to the Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Welfare can be found on the following websites: http://europa.eu.int//comm/food/fs/sc; http://europa.eu.int//comm/food/fs/sc/scah/index—en.html

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the EU Implementation Committee for Spirit Drinks is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; when it is next due to meet; what the United Kingdom representation on it is; whether experts nominated by the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [62921]

Mr. Morley: The Spirit Drinks Implementation Committee (SDIC) is mandated by council regulation 1576/89 and is responsible for the implementation of the general rules on the definition, description and presentation of spirit drinks as laid down in that regulation. It considers draft Commission legislation and gives its formal opinion on Commission proposals.

SDIC has met twice during the last 12 months. It is next due to meet on 17 July 2002. One DEFRA official is expected to attend the meeting.

UK representation varies according to the agenda for each meeting and may include members of the Scottish Executive (and other devolved administrations) where there are items of sufficient interest. Members of the Scottish Executive did not attend the two SDIC meetings held over the past 12 months.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the EU Committee on Geographical Indications and Protected Designations of Origin for agricultural products and foodstuffs is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; when it is next due to meet; what the United Kingdom representation on it is; whether experts nominated by the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [62916]

Mr. Morley: The Regulatory Committee on geographical indications and protected designations of origin for agricultural products and foodstuffs has met three times over the last 12 months. The date and time of the next meeting is unknown at this stage. Its mandate is laid down in Article 15 of Council Regulation (EEC) No. 2081/92. Its activities include helping the Commission to decide on the registration of protected food names and to draw up Commission regulations relating to the operation of the scheme.

UK representation varies according to the agenda for each meeting and may include members of the Scottish Executive and other devolved Administrations where there are items of sufficient interest. If Scottish Executive colleagues do not attend, they work closely with DEFRA officials to ensure that Scottish interests are fully taken into account.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the EU Joint Meetings of Management and Regulatory Committees in the field of agriculture is; how many times such meetings have taken place over the last 12 months; when it is next due to meet; what the United Kingdom representation on it is; whether experts nominated by the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [62922]

Mr. Morley: There are many management and regulatory committees in the field of agriculture whose mandates stem from individual pieces of Council legislation relevant to those sectors. Details of the past and next meetings of these committees and any involvement of the Scottish Executive could be assembled only at disproportionate cost.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandates of *(a)* the EU Committee on conservation, characterisation, collection and utilisation of genetic resources in agriculture is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; when it is next due to meet; what the United Kingdom representation on it is; whether experts nominated by the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [62924]

Mr. Morley: The purpose of the Committee on the conservation, characterisation, collection and utilisation of genetic resources in agriculture is to advise the Commission on draft measures made under Council Regulation 1467/94 on:

(a) assisting the co-ordination, at Community level, of certain national measures for the conservation, characterisation, collection and utilisation of genetic resources in agriculture to permit the rational organisation of the means employed within the Community and the efficient utilisation of the results and to achieve an approach in line with the aims of the Common Agricultural Policy.

(b) the development and implementation of programmes of measures for the conservation, characterisation, collection and utilisation of genetic resources in agriculture at Community level to support or supplement action taken in the member states; and

(c) other relevant questions.

Regulation 1467/94 established a programme for the conservation, characterisation, collection and utilisation of genetic resources in agriculture for a period of five years. The Commission has made proposals for a successor regulation, which is currently under consideration.

The Committee has met once in the last 12 months. It was attended by officials from my Department. No decision has been made regarding the date of any future meeting. UK representation varies according to the agenda for each meeting and may include members of the Scottish Executive and other devolved Administrations where they consider that there are items of sufficient interest.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandates of *(a)* the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund Committee and *(b)* the working party on irregularities are; how many times they have met over the last 12 months; when they are next due to meet; what the UK representation on them is; whether experts nominated by the Scottish Executive (i) have been and (ii) are members of them; and if she will make a statement. [62923]

Mr. Morley: The European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund Committee was set up under Council Regulation 17/64 EEC on the conditions for granting aid from the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund. Provisions which currently define the role of the Committee, confer powers on the Commission and establish rules for consultation and adoption of legislation are contained in Articles 11 to 15 of Council Regulation 1258/99 on the financing of the common agricultural policy.

The Committee has both voting and non-voting functions. The procedures for adoption of legislation by the Committee are set out in Article 13 of Regulation 1258/99. This is a management committee procedure (variant IIa). The voting procedure is applied to regulations made under Articles 4 and 5 of Regulation 1258/99 (essentially concerned with accreditation of paying agencies and submission of annual CAP accounts). In addition, a number of other regulations require the EAGGF Committee to express an opinion via Article 13 procedures, in particular on measures adopted under the Integrated Administration and Control System (IACS), some horizontal regulations, eg on calculating the costs of financing intervention measures, and certain commodity regime provisions which involve the grant of aid from EAGGF funds (in the latter case the sectoral management committee normally sit as a joint management committee with the EAGGF Committee).

The EAGGF Committee may also be consulted in circumstances set down in Article 14 of Regulation 1258/99. This provides for the Fund Committee to be consulted:

in cases where provision is made for it to be consulted;

for the assessment of the Fund's credits to be entered in the Commission's estimate for the coming financial year and, if necessary, on additional estimates;

on draft proposals from the Commission to the Council concerning the application of Regulation 1258/99 and on draft reports on the Fund to be submitted to the Council.

The Committee may also examine any other question referred to it by its chairman either on its own initiative or at the request of a representative of a member state. It should be informed regularly of the activities of the Fund. Consultation is required by Article 6 of the Regulation (essentially concerning payment of monthly advances from the Fund and decisions on clearance of annual CAP accounts). Consultation does not involve a vote.

The Committee has met 13 times over the past 12 months. The next meeting is on 18 July. The UK representation on the Committee is led by DEFRA, and the UK Co-ordinating Body usually also attend. Additional UK representation varies according to the agenda for each meeting and may include members of the Scottish Executive and other devolved Administrations where there are items of sufficient interest. Members of the Scottish Executive have attended two meetings over the past 12 months.

The Irregularities and Mutual Assistance Working Group is a technical sub-group of COCOLAF (Advisory Committee for the Co-ordination of Fraud Prevention). This working group looks at issues arising from irregularities within EAGGF guarantee section schemes. This working group is chaired by OLAF (European Anti-Fraud Office), which operates under an independent director-general.

This working group met once in the last 12 months, in April 2002. It is due to meet again after the summer break.

The UK representation on the working group is led by DEFRA, however the total representation depends on the agenda. A briefing meeting, organised by DEFRA, is usually held before the working group to discuss agenda items and decide on representation. The Rural Payments Agency (responsible for submitting irregularities on behalf of all UK paying agencies) are invited to attend as well as Treasury, Customs and Excise etc., and various other Departments who may have an interest in an agenda item. No expert nominated by the Scottish Executive attended the meeting last year.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the EU committee on organic production of agricultural products is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; when it is next due to meet; what the United Kingdom representation on it is; whether experts nominated by the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [62912]

Mr. Morley: The mandate of the Regulatory Committee on Organic Farming is set out in Article 14 of Council Regulation (EEC) No 2092/91. Standard rules of procedure were adopted by the Commission on 31 January 2001 in accordance with Council Regulation 1999/468/EC.

The Regulatory Committee on Organic Farming met four times in the last 12 months and is due to meet next on 9 June. The UK is represented by officials from DEFRA but officials from the devolved Administrations are kept fully informed of the progress of the committee's work. In the last 12 months DEFRA officials also attended a further 24 out of the 26 meetings held of the committee's associated working groups.

Members of Parliament (Personal Data)

Mr. Forth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what information is held by her Department on each hon. Member in relation to *(a)* personal relationships, both current and past, *(b)* financial status and dealings, *(c)* connections with companies and interest groups, *(d)* connections with Governments and *(e)* published works; and what was held in January 2002. [61823]

Mr. Morley: Ministers and officials in this Department have access to published reference sources, as well as to the information about hon. Members made publicly available by the House authorities, for the purpose of parliamentary business.

Foot and Mouth

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what recent representations she has received about foot and mouth spot checks, conducted by police and trading standards officers, on farmers moving stock in the Vale of York; [62260]

(2) what recent representations she has received about the interruption of the moving of farmers' stock by police and trading standards officers conducting foot and mouth spot checks in the Vale of York; [62262]

(3) what recent representations she has received about the use of the police and trading standards officers to conduct foot and mouth spot checks on farmers moving stock in the Vale of York. [62261]

Mr. Morley: The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has not received any representations on this matter.

Across the country, trading standards officers, with police support, are carrying out spot checks on animal movements as part of their enforcement responsibilities for the post FMD interim movement arrangements and I know that checks were carried out in the Thirsk area on 30 May, but we have not received any representations about them. My Department is encouraging local authorities to undertake these checks, based on local assessments of risk from the illegal movement of animals.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many sheep were disposed of at Great Orton, Cumbria; how many of those sheep tested positive for the foot and mouth virus; and if she will make a statement. [61603]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 19 June 2002]:* During the 2001 outbreak of foot and mouth disease, 448,508 sheep were disposed of at the Great Orton burial site, Cumbria.

We are not able to say whether any of the sheep were from premises that returned positive laboratory results as this specific set of information has not been collated.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proportion of payments made under the CAP went *(a)* directly to farmers and *(b)* to other sectors, with specific reference to (i) the food processing industry and (ii) storage companies, in the most recent year for which statistics are available. [60555]

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proportion of payments made through the CAP went to *(a)* farmers, *(b)* the food processing industry and *(c)* other sectors in the last year for which figures are available. [62534]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* Payments throughout the EU under the Common Agricultural Policy totalled 40,465 million euro in the budget year ending in October 2000. 25,529 million euro of this was spent on direct subsidies to farmers, 4,176 million euro on rural development (outside objective 1 areas), and 10,654 million euro on market support measures. The remainder was spent on veterinary and phytosanitary measures, and various information programmes.

Almost all of the direct subsidies will have gone to farmers. They will also have received most of the rural development expenditure, although other businesses are eligible for certain programmes. For example, payments under the rural development measures that were implemented in England as the processing and marketing grant scheme are largely received by food processors, although processors of non-food crops are also eligible.

The 10,654 million euro the Community spent on market support aimed to keep EU commodity prices above those prevailing elsewhere. This included the cost of export refunds (5,646 million euro), and of various intervention programmes (5,008 million euro). The cost of providing for public storage of products withheld from the market under these programmes came to some 379 million euro (excluding purchasing or financing costs); the cost of private storage was 574 million euro. Although many of the market support payments will in the first instance have gone to businesses specialising in trading or storage, these programmes will indirectly have improved most farmers' incomes.

Flood and Coastal Defence

Mr. Michael Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if she will list the local authorities who have not yet provided a High Level Target 1 policy statement for flood and coastal defence; [62908]

(2) if she will name the local authorities who have indicated that they are not prepared to produce a policy statement under High Level Targets for flood and coastal defence. [62906]

Mr. Morley: I placed the Environment Agency's report listing those local authorities from whom a policy statement under High Level Target 1 was awaited in the

House Libraries on 24 May. Since the agency's report was compiled, statements have been received from the following local authorities:

Mid Sussex district council
Rotherham borough council
Rushcliffe borough council
Stockton-on-Tees borough council
Teignbridge district council
Burnley borough council
Chesterfield borough council
East Hampshire district council
London borough of Bromley
Mid Suffolk district council.

We have not ascertained whether the authorities who have still not yet produced a policy statement are refusing to do so or if it is for other reasons. We plan to work with the Environment Agency and Local Government Association to encourage the production of policy statements especially by those local authorities who have significant flood and coastal defence responsibilities.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much money the Government have allocated to the Environment Agency in flood defence grants in each year since and including 1997; and what the overall expenditure spent on flood defence by the Government in the United Kingdom was in each year since and including 1997. [63819]

Mr. Morley: Flood and coastal erosion risk management is a devolved responsibility. The bulk of spending on flood and coastal defence in England comes from central Government either through the ODPM's support to local authorities through standard spending assessments (SSAs) which are intended in part to fund local authority levies to the Environment Agency, or through capital grants (and local authority Supplementary Credit Approvals) from DEFRA direct to the flood and coastal defence operating authorities (Environment Agency, local authorities and Internal Drainage Boards). Additional expenditure is incurred by DEFRA, for example to pay for the Storm Tide Forecasting Service. The table shows expenditure for England only:

£ million

	DEFRA grant and credit approvals				
	Environment Agency	*Other operating authorities*	*DEFRA other expenditure*	*ODPM SSAs*	*Total*
1996–97	45.9	51.5	5.2	207.1	309.7
1997–98	43.0	38.5	5.5	225.4	312.4
1998–99	33.8	36.9	5.4	239.8	315.9
1999–2000	33.0	36.2	5.1	252.0	326.3
2000–01	41.9	24.6	4.9	257.1	328.5
2001–02 (prov)	61.5	29.5	5.7	268.4	365.1

Notes:

1. Figures are outturns of actual cash spent.
2. 2001–02 figures for Other Operating Authorities are provisional, as credit approvals are yet to be finalised.
3. The allocation for 1996–97 was increased significantly in-year by the redistribution of funds from elsewhere in the Department.
4. In 2000–01 and 2001–02 local authorities under-achieved on coast protection works compared to their plans. They have recognised the need to improve project planning and the reliability of their forecasts.
5. In addition to the above, some £40 million annually comes from other sources such as drainage rates and charges paid by farmers.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for what reason no preferred scheme for improved flood defences in Lewes has been announced by the Environment Agency; when such an announcement is expected; and if she will make a statement. [63548]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 24 June 2002]:* It is important to consider the need for flood management measures within an overall strategy so as not to create problems elsewhere. The Environment Agency has commissioned consultants to prepare a strategy for the river Ouse catchment, covering flood problems at Lewes and other points in the valley. I understand that detailed checking of data and modelling work is being undertaken prior to the planned presentation of the strategy to the Sussex Flood Defence Committee in July prior to submission to DEFRA. I also understand that the strategy includes a preferred option for defence measures in Lewes.

I understand that the agency has consulted widely in preparing the strategy and, subject to consideration by the Sussex Flood Defence Committee, plans to arrange a public exhibition.

Flooding (Insurance)

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress she is making in securing an extension to the agreement in place between the Government and the Association of British Insurers to provide cover in flood affected areas, with particular reference to Lewes. [63547]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 24 June 2002]:* The Government are working hard with the Association of British Insurers to try to ensure the continued, widespread availability of affordable flood cover beyond the end of 2002. There have been regular meetings with the insurance industry, at both ministerial and official level, to consider their calls for increased investment in flood and coastal defence, controls on development in areas at risk of flooding, simplified arrangement for implementing flood defences and better information on real flood risk. I expect to meet again with the industry later in the summer.

Illegal Meat Imports

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her reply of 10 June 2002, ref. 53704, on illegal meat imports, how many *(a)* operational enforcement officers were employed in (i) 1997, (ii) 1998, (iii) 1999, (iv) 2000, (v) 2001 and (vi) 2002 to date and *(b)* seizures of illegal meat imports there were in each of those years. [62612]

Mr. Morley: There are enforcement officers employed by local and port health authorities, HM Customs and Excise, Meat Hygiene Service and DEFRA who contribute directly or indirectly to policing laws on meat imports. Total numbers are not held centrally.

A central database of information on seizures was created in April 2001. The details of seizures made during 2001 and the beginning of 2002 are still being received. Our database currently shows 1,224 seizures of consignments containing meat made in 2001 and 274 seizures in 2002.

Peat Alternatives

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps her Department is taking to promote the use of peat alternatives in horticulture; and if she will make a statement. [62268]

Mr. Morley: Peat is a major constituent of growing media used in gardening and commercial horticulture. It is well suited to a wide range of uses and comes from a variety of sources in the UK, the Republic of Ireland and the Baltic states.

The UK Biodiversity Action Plan commits the Government to undertake and promote research and development into sustainable alternatives to peat and provide advice on the development and marketing of peat alternatives. The aim of the plan is for 40 per cent. of the total market requirements to be peat free by 2005 and 90 per cent. by 2010.

There has already been some substitution of peat by other materials, such as coir and bark, with some degrees of success. We have been funding seminars for the ornamentals sector for some time to increase awareness of and to examine the potential for using reduced-peat and peat free alternatives and to encourage commercial growers and others to take them up where they are already available.

However, it is recognised that substantial peat replacement will take some time to achieve and there are still considerable difficulties to be overcome in producing alternative growing media of sufficiently reliable and consistent quality to replace peat in the full range of its present uses.

We will be working actively with interested parties to build on progress made so far in this area. As part of this, we have decided to build on the work of the Peat Working Group by establishing a new group, under the chairmanship of DEFRA, which will bring together all this Department's policies that affect the production and use of peat and peat alternatives, and provide a forum for consideration of the various factors in working towards the targets for peat substitution.

Holsworthy Biogas Project

Mr. Burnett: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will discuss with the managers of the Holsworthy Biogas project the recently published Composting Risk Assessment; and if she will instruct the Environment Agency to discuss with the managers of the project the Provisional Pollution Prevention and Control Permit BK 5088 issued in relation to this project; and if she will make a statement. [61771]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* The risk assessment commissioned by DEFRA on the treatment of catering waste through biogas plants was presented at a conference on 7 June. We are reviewing the Animal By-Products Order 1999 in the light of the assessment. Representatives from Holsworthy Biogas are included on the expert panel which is assisting with the review.

We regard to the Pollution, Prevention and Control permit, officials from the Environmental Agency are in discussion with Holsworthy Biogas.

Ministerial Visits (Wales)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the *(a)* date, *(b)* location and *(c)* purpose was of visits by Ministers in her Department to Wales since 1997; and when she next intends to visit Wales. [62073]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* All travel is undertaken fully in accordance with the guidelines set out in the Ministerial Code and Travel by Ministers, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

Since the creation of DEFRA on 7 June 2001 the Department's Ministers have been on the following visits to Wales:

Date	*Purpose*	*Venue*
Alun Michael		
25 July 2001	National Park Authority AGM	Cardiff
1 February 2002	Rural Affairs Q & A session	Cardiff
25 April 2002	Question Time	Caernarvon
11 June 2002	Queen's Jubilee Thanksgiving Service	Bangor
20 June 2002[1]	National Park Authority AGM	Cardiff
Lord Whitty		
1 February 2002	Bilateral with Carwyn Jones	Bridgend
Elliot Morley		
11 October 2002[1]	IWS 2002 Annual Convention	Cardiff

[1] Planned

Farm Animal Welfare

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to integrate good standards of farm animal welfare into her strategy for the future of farming; and if she will make a statement. [63046]

Mr. Morley: Encouraging high standards of animal welfare on farm is already at the heart of Government policy and will continue to play a role in the Department's new strategy for sustainable food and farming.

Timber

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures her Department has put in place to ensure the authenticity of certificates identifying the origin of tropical hardwood imports. [63062]

Mr. Morley: Central Government Departments and their agencies are required as a matter of policy to actively seek to buy their timber and timber products from sustainable and legal sources, for example, those identified under independent certification schemes such as that operated by the Forest Stewardship Council.

My right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment, (Mr. Meacher) has written to Green Ministers to explain that his Department has commissioned consultants to suggest guidance that will assist Government buyers to implement this policy. The consultants' report will address the issue of verifying claims made by contractors for the origin of timber supplied, including claims supported by certificates. The report is expected to be completed in the summer of 2002. In the meantime Departments have been given a model contract specification clause that requires suppliers to: (a) establish a chain of custody from the source of timber through to delivery of the final product, and (b) to provide documentary evidence and independent verification of the claims being made. The Forest Stewardship Council's certification scheme is identified as one way in which these requirements would be satisfied but the clause makes clear that suppliers may offer alternatives evidence of compliance.

To complement the Government's timber procurement policy we are pursuing a strategy of seeking to reach bi-lateral agreements with producing countries that would see the development of independently verified documentation to prove the legality of timber shipments to the UK. Once such memorandum of understanding has been entered into with the Government of Indonesia. The forthcoming World Summit on Sustainable Development may crystallise the interest of other countries around this issue.

The Government are considering whether there is scope for the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species to play a bigger part in helping to control the export and import of illegally logged timber and proposes to explore options with EU member states and the CITES range states.

To help tropical countries meet the Government's requirement for legally logged and sustainably managed timber, UK Government officials have participated in an expert advisory group tasked with developing guidance for tropical countries on establishing verification mechanisms and in international meetings convened to explore co-operation between the various certification initiatives.

Tree Diseases

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the threat to *(a)* alders and *(b)* willows by phytophthora infections; how that assessment is influencing her policy; and if she will make a statement. [61601]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 19 June 2002]:* Phytophthoras are a group of microscopic fungal pathogens responsible for plant diseases in many parts of the world. While some cause severe damage, including death of trees, others are of little consequence.

The Phytophthora disease of alder is present in England, Scotland and Wales and is most active in the south-west and south-east of England. Surveys of the disease in 2000 and 2001 established that an estimated 600,000 trees were affected: around 12 to 14 per cent. of the alder population. Researchers at the Forestry Commission Research Agency (FCRA) have established that the cause of the disease is a new hybrid pathogen which is very damaging to alder. The putative parents cause little or no damage to alder but can be aggressive pathogens of other woody hosts.

In addition to the UK, the disease is present in 10 other European countries. Movement of infected plants has probably facilitated its rapid dissemination and infected stock may start new foci of infection when planted out. Research is continuing to further improve methods of managing the disease and diagnosing the pathogen. As with most Phytophthoras, control is difficult and eradication from already infected riparian habitats would be impossible. As this particular disease is so widespread, quarantine controls would be ineffective.

It is rare for willows to suffer from disease caused by species of Phytophthora and they do not appear to be susceptible to the new hybrid Phytophthora that causes disease of alder.

Sheep Movements

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on how her Department intends to overcome difficulties in the manner in which the 20-day standstill is being interpreted for sheep movement in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* England and Wales. [62989]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 19 June 2002]:* DEFRA officials are in regular contact with their counterparts in the National Assembly for Wales Agriculture Department and the Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department and together they seek to find a solution to any practical difficulties arising from the differences in the livestock movements controls.

The Government will not make decisions about possible changes to the current standstill rules until Ministers have seen the recommendations of the Royal Society and lessons learned inquiries. Those decisions will be taken in discussion with the devolved Administrations and with stakeholders.

Salmon

Lawrie Quinn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the total percentage of salmon caught by *(a)* the Scottish Nets, *(b)* Northumbrian Nets, *(c)* Yorkshire Nets, *(d)* Scottish Rods and *(e)* Northumbrian Rods was in each year since 1990; and what the total number of salmon caught in the United Kingdom was in each of those years. [63363]

Mr. Morley: The most recent information is set out in the following table:

	Scottish nets		Northumbrian nets		Yorkshire nets		Scottish rods[1]		Northumbrian rods[1]		Total UK catch[1,2]
	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	
1990	33.9	97,400	15.0	43,048	3.0	8,482	24.9	71,600	0.5	1,449	287,328
1991	36.4	76,300	10.8	22,525	1.4	2,904	30.0	62,400	0.6	1,263	209,534
1992	39.0	101,600	7.0	18,567	0.6	1,577	31.4	82,900	0.7	1,749	263,846
1993	32.2	86,800	13.8	37,097	1.7	4,703	29.5	79,500	0.6	1,656	269,638
1994	34.0	106,400	13.6	42,547	1.3	4,007	26.7	83,300	0.6	1,772	312,529
1995	31.9	93,900	16.9	49,801	1.2	3,409	29.3	86,100	0.7	2,053	294,134
1996	30.7	64,700	8.4	17,784	0.4	797	33.0	69,600	1.2	2,466	210,860
1997	21.1	37,100	11.3	19,828	1.2	2,094	34.6	60,700	1.3	2,356	175,556
1998	17.9	31,800	9.2	16,298	1.1	1,967	41.2	73,100	1.6	2,786	177,244
1999	12.9	17,900	18.1	25,013	1.3	1,820	37.9	52,500	1.8	2,540	138,385
2000	18.0	35,500	20.1	39,635	1.9	3,719	33.2	65,600	1.7	3,451	197,426

[1] Includes data on catch and release.

[2] Excludes any NI rod catch for which no details are available.

Salmon and Trout

Lawrie Quinn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the stocking programme for salmon and trout on the River Esk has been over the last 20 years; when it was last stocked; and who provided the finance. [63362]

Mr. Morley: Details of salmon stocking on the River Esk are shown in the table. The Esk was last stocked with salmon in 2002 in mitigation for a pollution accident—compensation was obtained from the polluter. No sea trout have been stocked but between 700 and 1,200 brown trout have been stocked annually by angling clubs or fishery owners.

	Salmon				
	Unfed fry	0+ parr	1+ parr	smolts	Total
1982	—	—	—	—	0
1983	—	—	—	—	0
1984[1]	—	—	—	30,320	30,320
1985[1]	50,000	—	—	—	50,000
1986[1]	50,000	—	—	—	50,000
1987[1]	50,000	—	—	—	50,000
1988[1]	—	—	15,000	—	15,000
1989[1]	—	—	12,000	—	12,000
1990[1]	—	—	10,900	—	10,900
1991[1]	50,000	—	50,000	—	100,000
1992[1]	50,000	—	60,000	—	110,000
1993[1]	10,000	—	5,202	—	15,202
1994[1]	50,000	—	6,866	—	56,866
1995[1]	—	—	7,852	—	7,852
1996[1]	—	—	3,700	—	3,700
1997[2]	—	14,000	—	—	14,000
1998[2]	—	60,000	—	—	60,000
1999[2]	—	25,000	—	—	25,000
2000[2]	—	30,000	—	—	30,000
2001	—	—	—	—	0
2002	—	—	12,000	—	12,000

[1] Joint: River Esk Action Committee/Environment Agency or predecessor

[2] River Esk Regeneration Programme (including European funds through Objective 5b)

Countryside, Liberty and Livelihood March

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if representatives of the Government will attend the Countryside, Liberty and Livelihood march on 22 September. [63925]

Alun Michael: There are no plans to do so.

Tallow

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much tallow produced under the over-thirty-months scheme has been sold in each year since the scheme began *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* when exported overseas; and for what purpose it has been sold. [63535]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 21 June 2002]:* Since the introduction of the over-thirty-months slaughter scheme (OTMS) a total of 384,345 tonnes of tallow has been produced to date.

All tallow generated from cattle slaughtered under OTMS is to be incinerated (with energy recovery).

A total of 170,897 tonnes has been incinerated to date. This equates to a total of 13,271 tonnes for 1996, 29,711 tonnes for 1997, 15,896 tonnes for 1998, 28,188 tonnes for 1999, 37,409 tonnes for 2000, 27,274 tonnes for 2001 and 21,315 tonnes to date for 2002.

No tallow has been exported.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much revenue has been raised from the sale of tallow produced under the over-thirty-months scheme in each year since the scheme started in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* overseas. [63537]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 21 June 2002]:* No financial information is available in a calendar year basis. Please see the income from tallow sales by financial year.

Financial year	£
1996–97	[1]—
1997–98	[1]—
1998–99	333,397.00
1999–2000	1,454,308.00
2000–01	968,638.00
2001–02[2]	734,069.00

[1] Income for tallow sales not separately identifiable, included under general receipts.

[2] Invoice payments are outstanding.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for what reason the notification and results of tenders to dispose of tallow produced under the over-thirty-months scheme are not published in the *Official Journal*. [63538]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 21 June 2002]:* The RPA is currently evaluating the bids received in connection with the OTMS tallow disposal tender. Following contract award, details of the successful tenderers will be published in the *Official Journal of the European Communities*. The original contract award date was spring 2001 but the tender was suspended due to the foot and mouth crisis. The disposal was readvertised with a planned contract start date of spring 2002. The RPA expects contract award in mid July 2002.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what restrictions apply to the sale of tallow produced in the United Kingdom under the over-thirty-months scheme *(a)* in the UK and *(b)* when being exported overseas. [63536]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 21 June 2002]:* Over-thirty-month slaughter scheme (OTMS) tallow produced is currently incinerated (with energy recovery) at plants in the UK only. No tallow has been exported.

OTMS tallow remains the property of and under the control of RPA until it is incinerated.

EU Management Committees

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the EU Management Committees of the common organisations of agricultural markets for milk and milk products is next due to meet; whether experts nominated by the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members; and if she will make a statement. [63933]

Mr. Morley: The mandate of the Management Committee for Milk and Milk Products is to facilitate the implementation of measures relating to the common organisation of the market for these products.

The committee has met 22 times over the last 12 months. It is due to meet next on Thursday 27 June 2002.

The make up of the UK delegation is dependant on the agenda for each meeting, but would normally be lead by a DEFRA official and would include an official from the Scottish Executive if there was an item of particular interest. However, there have been no occasions in the last 12 months where the Scottish Executive have sought to have an official form part of the delegation.

Royal Prerogative

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what decisions have been made by her Department in the last year under authority from the royal prerogative. [63129]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 25 June 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I provided on 23 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 172W.

Sheep National Envelope

Liz Blackman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether she has reached decisions on implementation of the sheep national envelope in England. [65178]

Margaret Beckett: Under the revised EU sheepmeat regime national envelopes were introduced to provide member states with an element of flexibility in how they support their sheep sectors; funds under the envelope can be used to provide extra support to producers, improve the marketing and production of sheepmeat and encourage more environmentally friendly farming practices. National envelopes can be implemented on a regional basis; this is being done in the United Kingdom.

In England, the national envelope is worth £5.4 million in 2002. There is also a provision in the revised regime permitting member states, or parts of member states, to increase the size of the national envelope by reducing the basic rate of Sheep Annual Premium by up to one Euro. This could increase the size of the envelope in England by around £5 million.

The Government issued a consultation letter in January seeking views on how the national envelope should be used in England. We have now considered the responses we received, and have reached decisions on the way forward.

The Government intend to make maximum use of the flexibility we negotiated at the Agriculture Council to switch support from subsidies per breeding ewe to support for restructuring and modernising the industry in line with the strategy set out in the Curry Commission Report. This means that, after a transitional year this year, we will by 2003 use the maximum available under the scheme to reduce sheep numbers in historically overgrazed areas by encouraging extensification in the uplands and to improve the quality and marketing of sheep.

For the transitional year of 2002, we intend to introduce a scheme to reduce sheep numbers in areas subject to historic overgrazing. Under the scheme the Government will purchase sheep quota from producers, who in return will be required to undertake to maintain lower stocking levels on the land in question. The scheme will operate by tender; in deciding which offers should be accepted we will take into account both price and other relevant factors such as the extent of historic overgrazing. The scheme will be open for applications in the autumn, and we hope that offers will be dealt with before the close of the next quota-trading period.

£2 million will be allocated to the quota purchase scheme in 2002. The remains of the 2002 national envelope will be paid to producers as a top-up to Sheep Annual Premium payments; this will be worth some 46 pence per eligible animal.

For 2003, and in subsequent years, we intend to make full use of the opportunity in the new regulation to increase the size of the national envelope by reducing the rate of the Sheep Annual Premium. This will enable us to fund a range of schemes from the national envelope.

The quota purchase scheme will be retained in 2003 and beyond; the level of resources allocated to the scheme will be decided in the light of our experience this year, but we expect it to be at least £1 million a year.

We are minded to introduce two further schemes in 2003: an upland Extensification Scheme and an Industry Development Scheme.

the Upland Extensification Scheme will be linked to Hill Farming Allowances, and will pay additional sums, on a per hectare basis,

to producers in less favoured areas who stock sheep below certain stocking levels; there are likely to be different stocking criteria and payment rates for different categories of land;

the Industry Development Scheme will seek to encourage producers to participate in existing initiatives intended to improve the marketing and quality of sheepmeat. The details of the scheme still need to be developed, but the intention is to pay producers, via an uplift in their Sheep Annual Premium payments, who participate in eligible schemes. These might include recognised assurance schemes; sire referencing and genetic improvement schemes; schemes linked to the National Scrapie Plan; recognised local-marketing initiatives.

We will be consulting interested parties further on the details of these two schemes. We will also be considering, in the light of further views we receive, whether any further schemes should be introduced in 2003 or thereafter. Schemes will be operated by the RPA.

The Government believe that these schemes will make a major contribution towards addressing the problem of historic overgrazing in the uplands and improving the responsiveness of the sheep industry to the market. We recognise, however, that schemes funded from the national envelope can only form one element of the co-ordinated programme of measures needed to restore habitats damaged by historic overgrazing. We will be looking to English Nature to take appropriate action under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act, encouraging producers to make use of agri-environment schemes and considering what steps we can take, including use of the cross compliance rules where appropriate, to reduce stocking pressure on land in unfavourable environmental conditions.

Livestock

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many *(a)* sailings with livestock and *(b)* consignments have passed through UK ports in each of the last five years. [61161]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* The Department does not hold information on the number of sailings with livestock which pass through UK ports.

The information on livestock consignments which pass through UK ports is not available in the form requested. The number of export health certificates for livestock issued in Great Britain (including those for export to the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands but not including exports from Northern Ireland) in the last five years was as follows. The computer system from which the following data were obtained does not record whether the consignments were exported through seaports or airports.

Year	*Number*
1997	4,585
1998	5,457
1999	5,378
2000	4,656
2001	555

These figures may be subject to updating and amendment and may not include some exports which took place during December 2000. This was due to a computer malfunction.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Millennium Dome

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) on what date he expects the Government to receive their first payment under their profit sharing agreement with Meridian Delta and Anschutz Entertainment; [64576]

(2) if the profit sharing agreement between Meridian Delta and Anschutz Entertainment and the Government includes a guaranteed *(a)* minimum and *(b)* maximum return; [64578]

(3) if he will publish the profit sharing agreement between Meridian Delta and Anschutz Entertainment and the Government; [64575]

(4) when he expects the cost of the Millennium Dome to be fully recouped by the Government under its profit sharing agreement with Meridian Delta and Anschutz Entertainment; [64577]

(5) if he will list the minimum profit thresholds that are part of the profit sharing agreement between Meridian Delta and Anschutz Entertainment and the Government. [64568]

Mr. McNulty: As stated previously, the net present value of the agreements signed between English Partnerships and Anschutz Entertainment Group and Meridian Delta Ltd. on 29 May, is around £240 million, or up to £550 million in cash terms, assuming the full scheme is developed.

English Partnerships and the Lottery will receive a fair split of the proceeds from the sale of the dome and land on the Greenwich Peninsula. No decisions have yet been made on the split, including timing.

Under the terms of the deal, Anschutz Entertainment Group and Meridian Delta Ltd. will receive a priority return from the dome redevelopment, to reflect the £200 million investment that will be made in the dome. The details of the priority returns, and of the legal agreements as a whole, are commercially confidential. Release of commercial details could affect on-going discussions with third parties, both before and after planning permission is obtained; and the ability of English Partnerships to secure maximum value for money for the public purse.

On the wider land, English Partnerships will receive payments for development at the point when legal ownership of the site transfers from EP. Ownership will transfer on a plot by plot basis over the lifetime of the joint venture with Meridian Delta Ltd. (MDL) and will occur only after MDL has spent substantial sums on planning, marketing and installation of the infrastructure needed to support the redevelopment of the peninsula. The precise timing of all these payments depends on when planning permission is granted and the precise phasing of development.

The timing of the first payment to English Partnerships under the profit sharing arrangement for the dome depends on how long it takes to obtain planning permission, how long to undertake the development and how long to generate profits.

Anschutz and Meridian Delta Ltd. are required to maintain the dome until 2018. Should they then decide to remove the dome structure and redevelop the land, English Partnerships will be entitled to a 50 per cent. share of redevelopment proceeds.

Fire Brigades Union

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on pay negotiations with the Fire Brigades Union. [64622]

Mr. Raynsford: The Government have no statutory role in determining firefighters' pay. Representatives from local government, representing the employers, and from the Fire Brigades Union, representing employees, are responsible for negotiating firefighters' pay and conditions of service. These groups meet in the National Joint Council for Local Authorities' Fire Brigades. We understand that the two sides are currently in discussion on the Fire Brigades Union pay claim, which was formally tabled on the 28 May. It would not be appropriate for the Government to comment on the progress of these negotiations.

Supporting People Grant

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the Supporting People grant. [64521]

Mr. McNulty: The Government have allocated £40 million to local authorities to fund the implementation of the Supporting People Programme in 2002–03. This is in addition to the £15.2 million allocated to local authorities in 2001–02. The Programme goes live in April 2003, and baseline allocations for 2003–04 will be based on current spend in 2002–03, plus an allowance for inflation. ODPM is providing guidance to assist local authorities in identifying current spend. Allocations for 2004–05 should be derived from the final report of the Supporting People Allocation Formula project, which is due by March 2003. The report will summarise the main features of the funding model, how it has been derived, target allocations and pace of change issues.

China

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what representations concerning the situation in Tibet he made to Li Ruihuan, Chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, during Chairman Li's recent visit to the UK; and what response he received. [63862]

The Deputy Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Lord Chancellor discussed the situation in Tibet with Li Ruihuan during his recent visit to the UK. I made no representations to him on the matter.

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what representations he made to Vice Premier Wen Jiabao and other Chinese leaders concerning the situation in Tibet during his recent visit to China; and what response he received. [63861]

The Deputy Prime Minister: China is well aware of the UK Government's position on Tibet. I made no representations to Wen Jiabao or other Chinese leaders concerning the situation in Tibet during my recent trip to China.

Mobile Home Parks

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what guidelines he plans to issue to councils on their responsibilities concerning mobile home parks. [63835]

Mr. McNulty: The Government have, in the last two years, issued good practice guidance to local authorities on how to deal with incidences of harassment and illegal eviction of mobile home residents, and on the licensing of mobile home parks.

Research is planned to review the Model Standards on which these site licences are based. After its completion revised standards will be issued to local authorities in conjunction with further guidance.

Lone Parents

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many lone parents aged 16 and 17 years reside in local authority accommodation with *(a)* on-site support, *(b)* floating support and *(c)* no specialist support. [62578]

Mr. McNulty: Available information reported by local authorities in England on last year's Housing Investment Programme returns indicated a total of some 260 units with on-site support, and 390 with floating support occupied by lone parents under the age of 18 as at 1 April 2001. The corresponding number in non-supported accommodation on that date was not collected, but authorities reported making just over 1,800 lettings to lone parents under 18 years of age during 2000–01.

Stunt Performers (Health and Safety)

Ian Lucas: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make it compulsory for stunt co-ordinators and performers in film and television work to obtain certificates of qualification in health and safety. [64309]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

There are no plans to put in place such requirements.

Pavements (Disabled Access)

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what funds he is providing to enable local councils to make pavements accessible by wheelchairs in *(a)* England and *(b)* Gloucestershire; and if he will make a statement. [64444]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

Apart from major local transport schemes (those with a gross cost exceeding £5 million) local transport capital allocations are provided to English local authorities outside London in the form of a single block allocation the use of which is at their discretion. Such allocations can be used to make pavements accessible to wheelchair users. It is for local authorities to determine their local priorities.

For 2002–03, Gloucestershire county council has been provided with a single block allocation of £16.489 million from within a total allocation for England of £1.2 billion.

Our Ten Year Transport Plan reiterated our commitment to transport that is accessible to disabled people. It made clear that building in accessibility for disabled people in all new investment is a condition of public money being provided.

Human Rights Commission

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans there are to create a Human Rights Commission for the UK; and how such a Commission will cater for the rights of children and young people. [63099]

Yvette Cooper: I have been asked to reply.

The case for a Human Rights Commission for the UK is currently being considered by the Joint Committee on Human Rights. The Government will consider carefully any recommendation the Committee may make. I understand that the Committee is looking into how any Commission may cater for the rights of children and young people.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

EU Membership

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many candidate countries for EU membership he has visited since 7 June 2001. [62194]

Peter Hain: Since 7 June 2001, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has visited Poland in October 2001 and Turkey in October 2001 and February 2002. He will be visiting some of the other candidate countries in the near future.

I visited the Czech Republic in September 2001 and January 2002 (for the Visegrad 4 meeting), Poland in March 2002, Hungary in September 2001, Slovenia in January 2002 and Cyprus in April 2002.

Entertainment Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the cost was of the Department's 2001 staff Christmas party; and how many people attended. [61662]

Mr. MacShane: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office held a Christmas carol concert on 17 December 2001. Staff and members of their family and friends wishing to attend purchased a ticket at a cost of £5 per adult and £1 per child under 11 years. A total of £1,923 was received from the sale of tickets.

The costs attributed to staging this event amounted to £2,832.64.

Competitive Tendering

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on how many occasions in the last 12 months the requirement to engage in a competitive tendering process has been waived by his Department due to national security obligations under paragraph 6(h) of the supply regulations. [62817]

Mr. MacShane: We have claimed the security exemption and subsequently not held a tender competition on four occasions over the last year. Once for the purchase of aircraft equipment, and on the other occasions, for the purchase of armoured vehicles for use at our overseas posts.

Marwan Barghouti

Mr. Lepper: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations the UK Government have made to the Government of Israel about the conditions in which Marwan Barghouti is being held by the Israeli authorities. [63495]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I referred to Marwan Barghouti's detention with the Israeli Ambassador on 18 June 2002. The UK and EU partners will continue to monitor developments closely and will continue to raise our concerns about Palestinian detainees, including Barghouti, with the Israeli authorities.

Al-Qaeda

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the extent of Chechen involvement in al-Qaeda; and if he will make a statement. [64456]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: There are numerous reports of links between al-Qaeda and some groups fighting in Chechnya. Emir Khattab, the recently assassinated leader of the Arab mujaheddin in Chechnya, fought in Afghanistan and was reputedly a close friend of UBL. Shamil Basayev, an ethnic Chechen who shares UBL's extreme brand of Islam, underwent advanced combat training in a camp in Afghanistan. However, the nature of the al-Qaeda organisation makes it impossible accurately to assess the full extent of Chechen involvement.

Victims of Torture

Mr. Borrow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how the United Kingdom plans to mark UN International Day for Victims of Torture. [65240]

Mr. MacShane: On Wednesday 26 June, UN International Day in support of Victims of Torture, the FCO will launch phase 3 of the UK anti-Torture Initiative.

During the first two phases of the UK Anti-Torture Initiative, launched in October 1998 and December 2000 by the President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons, my right hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), the UK combined a global lobbying campaign for universal ratification of the UN Convention against Torture (at the time ratified by just over 50 per cent. of UN member states) with a number of practical measures, including the publication and distribution of 20,000 copies in seven languages of a handbook giving guidance on reporting instances of torture, financial support for the UN's work with torture victims and the secondment of a senior UK police officer to the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture.

Phase 3 will combine continued global lobbying with new practical steps. Since December 1998, 13 more countries have ratified the UN CAT. Our target is to secure another five ratifications by the end of 2003, bringing the total to 134 or 70 per cent. We will also be lobbying with EU partners for the adoption of the Draft Optional Protocol to the CAT. The Protocol is intended to help prevent torture by allowing both UN and independent national teams the right to inspect places of detention in signatory countries.

New practical measures for Phase 3 will include:

A new publication on judicial safeguards to provide judiciary and law makers worldwide with examples of best practice regarding judicial control of torture;

Support for the African Commission on Human Rights Special Rapporteur on Prisons in particular her monitoring role of prison conditions with regard to the prevention of torture;

Establishment of a visiting programme to UK for senior clinicians who work in countries where the practice of torture is widespread for work placements with leading NGOs involved in torture rehabilitation; and

The FCO will also continue to provide financial support of £175,000 per year to the UN Voluntary Fund for the victims of torture which provides urgent medical and legal support worldwide.

Phase 3 will be the last stage of activity. After this, to consolidate efforts of the past three years to combat torture, the FCO is planning to mainstream torture work within the FCO's general Human Rights mandate and set up a panel of experts to advise on future strategy.

Chagos Archipelago

Mr. Borrow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans have been made for the Chagossians to visit the Chagos Archipelago. [65241]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Government of the British Indian Ocean Territory is organising and paying for the charter of a ship to take about 100 Chagossians to the outer islands of the Chagos Archipelago to visit ancestral graves. Subject to agreement with the representatives of those concerned, the ship—the M/S Mauritius Trochetia—will depart from Port Louis on 5 October and will visit the islands of Peros Banhos and Salomon. It is expected to return on 17 October. The British high commissions in Mauritius and Seychelles are in contact with the leaders of the various Chagossian groups and are inviting them to draw up a jointly agreed list of passengers.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Ministerial Salaries

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council what the annual cost was of ministerial salaries in his Department in *(a)* 1997–98 and *(b)* 2001–02. [60933]

Mr. Robin Cook: The level of ministerial salaries is recommended by the Senior Salaries Review Body. From May 1997, in this Department there were two Cabinet Ministers, with a total annual salary £125,308. From June 2001, there was one Cabinet Minister, at an annual salary of £68,157 and one Parliamentary Secretary, at an annual salary of £26,835.

Annual Leave

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council what the average annual leave entitlement is for staff in his Department in 2002. [64645]

Mr. Robin Cook: In my Department, staff with less than 10 years service are entitled to 25 days annual leave each year; staff with 10 years or more service are entitled to 30 days. Annual leave entitlement for members of the senior civil service is currently set by the Cabinet Office at 30 days.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Departmental Grants

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport which organisations which were in receipt of a grant from her in 1997–98 no longer are; what the annual saving is; which organisations which were not in receipt of a grant in 1997–98 now are; and what the annual cost is. [61397]

Dr. Howells: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury to the hon. Member on 17 June 2002, *Official Report,* columns 136–37W.

Golden Jubilee

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the members of the Ministerial Group for the Golden Jubilee. [64214]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 24 June 2002]:* The membership of this group, which I chair, is being adjusted to reflect the recent changes of ministerial responsibilities. The previous membership was as follows:

President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons
Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions
Secretary of State, Northern Ireland Office
Secretary of State, Wales Office
Secretary of State, Scotland Office
Secretary of State for Trade and Industry
Secretary of State for Education and Skills
Minister for Sport, Department for Culture, Media and Sport
Minister of State, Cabinet Office
Financial Secretary, HM Treasury
Minister of State for the Armed Forces
Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department
Parliamentary-Under-Secretary, Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Parliamentary Secretary, Home Office
Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Work and Pensions
First Minister, Scottish Executive
First Minister, National Assembly for Wales
Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure, Northern Ireland Executive
Private Secretary to Her Majesty the Queen
The Mayor of London
Head of the Golden Jubilee Office.

Licensing (Live Music)

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to reform the two in a bar system; and if she will make a statement. [62777]

Dr. Howells: Our plans for the modernisation of the licensing regimes were set out clearly in the White Paper "Time for Reform" (Cm.4696) published on 10 April 2000. We proposed that the current exemption from public entertainment that allows two musicians to perform live in premises licensed for the sale of alcohol should end. This is because one or two live musicians using powerful microphones and amplifiers can make more noise and so generate more nuisance for local residents than three without. Alcohol and public entertainment licensing will be integrated into a single scheme. This will remove at a stroke a considerable amount of existing red tape and reduce the licensing costs which currently deter many venues from providing live music and dancing. The reforms will be implemented by means of primary legislation to be brought forward as soon as parliamentary time permits.

Independent Television Production

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) if she will make a statement of the value to the economy of the independent television production sector in the United Kingdom; [64570]

(2) if the proportion of programmes required to be sourced from the independent production sector is based upon that sector's estimated contribution to creativity in UK television. [64569]

Dr. Howells: Independent productions are an important component of the television landscape in the United Kingdom. The 25 per cent. independent productions quota, set out in the Broadcasting Act 1990, has helped maintain the diversity of British television, supported the development of creative and technical skills and helped create a thriving and innovative production industry—total expenditure by UK broadcasters on independent programming was around £750 million in 1999. We want this to continue to develop and have therefore retained the obligations in the recently published draft Communications Bill (Cm 5508-I).

Film Council

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what were the total employment costs of staff employed by the Film Council in each year of its operation; [64572]

(2) how many staff are employed in each department of the Film Council. [64573]

Dr. Howells: The total employment costs of staff employed by the Film Council for each full year of the Film Council's existence, building up from its foundation as a new organisation, are:

2000–01: £2,461,000

2001–02: £3,739,000.

There are 83 people employed at the Film Council. These include staff transferred from the British Film Institute, the Arts Council of England, the British Film Commission and the British Screen Finance group of companies, all previously employed using public subsidy.

In addition, the Film Council has taken on extra work such as statistical evidence gathering, called for by the Government's Film Policy Review, and the UK Media Desk.

This can be broken down as:

Strategy—15

Funding—28

Resources—24

British Film Commission—12

Business Affairs—4.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) how many consultants were employed by the Film Council in each year of its operation, stating for each consultant *(a)* the purpose of their employment and *(b)* the number of hours they were employed for; [64574]

(2) what the total employment costs were of consultants employed by the Film Council in each year of its operation. [64571]

Dr. Howells: In 2000–01, the Film Council's first full year of operation, £526,289.55p or 0.8 per cent. of turnover was spent on employing consultants. In 2001–02, £897,423.18p or 1.4 per cent. of turnover was spent on consultants. In 2000–01, 30 consultants were employed. Of the 30 consultants in total employed, 17 were paid less than £10,000 and 22 were paid less than £20,000.

In 2001–02, the Film Council employed 46 consultants. Of the 47 consultants in total employed, 25 were paid less than £10,000 and 29 were paid less than £20,000.

The consultants were employed to help set up the new organisation's infrastructure and to inform the development of its new strategy. They worked on a wide range of specific projects, including areas of strategic development, training, monitoring, cultural diversity and development of European policy.

It is not possible to state the number of hours for which the consultants were employed.

These figures exclude the cost of legal advice, corporate print and design, and internal and external auditing advice.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the films for which it has been a condition of a grant made by the Film Council that a member of their staff receive a personal credit on the film. [64581]

Dr. Howells: The list of films for which it has been a condition of a grant made by the Film Council that a member of their staff receive a personal credit on the film is shown in the following list. This list comprises feature film projects where an offer has been accepted and has not lapsed. The credits reflect the roles played by Film Council staff in creative development, structuring of finance (in addition to Film Council investment) safeguarding finance, creative roles undertaken during production and post-production and advice given during the marketing and distribution processes.

New Cinema Fund titles:

Anita and Me

Ape

Bloody Sunday

Body Song

Emotional Backgammon

Entering Blue Zone

Helen of Peckham

Hoover Street Revival

Live Forever

Magdalene

Noi the Albino

Once upon a Time in the Midlands

Revengers Tragedy

Tomorrow La Scala (aka Sweeney)

The Wooden Camera

This is Not a Love Song

Premiere Fund titles:

Braids, Twists and Tales

Five Children and It

Gosford Park

L'Homme du Train

Miranda

Mike Bassett, England Manager

The Importance of Being Earnest

Water Warriors

Young Adam.

Millennium Dome

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what has been the total cost of *(a)* the Millennium Dome and *(b)* the Millennium Experience in each year since 1996. [64580]

Dr. Howells: Expenditure incurred on the Millennium Experience by the New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) was as follows:

	£ million
April 1997–March 1998	90
April 1998–March 1999	179
April–December 1999	330
January–December 2000	177
January–December 2001	18

These figures include the cost of the London Riverside new year's eve celebrations of 31 December 1999. It is not possible to separate the amount of expenditure by NMEC on the dome as the national programme included elements both at the dome itself and throughout the country. Expenditure incurred by NMEC before 1 April 1997 is included under 1997–98. The figure for 2001 takes account of rebates and savings on costs provided for in the previous years' accounts.

Expenditure on the Millennium Dome by English Partnerships was as follows:

	£ million
March 1999-February 2001	6.70
July-December 2001	9.75

All costs incurred by English Partnerships will be recovered from eventual sale proceeds.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Volunteers

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many members of his staff in each of the past two years have been granted a day's paid leave to work as a volunteer; and if he will make a statement. [39735]

Mr. McCartney: The Department's special leave policy actively supports voluntary public service by allowing staff both paid and unpaid leave for public duties, including carrying out voluntary work. However the information on the number of staff granted paid leave to enable them to carry out voluntary work is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Pensions Policy

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in his Department are involved in monitoring and developing pensions policy. [39987]

Mr. McCartney: There are currently around 150 people in the teams responsible for developing, designing, supporting and monitoring state and private pension policy. Many more people across the Department, including staff providing the day-to-day service to customers, computer specialists, statisticians, economists and legal advisers, contribute to planning for and delivering the Government's agenda for both today's and future pensioners.

Welfare Spending

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 17 April 2002 to the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison), *Official Report*, column 1004W, on welfare, what plans he has to calculate the proportion of the total welfare bill spent on those living below 60 per cent of the median income. [52153]

Malcolm Wicks: None.

Appeals

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many appeals against decisions made at *(a)* all-work tests and *(b)* personal capability assessments were (i) heard and decided and (ii) decided in the appellant's favour in each of the last 10 years; [58756]

(2) what the average length of time was between lodging an appeal against *(a)* an all-work test and *(b)* a personal capability assessment decision and having that appeal heard in each of the last 10 years. [58757]

Maria Eagle: This is a matter for Neil Ward, Chief Executive of the Appeals Service. He will write to the hon. Gentleman.

Letter from Neil Ward to Mr. Paul Holmes, dated 24 June 2002:

The Secretary of State has asked me to respond to your recent parliamentary questions on the subject of appeals against all work tests and personal capability assessments. You asked:

> How many appeals against decisions made at all work tests and personal capability assessments were (i) heard and decided and (ii) decided in the appellants favour in each of the last 10 years (58756), and;
>
> What the average length of time was between the lodging of an appeal against an all work test and a personal capability assessment decision, and having the appeal heard in each of the last 10 years (58757).

Figures are not available for the last 10 years as requested, but are available from 1998.

The information is in the following table.

The number of all work test/personal capability assessment appeals heard (in relation to current IS, IB and SDA case loads), found in favour of the appellant, and the average time taken between receipt at the Appeals Service and first hearing

	1998	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Income support case load	3,824,000	3,834,600	3,876,700	3,949,600
Incapacity benefit case load	2,299,700	2,267,400	2,310,400	2,342,900
Severe disablement allowance case load	371,600	370,100	367,500	362,300
Number of appeals heard	56,910	53,580	37,935	30,880
Number of appeals found in favour of the appellant	23,410	22,625	15,535	13,110
Average waiting time, in weeks, between receipt at the Appeals Service and first hearing	22.7	17.2	11.7	12.1

I hope this is helpful.

Staff Numbers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many staff were employed by his Department on *(a)* 2 May 1997 and *(b)* 31 May 2002. [60895]

Mr. McCartney: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary for the Cabinet Office (Douglas Alexander) on 13 June 2002, *Official Report,* column 1402W.

Polygamous Spouses

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in what circumstances benefits can be paid to polygamous spouses; and what benefits can be paid to polygamous spouses. [59905]

Malcolm Wicks: Income-related benefits (income support, income-based jobseeker's allowance, housing benefit and council tax benefit) are payable to people in polygamous marriages where the relationship has been solemnised by a marriage ceremony in a country where polygamous marriages are permitted, and where the general conditions of entitlement are met.

The amount of benefit payable includes personal allowances for the male spouse and one partner at the appropriate couple rate and, for each other partner, the difference between the higher rate for a couple and the higher rate for a single person. In general there is no financial advantage to claiming for those in polygamous marriages. Having separate claims for a couple and for other members of the marriage would normally result in more benefit being paid. Benefit entitlement for any additional partners is restricted to an allowance which is less than the rate for single people.

In addition, any member of a polygamous marriage can claim a contributory or non-contributory social security benefit in his or her own right where he or she satisfies the relevant conditions of entitlement.

Pensioner Credit

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the costs of the introduction of pensioner credit in 2003 and in each of the subsequent five years. [61255]

Mr. McCartney: I refer my right hon. Friend to table A.2 (page 156) of the Economic and Fiscal Strategy report and Financial Statement and Budget report April 2002 (HC 592).

Winter Fuel Allowance

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions which assessment he has made of the cost of introducing a winter fuel allowance, equivalent to that received by pensioners, for those in receipt of disability benefits. [62389]

Mr. McCartney: The cost of extending the winter fuel payment scheme in this way would be approximately £510 million each year.

Notes:

1. Based on the 2000–01 Family Resources Survey and data taken from DWP administrative records for November 2001.

2. Assumes that the payment is made to people in receipt of incapacity benefit, disability living allowance, severe disablement allowance or to claimants receiving incapacity benefit credits.

Occupational Pensions

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on his recently published latest estimates of occupational pension receipt among the newly retired. [61385]

Mr. McCartney: The "Pensioners' Income Series" publication contains guidance about how to interpret the information contained within it. In particular, it warns that great care should be taken when interpreting changes in income over short periods of time since random sampling fluctuations mean that estimates should be regarded as broad indications of trends only.

Table 12 of the "Pensioners' Incomes Series 2000–01" contains estimates of the proportion of pensioner units with occupational pension income and the average amount for those in receipt from 1994–95 to 2000–01. It shows that 59 per cent. of recently retired pensioner units received income from occupational pensions in 2000–01, lower than the corresponding estimate for 1999–2000 of 64 per cent. Estimates for both singles and couples were lower in 2000–01 than in 1999–2000, but the drop was greatest for singles from 51 per cent. in 1999–2000 to 44 per cent. in 2000–01.

There are various possible explanations for these changes, including the possibility that they are due to random sampling fluctuation. More years of FRS data would be needed to confirm whether this is the case.

The "Pensioners' Income Series" publication warns that the time series of results based on the Family Resources Survey (FRS) 1994–95 to 2000–01 is too short to provide an accurate picture of detailed changes in pensioners' incomes over time. It also warns that estimates of proportions in receipt of occupational pension income should be treated with caution because they may be subject to under-reporting by respondents to the FRS.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will provide a breakdown by gender of his latest estimates of occupational pension receipt among the newly retired. [63690]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 21 June 2002]:* The information required can only be supplied for Single Pensioners. As published in the Pensioners' Incomes Series publication, estimates for pensioner couples cannot be split by gender, as the extent of income sharing within the pensioner units is not known.

Information for "All Single Pensioners" and for "Single Male Pensioners" and "Single Female Pensioners" is in the table.

The proportion of recently retired pensioners with occupational pension income and the average amounts for those in receipt, 1994–05 to 2000–01

	1994–95	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Proportions in receipt of occupational pension income					
All single pensioners	51	51	52	51	44
Single male pensioners	57	54	59	56	52
Single female pensioners	48	50	48	48	39
Average amount of occupational pension income for those in receipt (£pw)					
Mean amounts					
All single pensioners	88	93	93	97	95
Single male pensioners	104	107	103	108	115
Single female pensioners	77	83	86	89	79
Median amounts					
All single pensioners	55	63	58	62	57
Single male pensioners	62	66	65	66	81
Single female pensioners	49	57	52	58	47

Notes:

1. Estimates of the percentage of pensioner units in receipt of occupational pension income are based on respondents' own assessment and may be subject to under reporting.

2. Recently retired single pensioners are defined as single women aged 60–64 or men aged 65–69.

Medway Unitary Authority

Jonathan Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he will publish the inspection report of the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate in respect of Medway Unitary Authority. [65242]

Malcolm Wicks: The Benefit Fraud Inspectorate's (BFI) report on Medway Unitary Authority was published today and copies of the report have been placed in the Library.

Inspectors found that the council's previous good performance had been adversely affected by a number of factors including the move of staff to a central location, the loss of staff to a neighbouring authority and the introduction of a new IT system. This has led to a backlog of work. The council recognised these shortfalls and put in place proposals to tackle the backlog and address many of the other problems.

The report notes that the council needed to implement its stated aim to increase awareness of housing benefits. The council had run no take-up campaigns since 1999.

Inspectors found that most staff applied a high standard of scrutiny to claims, but limited management checking removed any means of identifying inconsistency and training needs.

There was a high level of accuracy in classifying overpayments but some improvements were needed in overpayment recovery.

Medway's fraud investigations unit is experienced and some good quality investigation work had been done.

Medway administered some £51 million in housing benefits in 2000–01.

The report makes recommendations to help the council address weaknesses and to improve the administration of housing benefit and council tax benefit, as well as counter fraud activities.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is now considering the report and will be asking the council for its proposals in response to the findings and recommendations of the BFI.

TREASURY

Performance Targets

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what targets he has accepted through public service agreements with *(a)* the Isle of Wight council, *(b)* Lewisham council and *(c)* Staffordshire county council; and what steps he takes to monitor those targets or audit the quality of information delivered to him as to their performance against those targets. [62215]

Mr. Leslie: I have been asked to reply.

A copy of the Local Public Service Agreement with the London borough of Lewisham is in the Library. We are currently finalising an agreement with Staffordshire county council. Negotiation of an agreement with the Isle of Wight council is scheduled to begin on 1 July 2002.

The targets relate to performance at the end of the period of the agreement; agreements normally run for around three years. An authority earns a reward grant for the achievement of its targets, and will provide information to enable the performance on which the grant is based to be verified.

Taxation

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the percentage change in income per income decile after tax as a consequence of changes to direct and indirect taxation from 1998–99 to 2000–01. [4632]

Mr. Boateng: The table shows the estimated percentage impact on the net income of UK households of direct and indirect tax and benefit changes introduced over the last Parliament and taking effect by 2001–02.

Net income decile	*Percentage change in net income*
Bottom	+11
2	+9
3	+7
4	+4
5	+3
6	+2
7	+2
8	+1
9	+1
Top	0

Note:

The estimates are based on Family Expenditure Survey data with incomes and expenditure projected forward to 2001–02. The decile groups are of all households ranked by net income before housing costs and equivalised using the McClements scale.

Bank of England

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on what date he plans to announce the appointment of the next Deputy Governor of the Bank of England with responsibility for financial stability. [63903]

Ruth Kelly: The term of office of Mr. David Clementi, the Deputy Governor for Financial Stability, runs until 31 August 2002. Mr. Clementi is not seeking reappointment. His successor will be announced in due course.

Fuel Duty

Mr. Howard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of fuel duty changes since May 1997 on the tax burden on families in the lowest income quintile; and if he will make a statement. [12800]

Mr. Boateng: Changes to fuel duties since May 1997 have cost families with children in the lowest income quintile around £30 a year on average in real terms. Personal tax and benefit changes introduced since 1997 have benefited families with children in the lowest income quintile by £2,400 a year on average in real terms.

Capital Modernisation Fund

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the projects funded in the first three rounds of the Capital Modernisation Fund; what funding each project has received to date; and if he will make a statement. [64550]

Mr. Boateng: Table 1.12 of the Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses 2001–02 (CM5101) lists all allocations made in the first three rounds of the Capital Modernisation Fund which had been announced at that date. Details of projects announced since then have been placed on the Treasury's public website.

Tax Credits

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 12 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 336W, on the Budget, what the levels of housing benefit and council tax benefit take-up were in 1997–98; what the caseload numbers for those receiving family credit were in 1997–98; what the levels of housing benefit and council tax benefit take-up were in 1999–2000; what the projected caseload numbers of those receiving WFTC or DPTC are for 2002–03; and what the projected caseload numbers are for those receiving the new tax credits in 2003–04. [64207]

Dawn Primarolo: There were some 4.77 million recipients of housing benefit in the UK in May 1997. This had fallen to 4.44 million by May 1999.

There were some 5.5 million recipients of council tax benefit in Great Britain in May 1997. This had fallen to 5.17 million by May 1999.

There were around 780,000 family credit recipients in the UK in May 1997.

The UK caseload of recipients receiving WFTC or DPTC as at November 2001 was 1.325 million.

The projected UK caseload of recipients of the child or working tax credits is about 6 million in 2003–04.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Electoral Fraud

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action will be taken by the Northern Ireland Office in conjunction with the Electoral Office headquarters to inform the electorate in relation to the requirements of the Electoral Fraud (NI) Act 2002; and when this information campaign will commence. [63534]

Mr. Browne: The Electoral Commission, which assumed responsibility for voter education and awareness for the whole of the UK on 1 July 2001, in consultation with the Northern Ireland Office and the Electoral Office, is planning a public awareness campaign in Northern Ireland. It will focus on the changes brought about by the Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Act 2002, in particular voter registration and identification, and will begin in the autumn.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Postal Voting

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment he has made of the pilot studies on postal voting at local government elections. [63825]

Mr. Raynsford: I have been asked to reply.

The Electoral Commission is evaluating the local authority pilot schemes that ran all postal ballots in the May 2002 local and mayoral elections and will provide a detailed assessment of the impact of each scheme to the Deputy Prime Minister by 2 August 2002.

Departmental Grants

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department which organisations which were in receipt of a grant in 1997–98 no longer are; what the annual saving is; which organisations which were not in receipt of a grant in 1997–98 now are; and what the annual cost is. [61401]

Yvette Cooper: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, my right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng), on 17 June 2002, *Official Report,* column 136W.

Tables 1 and 2 detail those organisations now in receipt of grants that were not in 1997–98.

Table 3 details those organisations that were in receipt of a grant in 1997–98 that are not now.

The saving from discontinued grants is £247,608.

The cost of new grants totals £1,303,000.

Marriage and relationship support (MARS) grant programme 2002–03

Core funding [1]	£ *Funding allocated*
Parentline Plus	62,000
2 as 1	150,000
Totnes Family Partnership	58,000
Somerset Family Partnership	50,000
Family Matters York	50,000
Prisoners Families and Friends Service	12,000
The Lesbian and Gay Foundation	48,000
Muslim Women's Helpline	20,000
The Salvation Army	40,000
Aquila Care Trust	88,000
Project for Advocacy, Counselling and Education	46,000
Basic for Life	34,000
The Cogwheel Trust	4,000
Poole Community Family Trust	50,000
CFP Guildford	40,000
Bristol Community Family Trust	50,000
	802,000

[1] Core grant is paid in respect of administration costs of the recipient organisation.

Marriage and relationship support grant programme 2002–03
Programme funding [1]

		£
University of Exeter, School of Psychology	Money management and marital commitment in new couples: An evaluation of the efficacy of the FOCCUS Inventory	43,000
Care for the Family	Asian family matters	19,000
2 as 1	Development and adaptation of Relate training material	66,000
The Minster Centre	Aracas project (domestic violence)	72,000
2 as 1	Partnership project (Relate)—Generic awareness campaign to promote MARS	120,000
Sussex Family Mediation Service	One Stop Shop	26,000
The Church of England	Marriage Preparation and Support in the south-east	54,000
Brook in Birmingham	Counselling for young couples	39,000
The Richmond Centre	Videos are Valuable	38,000
Talking Matters	Infrastructure for Marriage Preparation in the Orthodox Jewish Community	24,000
Total		501,000

[1] Programme grant is paid in respect of defined project costs of the recipient organisation.

Marriage and relationship support discontinued grants 1997–98

	£
Marriage Resource	126,900
Marriage Resource—Glossop	11,228
African Caribbean Family Mediation Service	89,900
Lighthouse Christian Care	29,580
Total	247,608

Staff Training

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how much the Department has spent on staff training and development in each of the last five years. [61061]

Yvette Cooper: The table details the amounts spent on staff training and development for each of the last five years by LCD.

Year	£
1997–98	2,253,686
1998–99	3,166,424
1999–2000	3,071,804
2000–01	3,818,095
2001–02[1]	3,154,397

[1] Provisional

The Department's commitment to the training and development of its staff is demonstrated through our successful achievement of the Investors in People status. LCD received accreditation in 2000 and the Court Service was re-accredited in 2001.

Training is delivered via a range of methods, including job shadowing and mentoring. Formal development activities include professional training, NVQs and the Princes Trust Volunteer Scheme.

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) what has been the *(a)* cost and *(b)* saving from the pursuit of the Department's Public Service Agreement targets in each year since they were introduced; [61047]

(2) what the *(a)* cost and *(b)* saving has been from the Department's pursuit of Service Delivery Agreement targets in each year since they were introduced. [61638]

Yvette Cooper: The Department's Public Service Agreement sets out the key outcomes it is committed to deliver with the resources provided, and its Service Delivery Agreement sets out the key steps towards delivery of those targets. Every year the Department publishes performance against its targets—including on value for money—and the resources it has used, in its Departmental Report.

Magistrates Courts Committees

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to reform magistrates courts committees. [62060]

Yvette Cooper: Sir Robin Auld's Review of the Criminal Courts in England and Wales makes wide-ranging recommendations, including several concerning magistrates courts committees. The period for comment closed on 31 January. The Government are now considering the recommendations in detail, taking account of the comments received. The Government hope to announce their conclusions by way of a White Paper before the summer recess.

Freedom of Information

Norman Baker: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will list the membership of the Advisory Group dealing with the implementation of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. [61413]

Yvette Cooper: The Lord Chancellor announced the formation of the Advisory Group on Implementation of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 in his statutory report to Parliament in November 2001. Mrs. Elizabeth France, the Information Commissioner, and myself jointly chair the group. The members of the group are:

Mr. James Leslie MLA: Northern Ireland Executive

Mr. Denis Haughey MLA: Northern Ireland Executive

Ms Alison Sutherland: Local Government Association

Mr. Tim Ricketts: National Association of Local Councils

Deputy Chief Constable Mr. Ian Readhead: Association of Chief Police Officers

Dr. Michael Wilks: British Medical Association

Ms Christine Miles: NHS Confederation

Mr. Michael Malone-Lee: Universities UK

Ms Jane Phillips: National Association of Governors and Managers

Ms Santha Rasaiah: Newspaper Society

Mr. Jonathan Baume: First Division Association

Mr. Maurice Frankel: Director of the Campaign for Freedom of Information

Mrs. Christine Gifford: former Metropolitan police civil servant

Professor Robert Hazell: Director of the Constitution Unit, University College London

Dr. Dilys Jones: former consultant psychiatrist, Department of Health

Mr. David Henke: The Guardian

Mr. David Reynolds, Director of Investigations at the Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration

Ms Sarah Tyacke, Keeper of the Public Records

Mr. Alan Cogbill: Director, Civil Justice and Legal Services, Lord Chancellor's Department

Mr. Lee Hughes, Head of the Freedom of Information and Data Protection Division, Lord Chancellor's Department

Mr. Graham Smith, Deputy Information Commissioner.

The Secretariat is provided by the Freedom of Information and Data Protection Division in the Lord Chancellor's Department.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will set out the timetable for the *(a)* repeal and *(b)* amendment under section 75 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 of the primary and secondary legislation which contains provisions prohibiting the disclosure of information. [63090]

Yvette Cooper: My predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for North Swindon (Mr. Wills), made a statement on 30 April 2002, *Official Report*, columns 699–700, announcing the publication of an interim report detailing the progress made so far in reviewing legislation prohibiting the disclosure of information. A further report is being prepared and will be published at the time of the Lord Chancellor's annual report in November on implementation of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Norman Baker: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will list the Ministers with responsibility for implementing freedom of information policies. [61411]

Yvette Cooper: Policy responsibility for the Freedom of Information Act rests with the Lord Chancellor and myself. The Lord Chancellor chairs the Cabinet Ministerial Sub-Committee on Freedom of Information and its members are responsible for implementation of the Act in their Departments. The sub-committee's terms of reference are

> "To consider policy and other issues arising from the Government's decision to legislate on freedom of information and from legislation on data protection; to oversee implementation of the relevant legislation; and to report as necessary to the Committee on Constitutional Reform Policy".

The membership of the committee in the light of the recent Cabinet reshuffle will be confirmed shortly.

Crown Court (Buckinghamshire)

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, which locations she is considering for the site of future Crown court buildings in Buckinghamshire. [61560]

Yvette Cooper: The Court Service is currently considering both Aylesbury and Milton Keynes as potential locations for a new Crown court in Buckinghamshire.

Judges

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, how many representations the Lord Chancellor has received concerning the *(a)* conduct of judges and *(b)* operation of the Legal Services Commission since 1997. [62779]

Ms Rosie Winterton: *(a)* The principle of judicial independence means that it is not open to the Lord Chancellor or his Department to entertain complaints about judicial decisions. However, as Head of the Judiciary, the Lord Chancellor does consider complaints about the personal conduct of individual judges and other judicial office holders and is able to reprimand or rebuke judges who have behaved inappropriately. In the most extreme cases the Lord Chancellor, with the consent of the Lord Chief Justice, can remove a judge below the level of the High Court from office.

No figures for complaints about judges' conduct are available for the period before August 1998, when the Lord Chancellor established a team of officials dedicated to make thorough inquiries on his behalf into all complaints about judicial conduct. Between August 1998 and 31 May 2002, the Lord Chancellor received 1,351 complaints which appeared to relate to judges' personal conduct. In 1,089 cases the complainant agreed that the Lord Chancellor could investigate the complaint by asking the judge for his or her comments. The Lord Chancellor then considered the complaint and the response, and informed the complainant of the judge's comments and his own conclusion. The great majority of these complaints were from disappointed litigants and were found to be without foundation. However, on 23 occasions, the Lord Chancellor thought it appropriate to rebuke or reprimand the judge concerned in relation to conduct.

(b) The Legal Services Commission was established by the Access to Justice Act 1999, and came into being on 1 April 2000 to replace the Legal Aid Board. Since that date 67 representations have been received (although some of these will relate to the old Legal Aid Board). Of these, 17 were from politicians and 50 from the public.

Overall figures on representations about the two bodies received by the Lord Chancellor's Department, are unavailable for 1997. Since 1 January 1998, the Department has received 238 separate representations, relating to either the Legal Aid Board or the Legal Services Commission. Of these, 155 have come from members of the public, with the remaining 83 from MPs and peers.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Coroners

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many *(a)* part-time and *(b)* full-time coroners have been met by members of the review team examining the future of the coroner system as part of their work; and if he will make a statement; [62835]

(2) if he will list the shire counties visited by members of the review into the coroner system as part of their work; [62837]

(3) when he intends to publish the findings of the review of the coroner system; and if he will make a statement. [62836]

Hilary Benn: Responsibility for the review team's consultation and fact-finding arrangements lies with the Chair of the review, Tom Luce. I have accordingly asked him to write to the hon. Member direct about the visits which the review team has made and the coroners they have met.

Mr. Luce has recently assessed that the work involved in conducting the review will require a little more time than originally agreed, but I now expect to receive the findings by April 2003 and to publish them shortly thereafter.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with the Scottish Executive in respect of providing for the education of the children of asylum seekers in Scotland. [62414]

Beverley Hughes: My officials and the Scottish Executive continue to discuss the provision of education for the children of asylum seekers in Accommodation centres proposed for Scotland.

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which detention facilities in which asylum seekers are detained are defined as *(a)* short-term and *(b)* long-term; and what is the average length of time he estimates asylum seekers will be held in (i) short-term and (ii) long-term detention [63462]

Beverley Hughes: There are short-term holding facilities at Manchester, Dover, Cheriton, Felixstowe and Harwich. Detainees are held at these centres for no longer than five days, or no longer than seven days in cases where removal directions have been set.

The immigration removal centres at Campsfield House, Harmondsworth, Tinsley House, Dungavel House, Dover, Haslar, Lindholme and Yarl's Wood (which is closed at present) may be used to hold detainees for whatever period is necessary for the purpose for which detention was authorised. This period will vary from case to case.

In addition, Oakington Reception Centre is used to detain persons whose asylum claim is assessed to be straightforward and capable of being decided quickly. The fast-track asylum process at Oakington typically takes between seven to 10 days.

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his policy is regarding *(a)* when and *(b)* for how long asylum seekers should be detained. [63461]

Beverley Hughes: Our policy regarding the use of detention was set out in the 1998 White Paper "Fairer, Faster, Firmer—A Modern Approach to Immigration and Asylum" and the recent White Paper "Secure Borders, Safe Haven".

Detention will usually be appropriate to effect removal; initially to establish a person's identity or basis of claim; or where there is reasonable belief that a person will fail to comply with the conditions attached to the grant of temporary admission or release. In addition, persons whose asylum claims appear straightforward and capable of being decided quickly may be detained as part of the fast-track asylum process at Oakington Reception Centre.

Detention under the Immigration Act 1971 is not time limited. However, it is used sparingly and is kept to the minimum duration necessary for the purposes for which it was authorised.

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reasons asylum seekers may be moved from one place to another within the detention estate. [63463]

Beverley Hughes: The transfer of detainees between removal centres, for whatever reason, is kept to a minimum. However, a transfer may occur for reasons of security; for health care reasons, as not all centres have in-patient facilities; and, on occasion, for domestic or compassionate reasons, or to enable a detainee to be more easily visited by a representative. Transfers may also be arranged for operational reasons as a stage towards removal from the United Kingdom, or to create vacancies in a particular centre.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether local grant claims for supporting adult and family asylum seekers for the period 1 April 1999 to 5 December 1999 have been met. [65177]

Mr. Blunkett: I have laid before Parliament today a Special Grant Report which sets out the arrangements for reimbursing local authorities in England for amounts outstanding in respect of claims for supporting asylum-seeking adults and families for the period 1 April 1999 to 5 December 1999.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers were accepted as refugees from *(a)* the Czech Republic, *(b)* Slovakia, *(c)* Bulgaria and *(d)* Romania in 2001. [63955]

Beverley Hughes: The information requested is given in the table. These statistics relate to initial decisions only and exclude the outcome of appeals or other subsequent decisions.

Initial decisions[1] made on applications for asylum in the UK, excluding dependants, 2001

	Czech Republic	*Slovakia*	*Bulgaria*	*Romania*
Total initial decisions made	885	85	145	2,125
Recognised as a refugee and granted asylum	—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
Not recognised as a refugee but granted exceptional leave	5	[2]—	15	70
Refused asylum and exceptional leave	850	80	130	2,055

[1] The information relates to initial decisions made in 2001, which in some cases will relate to applications received in previous years. Figures have been rounded to the nearest five and are provisional.

[2] Equals one or two

Information on initial decisions is published quarterly. The next publication will cover the period up to June 2002, and will be available from 30 August 2002 on the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what criteria the National Asylum Support Service uses to assess the *(a)* existence and *(b)* suitability of accommodation for those leaving induction centres; [58917]

(2) what proportion of those who stayed in the Home Office induction centres in the last 12 months now reside in London. [58918]

Beverley Hughes: The first induction centre opened in Dover on 21 January 2002. The National Asylum Support Service (NASS) does not keep separate figures showing the destination of those passing through the induction centres.

Applications for support from those in the induction centre are considered in the same way as any other. Only asylum seekers who request that accommodation be provided as part of an application for support are liable to be dispersed. Each application is considered on its individual merits. It is open to the asylum seeker to put forward reasons why they should either not be dispersed or should be sent to a particular area. Generally speaking NASS does not provide accommodation in London. Normally the only exceptions are where the asylum seeker has been accepted for treatment by the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture or where the asylum seeker is transferring to the NASS system of support and has school age children who have been at school for over one year.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to reimburse local authorities for their expenditure on supporting unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. [65174]

Mr. Blunkett: I have laid before Parliament today a Special Grant Report which sets out the arrangements for reimbursing local authorities in England for the costs of supporting unaccompanied asylum-seeking children as a result of their duties under the Children Act 1989.

The Special Grant Report explains the areas of expenditure which will be eligible for the grant and the time scales for local authorities to make their claims.

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what *(a)* the cost is of building accommodation centres at each of the three sites identified, *(b)* the cost is of providing facilities at those centres as set out in Clause 25 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill and *(c)* use is planned for the accommodation centres at the end of the experimental period if the evaluation of them deems them unsuitable. [58395]

Beverley Hughes: We have not yet tendered for the provision of accommodation centres.

We expect the trial centres to be successful. If in the light of the evaluation of the trial there is a need to modify any aspect of the centres, we will address that at the time.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has collated on the use of accommodation centres for asylum seekers in other EU countries on *(a)* decision times, *(b)* removal rates and *(c)* the welfare of applicants. [62529]

Beverley Hughes: The Home Office has looked at the use of accommodation centres for asylum seekers during visits to Belgium, Denmark and Sweden. As far as we are aware, none of these countries has systematically evaluated the use of accommodation centres for asylum seekers or carried out any comparison of the impact of accommodation centres on decision times and removal rates. There has been some analysis of the impact of accommodation centres on the welfare of applicants. Published sources include: Dutch Refugee Council (1997) "Asylum seekers—don't let them just sit and wait: six months in a centre is the limit"; Danish Red Cross leaflet 2001 "Danish Red Cross and the Asylum Work"; Willigen, L. van and Mooren, G.T.M. (et al) (1993) "Study on the difficulties in the reception and care of children of refugees and asylum seekers in the Netherlands", in Willigen, L. van (ed) "Health Hazards of Organised Violence in Children", Pharos Foundation for Refugee Health Care, London.

In January 2002, the Home Office commissioned research to examine the reception policies and practice of four European countries (Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands and Germany). This includes an analysis of the impact of accommodation centres on: (1) application rates; (2) the speed of the determination process; (3) the facilitation of return and removals; and (4) integration.

Prison Service (Meat Supplies)

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what (1) proportion of meat and meat products purchased by HM Prison Service is derived from *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* other EU countries and *(c)* countries outside the EU; [61595]

(2) if he will make a statement on his Department's policy on the sourcing of meat and meat products for consumption in UK prisons; [61596]

(3) what steps his Department has taken to increase the proportion of meat and meat products sourced from UK producers by HM Prison Service; what assessment he has made of the benefits to UK prisons of the purchase of UK produced meat; and if he will make a statement. [61593]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* Her Majesty's Prison Service for England and Wales procures meat and meat products using contracts awarded in accordance with European Union (EU) procurement regulations and on a best value for money basis which takes account of quality of product, cost and availability. The EU regulations are designed to support fair and open competition allowing British suppliers to compete for business with other members. British suppliers have been awarded contracts under this mechanism and have access to a global market as part of their supply chain to ensure availability and the cost-effectiveness of the product at all times.

Data available from existing contracted suppliers show the following information:

64 per cent. of meat and meat products purchased by HM Prison Service is from the United Kingdom;

17 per cent. is derived from other EU countries; and

19 per cent. is derived from countries outside the EU.

No steps have been taken by the Department to increase the proportion of meat and meat products sourced from United Kingdom (UK) producers by HM Prison Service and no direct assessments have been made regarding possible benefits or disadvantages to prisons in England and Wales from the purchase of UK produced meat. The Service has no plans to change the current situation as any move to discriminate in favour of UK producers would be deemed to be in contravention of the EU supplies directive, 93/96/EC Purchase of Goods, by disadvantaging other member states.

Information about the procurement of meat and meat products for prisoners in Scotland and Northern Ireland is the responsibility of the Scottish Executive and the Northern Ireland Office respectively.

Victim Support

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what performance indicators are utilised to describe the efficiency and effectiveness of Victim Support; when the indicators were established; and if they have been reviewed. [62716]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 19 June 2002]:* A range of means are used to measure the effectiveness of Victim Support including two performance indicators. The first, which was established under the Victim's Charter in 1996, is that Victim Support should aim to contact victims within four working days of the necessary details being passed to them by the police. The second, established in 1999–2000, was that Victim Support should, with Home Office funding, set up a witness support service in all magistrates courts by April 2002. This was substantially achieved by the due date.

The National Audit Office (NAO) is currently looking at the work of Victim Support and the Home Office's oversight of its substantial annual grant to the organisation. The NAO's findings will be published and considered in due course.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the terms of reference and membership are of the body which replaces the Victims Steering Group; and who has been working on the terms of reference for the group. [62714]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 19 June 2002]:* The Victims Steering Group was formally disbanded in November 2001, as it was recognised that the new services for victims in recent years, together with planned developments, required a more proactive, delivery-focused national group.

A new draft national strategy for victims and witnesses has been developed which the Government are planning to publish later in the year. Once the national strategy has been agreed, we will give consideration to the membership and terms of reference of the group or committee which is required to support, evaluate and review it.

To complement the group, and other existing official groups or ministerial committees, we also plan to establish a Victims Advisory Panel. The panel will have the opportunity to comment on a range of policy developments and on service delivery issues, and we are currently considering how best to set it up.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if officers interviewing convicted criminals in prison on the basis that the criminal is a victim of a crime give prisoners the opportunity to be contacted by Victim Support; and how it is ensured that each prisoner receives a Victims of Crime leaflet. [62712]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 19 June 2002]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) to her question on 27 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1388W.

It is for individual officers to determine the most appropriate course of action in the particular circumstances of the case.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the review of the Victims Charter will be completed; who and what agencies have been involved in the review; and what recent developments have been included in the review. [62718]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 19 June 2002]:* The following Departments, organisations and victims groups have been directly involved in the review of the Victims Charter:

Home Office Justice and Victims Unit
Home Office National Probation Directorate
Home Office Research and Statistics Unit
Association of Chief Police Officers
Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation
Prison Service
The Court Service
Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority
Criminal Cases Review Commission
Crown Prosecution Service
Lord Chancellor's Department
Department of Health
Department of Work and Pensions
Department of Transport
Department of Local Government and the Regions
Her Majesty's Treasury
Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration
Justices' Clerk's Society
Magistrates' Association
Judiciary
Victim Support
Campaign Against Drink Driving
Brake
RoadPeace
Headway.

The work on the new benefits for victims—a bill of rights, a victims commissioner, a new complaints procedure, and new services for particular victims—is well advanced, and the Government expect to make an announcement later this year. Those leading and involved in the review have taken into account all new developments which impact on victims, including lessons to be learned from individual cases and important initiatives such as the street crime initiative.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action the Government have taken in response to the responses from individuals in relation to the review of the Victims Charter. [62715]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 19 June 2002]:* Individuals who responded to the consultation exercise on the Review of the Victims Charter received a letter of acknowledgement and were advised on how the work would be taken forward. A summary of the responses to the consultation process was placed in the Library and published on the Home Office website in July 2001.

The Victims Charter Review Implementation Group was set up in October 2001 to take forward the work on the Review of the Victims Charter and has now met on three occasions. The group's work, and that of its subsidiary groups working on the Victims Ombudsman/Commissioner and the inclusion of the victims of road traffic incidents within the scope of the revised Victims Charter, is progressing well. The views expressed by individuals during the public consultation process have been taken into account by all of these groups.

Overstayers

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what percentage of visitors from overseas entering the UK in each of the past five years by visa became overstayers; [63435]

(2) what proportion of visitors from Jamaica in each of the last five years to the United Kingdom became overstayers. [63434]

Beverley Hughes: The information requested is not available.

Extradition

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women have been extradited from the UK in each of the last three years; and to which countries they were extradited. [63584]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The information requested is as follows:

	Numbers surrendered	
Year	*Men*	*Women*
1999	33	4
2000	43	4
2001	52	3

The countries to which those 139 fugitives were surrendered are as follows:

Country	*Fugitives*
Australia	1
Belgium	8
Canada	3
Cyprus	3
Czech Republic	5
Denmark	2

Country	Fugitives
Finland	3
France	5
Germany	25
Greece	1
Hong Kong	2
India	1
Italy	8
Lithuania	1
Luxembourg	1
Netherlands	14
Norway	3
Portugal	6
South Africa	1
Spain	4
Sweden	5
Switzerland	13
Uganda	1
United States of America	23

Prison Farms

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the proposed closure of prison farms following the review of the future of the Farms and Gardens Estate. [63633]

Hilary Benn: Proposals on the future of prison farms are to be put to Ministers for consideration shortly.

Ethnic Minorities

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the Government's estimate is of the size of the Sikh community in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* England and Wales. [63613]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 21 June 2002]:* At present, there are no accurate data available on the size of the Sikh community in either the United Kingdom or England and Wales. Current estimates for the United Kingdom Sikh population range from 350,000 to 500,000.

Next February we hope to have a clearer picture. Demographic data about Sikhs in the United Kingdom—and specifically England and Wales—will be available for the first time from the results of the religious identity question in the 2001 Census.

However, the Labour Force Survey is also introducing a question on religion this spring. The results will be evaluated and, if possible, released towards the end of the year.

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Sikhs are employed in his Department. [63607]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 21 June 2002]:* The Home Office keeps ethnicity data on its employees using the 2001 Census categories of ethnic groups. Information is not currently kept on the religious beliefs or affiliations of employees.

Immigration

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average time taken to process applications for indefinite leave to remain submitted by people admitted for settlement as the fiancé(e)s of British citizens was in the last 12 months. [64151]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 24 June 2002]:* Information on decision times for individual types of general immigration applications is not available. Our aim is to decide straightforward applications within three weeks and this was achieved during the first half of 2001. Due to an exceptionally large increase in the number of immigration cases in the latter part of the year the turnaround time increased. This has now been reduced to four weeks and we are working to return performance to three weeks shortly.

Information on initial decisions is published quarterly. The next publication will cover the period up to June 2002, and will be available from 30 August 2002 on the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he changed the advice on his Department's website that applications by people admitted as fiance(é)s for indefinite leave to remain in the United Kingdom, would be dealt with in six weeks; what the reasons were for that change; and if he will make a statement. [64152]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 24 June 2002]:* The information on the Immigration and Nationality Directorate website reflects the current average length of time between the receipt of all postal immigration applications in Croydon and their initial consideration. In early March the average length of time quoted on the website was changed to six weeks. This was changed to five weeks at the beginning of May and to four weeks at the beginning of June. These changes reflect the improvement in initial processing times over recent months towards the target of three weeks.

Immigration and Nationality Directorate

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what percentage of letters received by the IND in 2000 went unanswered; [64236]

(2) what the average response time was for letters sent by *(a)* hon. Members and *(b)* others to the IND in the last 12 months; [64240]

(3) for what reason it is not the policy of the IND to acknowledge all correspondence; what percentage of written communications are acknowledged; and if he will make a statement. [64238]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 25 June 2002]:* Information on all correspondence received by the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) in 2000, and on the average length of time taken for officials to respond to hon. Members' correspondence over the last 12 months is not recorded centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. IND received over one million pieces of correspondence during 2001–02, and systems are not yet in place to identify whether responses were given to all categories of correspondence we have seen.

We are however now developing measures to record and track all categories of public correspondence, including MP's correspondence. The Home Office Customer Communication Foundation project was suspended last November and has now been replaced by a short term/tactical Correspondence Tracking System (CTS) project to address the handling of correspondence and the provision of accurate management information. The project is due to begin on 1 July 2000 and will be rolled out for operational use during the autumn. IND's ministerial and treat official correspondence are both included in the intended scope of the project.

The Home Office's service delivery agreement for 2001–04, which commits all directorates, including the IND to replying to 95 per cent. of public correspondence within 20 days by the end of 2001–02, does not require that such correspondence also be acknowledged. However, it is IND's policy to acknowledge the receipt of all immigration, asylum, asylum support and citizenship applications either by the sending of a letter or the issue of a form. Other casework-related correspondence is not routinely acknowledged at present although we are considering the feasibility of acknowledging certain categories, when backlogs are reduced to a frictional level.

Hunting-related Offences

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many offences against *(a)* hunt personnel, supporters or their property and *(b)* opponents of hunting or their property (i) were reported, (ii) were prosecuted and (iii) led to convictions in each year since 1997. [63880]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 24 June 2002]:* The information requested is not available centrally.

Prevention of Terrorism

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to publish the report on the operation in 2000 of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 and the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1996. [65176]

Mr. Blunkett: I am pleased to say that J. J. Rowe's report on the Prevention of Terrorism Act and Northern Ireland Emergency Provisions Act will be placed in the Library today.

Permanent counter-terrorist legislation was enacted in the Terrorism Act 2000, which came into effect on 19 February 2001.

Temporary Staff

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the cost to his Department was of employing staff in *(a)* London and *(b)* the south-east from employment agencies in each year since 1997. [56510]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* Detailed breakdowns of costs of employment agency staff by region are not held centrally nor captured by the Department's accounting systems. Data are recorded under broad expenditure headings. Further detail could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The Department's policy is that staff from agencies may be employed to provide short-term cover for vacancies while permanent staff are recruited.

The recorded expenditure on agency staff by the core Home Office is shown in the table:

£000

Year	*Expenditure*
1997–98	298
1998–99	466
1999–2000	1,189
2000–01	3,014
2001–02	6,641

The increase since 1999 is mainly due to the expansion of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) in response to the increased numbers of asylum seekers. Agency staff were employed until long-term recruitment plans were implemented, enabling us to drive home the backlog and speed up the time taken for vital decisions.

Throckmorton

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to purchase residential properties at Throckmorton in the immediate vicinity of the site of the proposed asylum accommodation centre, where residents are attempting to sell their homes; and if he will make a statement. [57235]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* We have no plans to purchase such properties.

Pensions

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much was spent by his Department on paying pensions to retired employees of his Department in 2001–02; if he will estimate the corresponding amounts to be spent in *(a)* five years' time, *(b)* 10 years' time, *(c)* 20 years' time and *(d)* 30 years' time; if he will estimate in each case the proportion of such liabilities which will arise from (i) unfunded pension schemes and (ii) pre-funded pension schemes; and in the case of pre-funded schemes, if he will estimate the value of the corresponding pre-funded funds in each of these years. [57370]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Mr. Leslie), on 23 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 563W.

Regional Organisation

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what regional organisation his Department has; and if he will list the counties and unitary authorities in each region in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2002. [58936]

Beverley Hughes: The Home Office operates through the Government offices for the regions, who carry out a number of functions at regional level such as the regional management of crime reduction and drug treatment programmes and liaison with local partnerships. A table setting out the structure of the Government office regions and the counties and unitary authorities in 1997 and 2002 is as follows.

Other parts of the Department with specific operational responsibilities have their own regional organisational structures. Since April 2000, the Prison Service has operated an area manager structure that is based on the Government regions. Two regions are divided between two area managers: the south-east (one for Thames Valley, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight and one for Kent, Surrey and Sussex) and east midlands north (Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire, Derby and Nottingham) and south (Leicestershire and Northamptonshire, Leicester and Rutland). Previously area managers had been based in London. The National Probation Service regions mirror the Government office regions.

Both the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) and the Immigration Service (IS) in Immigration and Nationality Department operate regional structures. NASS, which became fully operational in April 2000, has regional representatives in each Government region, and operates broadly within that regional structure, with some minor differences for local operational reasons.

The Immigration Service operates at ports and airports across the United Kingdom and had, until 2002, an Immigration Service regional organisation with four regional districts: Scotland, Northern Ireland, North-west England and north Wales; North-east England, the east midlands and East Anglia and South-west England and mid and south Wales. London and the south-east came under Immigration Service South East. From 2002 the regional boundaries of the IS were realigned to more closely match the Government office regions. The present structure, managed by regional operations headquarters in Manchester, comprises:

Scotland

North-west England, Northern Ireland and North Wales

North-east England (which includes Yorkshire and the Humber)

Southern England

West midlands

Eastern (east midlands and East Anglia, including Lincolnshire)

South-west England, mid and south Wales.

London (including Heathrow and Gatwick) and Kent are managed by Immigration Service headquarters, Croydon.

Regions, counties and unitaries in England

Region	*County authorities*	*Unitary authorities*
East of England	Bedfordshire Cambridgeshire Essex Hertfordshire Norfolk Suffolk	Luton* Peterborough* Southend-on-Sea* Thurrock*
East Midlands	Derbyshire Leicestershire Lincolnshire Northamptonshire Nottinghamshire	Derby* Leicester* Nottingham* Rutland*
London		Barking and Dagenham Barnet Bexley Brent Bromley Camden Corporation of London Croydon Ealing Enfield Greenwich Hackney Hammersmith and Fulham Haringey Harrow Havering Hillingdon Hounslow Islington Kensington and Chelsea Kingston-upon-Thames Lambeth Lewisham Merton Newham Redbridge Richmond-upon-Thames Southwark Sutton Tower Hamlets Waltham Forest Wandsworth Westminster

Regions, counties and unitaries in England

Region	*County authorities*	*Unitary authorities*
North East	Durham	Darlington*
	Northumberland	Hartlepool
		Middlesbrough
		Redcar and Cleveland
		Stockton-on-Tees
		Metropolitan authorities in Tyne and Wear
		Gateshead
		Newcastle upon Tyne
		North Tyneside
		South Tyneside
		Sunderland
North West	Cumbria	Blackburn with Darwen*
	Cheshire	Blackpool*
	Lancashire	Halton*
		Warrington*
		Metropolitan authorities in Greater Manchester
		Bury
		Bolton
		Manchester
		Oldham
		Rochdale
		Salford
		Stockport
		Tameside
		Trafford
		Wigan
		Metropolitan authorities in Merseyside
		Knowsley
		Liverpool
		Sefton
		St. Helens
		Wirral
South East	Buckinghamshire	Brighton and Hove*
	East Sussex	Isle of Wight (County)
	Hampshire	Medway*
	Kent	Milton Keynes*
	Oxfordshire	Portsmouth*
	Surrey	Southampton*
	West Sussex	*Unitary authorities in Berkshire:*
		Bracknell Forest*
		Reading*
		Slough*
		West Berkshire*
		Windsor and Maidenhead*
		Wokingham*
South West	Cornwall	Bath and North East Somerset
	Devon	Bournemouth*
	Dorset	Bristol
	Gloucestershire	North Somerset
	Somerset	Poole*
	Wiltshire	Plymouth*
		South Gloucestershire
		Swindon*
		Torbay*
West Midlands	Shropshire	Herefordshire*
	Staffordshire	Stoke on Trent*
	Warwickshire	Telford and Wrekin*
	Worcestershire	
		Metropolitan authorities in West Midlands
		Birmingham
		Coventry
		Dudley
		Sandwell
		Solihull
		Walsall
		Wolverhampton
Yorkshire and the Humber	North Yorkshire	East Riding of Yorkshire
		Kingston upon Hull
		North Lincolnshire
		North East Lincolnshire
		York

Regions, counties and unitaries in England

Region	*County authorities*	*Unitary authorities*
		Metropolitan authorities in South Yorkshire
		Barnsley
		Doncaster
		Rotherham
		Sheffield
		Metropolitan authorities in West Yorkshire
		Bradford
		Calderdale
		Kirklees
		Leeds
		Wakefield

Note:

The unitary authorities that came into being as a result of the last local government review were established over three years. Those established on or after 1 April 1997 are asterisked.

Public Consultation

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the public consultations undertaken by his Department since June 2001, stating in each case the *(a)* number of respondents and *(b)* percentage of those specifically consulted who responded. [60150]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* The Home Office has undertaken 14 formal national public consultations since June 2001. The table lists consultations that started after 1 June 2001 and finished by the time of this response. The number of respondents in each case is noted but the percentage of those specifically consulted is not, as Departments are not routinely required to keep such records.

The figure do not include internet hits which are an increasingly popular method of the public accessing Government consultations.

Table of consultations

Subject of consultation exercise	*Start date*	*Deadline for responses*	*Number of responses*[1]
The Halliday Report—making punishments work	5 July 2001	31 October 2001	305
Consultation Paper on the Review of Part 1 of the Sex Offenders Act 1997	30 July 2001	19 October 2001	46
Use of x/gamma radiation scanners for the detection of clandestine illegal entrants	17 July 2001	27 August 2001	30
Extension of civil penalty to eurotunnel	18 July 2001	29 August 2001	8
Police and Criminal Evidence Act—Code F	15 September 2001	31 October 2001	10
Ratification of the driving disqualification convention	25 September 2001	18 December 2001	46
Review of family visitor appeals	29 October 2001	14 December 2001	23
Young people's substance misuse plans: supporting joint working at local level	21 November 2001	11 January 2002	440
Consultation paper on revising the definition of categories of deaths of members of the public during or following police contact	14 December 2001	31 January 2002	14
White Paper "Policing a New Century: A Blueprint for Reform"	5 December 2001	21 January 2002	1,200
Police and Criminal Evidence Act—Code A	11 March 2002	19 April 2002	45
Motor Salvage Operators Regulations 2002, made under the Vehicles (Crime) Act 2001	4 January 2002	1 March 2002	26
White Paper "Secure Borders, Safe Haven: Integration with diversity in modern Britain"	7 February 2002	21 March 2002	330
Proposed changes to the misuse of drugs legislation	4 March 2002	17 May 2002	6

[1] The number of responses does not include hits on internet sites and may include both targeted and non-targeted respondents.

Departmental Grants

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which organisations which were in receipt of a grant from him in 1997–98 no longer are; what the annual saving is; which organisations which were not in receipt of a grant in 1997–98 now are; and what the annual cost of each is. [61390]

Beverley Hughes: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Andrew Smith), on 17 June 2002, *Official Report,* column 136W.

The aggregate figure for Government grants to private organisations and individuals was £28.6 billion in 2000–01 (the last year for which full outturn data are available) compared with £24.8 billion in 1997–98. This excludes social security payments classified as grants in the national accounts and includes lottery grants.

Detailed analysis of departmental spending is contained in Departments' annual reports. Comprehensive data on individual grant recipients are not centrally available.

Non-UK Minors

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions for the employment of children not of UK nationality and under the age of 16 years there were in the UK in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001, broken down by employment sector. [62218]

Hilary Benn: The information requested is not held centrally.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter to him dated 22 April from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mr. Mohamed Tavs (Niaz). [61676]

Mr. Blunkett: I wrote to my right hon. Friend on 20 June 2002.

Videos (Prosecutions)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* successful and *(b)* unsuccessful prosecutions have been brought since 1997 against persons making videos involving the payment of people to injure themselves or others; and if he will make a statement. [62054]

Hilary Benn: The information requested is not held centrally.

Racism (Prosecutions)

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions have been undertaken against members of racist organisations in each of the last five years. [61851]

Hilary Benn: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Prisons

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of the annual budget for prisons in England is designated for *(a)* education and *(b)* health care. [62287]

Hilary Benn: Figures are available for education expenditure in prisons in England and Wales only. In the financial year 2002–03, the sum of £70 million is planned to be spent on prisoner education, which is 3.1 per cent. of the overall departmental expenditure limit for the Prison Service.

Information is not held centrally in a way that allows expenditure on health care to be readily identified. Research conducted for "The Future Organisation of Prison Health Care" (published 9 March 1999) estimated that establishments spent £85 million on prisoner health care in the financial year 1997–98.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what financial contribution he plans to make to the reconstruction of sewers and drains on the Isle of Wight prison estate to facilitate the *(a)* adoption of roads, drains and lighting, *(b)* implementation of planning permissions for new housing on the estate and *(c)* construction of new prison places which have been announced. [62963]

Hilary Benn: The Prison Service has been seeking outline planning permission for residential development on 11 sites adjacent to former prison housing estates. Outline planning permission has been received on seven sites to date and are expected on a further two later this year. Two amended applications may be re-submitted in due course.

The future development schemes for the 11 sites include proposals to upgrade to adoptable standard a number of roads, street lights and drains leading to these sites, either by the Prison Service to facilitate a sale and maximise sale receipts, or by future owners under planning agreements.

Consideration is also being given to upgrading other roads, storm water drainage and street lighting not directly accessing future development sites. It is hoped this will be to a standard suitable for maintenance adoption by the local highways authority. There are a number of legal and technical issues to resolve before formal proposals are made. Progress is also dependent on obtaining further outline planning consents, with sustainable planning conditions and the relative strength of the property market during a future land sales programme. To date no decision has been taken as to the extent of the Prison Service's contribution.

It is not anticipated that it will be necessary to upgrade roads and drains within the estates as a result of the construction of the additional accommodation unit at Albany prison for which the Prison Service secured planning clearance in April 2002. In the event that it would be necessary to do so, this will be done in consultation with the Isle of Wight council. Should the Prison Service decide to proceed with a development on the site to the west of Parkhurst prison (for which it secured planning clearance for a 416-place prison in 1997), it would ensure that it was properly accessed and supplied with mains services.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of cells in segregation units in each category B prison have forced ventilation; and if he will make a statement. [62376]

Hilary Benn: The Prison Service does not collect this information centrally and it could be provided only at disproportionate cost. All segregation cells in secure penal establishments are built to a category B type standard. After 1980 the standard provision for all segregation cells is mechanically ventilated or natural ventilation through grilles. Before 1980 segregation cells will have natural ventilation, unless they have since been refurbished with fixed windows and in these cases the provision will be mechanically ventilated systems or natural ventilation through grilles. Certain "short term holding" cells in segregation units within the prison estate have "forced (mechanical)" ventilation when this is required.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many sessions of purposeful activity were *(a)* delivered and *(b)* lost (i) per prisoner and (ii) in total in each category B prison in the most recent year for which information is available. [62381]

Hilary Benn: The Prison Service does not collect centrally, the number of purposeful activity sessions delivered or lost in prisons. Average weekly purposeful activity hours achieved in each category B prison and in total during 2001–02 are given in the table.

Establishment	*Activity hours*[1]
Albany	24.2
Blundeston	25.8
Dovegate	27.5
Garth	23.4
Gartree	30.5
Grendon	35.6
Kingston	24.3

Establishment	*Activity hours*[1]
Lowdham Grange	27.2
Maidstone	21.0
Parkhurst	19.1
Rye Hill	29.4
Swaleside	24.3
Total in all prisons	23.4

[1] Average weekly purposeful activity hours 2001–02.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in what way the EU Directive for shellfish waters is inhibiting the adoption of roads on the Isle of Wight prison estates. [62962]

Hilary Benn: The Government are not aware that the European Union (EU) Directive on shellfish waters is directly inhibiting the possible adoption of existing roads and drains within the former prison housing estates.

There are currently seven development sites owned by the Prison Service, adjacent to these estates, with outline planning permission for residential developments. One of the standard planning conditions is to agree with the water company Southern Water proposals for the disposal and treatment of foul and storm water generated by future developments. Southern Water may be required to consider the relevance of the EU directive when negotiating with the Prison Service or future owners.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for how many hours, on average, non-segregated prisoners were confined to their cells in each category B prison in the last year for which information is available. [62383]

Hilary Benn: The Prison Service does not collect centrally information to distinguish time out of cell for specific categories of prisoner. The average time out of cell on weekdays for all prisoners in each category B prison during 2001–02 is given in the table. Comparative figures are not available for privately managed prisons.

Establishment	*Time out*[1]
Albany	9.3
Blundeston	10.1
Garth	10.0
Gartree	10.1
Grendon	15.4
Kingston	11.8
Lowdham Grange	12.4
Maidstone	10.4
Parkhurst	9.7
Swaleside	9.7

[1] Average weekday time out of cell 2001–02—all prisoners.

CABINET OFFICE

Waste Strategy

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what research contracts have been let by the Performance and Innovation Unit as part of its review of the Government's waste strategy; when these research contracts will be completed; and if he will put copies of the resulting research reports in the Library. [63817]

Mr. Alexander: The PIU waste study has commissioned some independent research to inform its work, mainly in the form of data gathering and specific contributions to the modelling of waste management options. A report on the role of new and emerging waste management technologies has also been commissioned, but contains commercially sensitive information and will remain confidential to the PIU. The intention is that the PIU waste study will be published.

Special Advisers

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what the pay bands are for special advisers; how many special advisers are in each pay band; how it is decided which pay band a special adviser is in; and if he will make a statement. [64566]

Mr. Alexander: The Government have already announced the introduction from 8 June of a new special adviser pay system based on individual job evaluation. The paper deposited in the House Library by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 20 July sets out how special advisers will be allocated to pay bands. Further details will be made available once the process of job evaluation is complete.

HEALTH

Teenage Pregnancy Report

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish the Government response to the Independent Advisory Group on Teenage Pregnancy's annual report. [65173]

Ms Blears: The Government's response will be published on 27 June. Copies will be placed in the Library.

Osteoporosis

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many osteoporotic hip fractures have been recorded in each health authority in the last five years; and if he will make a statement; [56136]

(2) what guidance he provides on osteoporosis risk assessment; and what percentage of fracture patients aged 50 years and over received an osteoporosis risk assessment in the last 12 months. [56138]

Jacqui Smith: Information about identifying those at risk of osteoporosis was included in the Department's "strategy to prevent fractures caused by osteoporosis", which was issued to all health authorities in 1998. This was based on the Royal College of Physicians' clinical guidelines for strategies to prevent and treat osteoporosis.

Osteoporosis has since been included in the Falls Standard of the national service framework for older people (NSF), which requires the local development of interventions and advice to prevent osteoporotic fracture. To support the NSF we have asked the National Institute of Clinical Excellence to develop clinical guidelines for the prevention, treatment and assessment of osteoporosis.

Information on the percentage of fracture patients who have received an osteoporosis risk assessment is not available centrally.

The numbers of finished consultant episodes where hip fractures were recorded in national health service hospitals in England in the last five years are shown in the table. Hip fractures are invariably osteoporotic.

Health authority	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Avon	1,302	1,280	1,334	1,419	1,416
Barking and Havering	442	425	438	563	487
Barnet	205	344	349	421	484
Barnsley	267	266	398	304	300
Bedfordshire	487	516	646	592	573
Berkshire	705	781	806	792	789
Bexley and Greenwich	491	537	522	476	437
Birmingham	1,090	1,123	1,093	1,322	1,161
Bradford	500	511	639	582	598
Brent and Harrow	459	510	443	419	140
Bromley	437	426	438	503	496
Buckinghamshire	651	664	775	904	852
Bury and Rochdale	405	459	429	478	464
Calderdale and Kirklees	763	637	647	705	683
Cambridge	—	—	—	1,117	1,064
Cambridge and Huntingdon	475	523	514	—	—
Camden and Islington	427	422	413	447	411
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	624	1,042	1,082	1,090	908
County Durham	779	797	871	901	859
Coventry	362	347	422	430	378
Croydon	349	262	281	341	233
Doncaster	321	338	365	336	379
Dorset	1,101	1,138	1,128	1,140	1,244
Dudley	380	407	538	362	424
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	589	652	640	650	580
East and North Hertfordshire	488	530	520	608	563
East Kent	1,198	1,102	1,052	1,116	1,031
East Lancashire	504	622	586	658	577
East London and The City	605	526	561	632	599
East Norfolk	1,211	1,309	1,390	—	—
East Riding	176	95	682	720	637
East Surrey	582	517	556	571	577
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	1,354	1,245	1,213	1,286	1,280
Enfield and Haringey	437	434	437	449	468
Foreign	—	—	152	142	93
Gateshead and South Tyneside	474	587	528	605	621
Gloucestershire	727	969	966	963	853
Herefordshire	253	253	213	196	289
Hillingdon	212	20	202	214	204
Isle of Wight	228	229	214	191	237
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	364	420	396	422	447
Kingston and Richmond	365	323	319	352	397
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	704	651	630	664	660
Leeds	812	857	879	862	813
Leicestershire	993	993	1,106	1,030	989
Lincolnshire	845	766	887	860	874
Liverpool	799	847	778	713	711
Manchester	485	477	531	563	439
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	736	594	681	710	706
Morecambe Bay	331	397	430	329	414
Northern Ireland	6	3	0	5	0
Newcastle and North Tyneside	647	633	717	743	676
Norfolk	—	—	—	1,763	1,811
North and East Devon	792	997	1,156	1,127	1,301
North and Mid Hampshire	566	571	544	636	735
North Cheshire	276	303	301	358	328
North Cumbria	435	408	502	559	510
North Derbyshire	430	380	461	425	460
North Essex	1,271	1,418	1,312	1,276	1,250
North Nottinghamshire	417	469	500	543	528
North Staffordshire	487	595	602	657	643
North West Anglia	346	704	776	—	—
North West Lancashire	814	770	817	839	614
North Yorkshire	996	614	970	936	913
Northamptonshire	409	677	697	779	782
Northumberland	429	418	462	424	504

Health authority	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Nottingham	846	813	826	803	758
Oxfordshire	605	569	662	687	710
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	807	935	909	1,034	1,044
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	579	503	527	577	596
Rotherham	245	226	289	287	240
Salford and Trafford	555	448	486	540	568
Sandwell	360	309	394	354	372
Scotland	49	38	0	55	60
Sefton	408	428	398	373	429
Sheffield	784	710	734	649	745
Shropshire	408	404	434	428	453
Solihull	199	216	244	267	278
Somerset	711	693	794	837	773
South and West Devon	784	917	913	1,104	1,390
South Cheshire	795	797	754	768	794
South Derbyshire	504	647	622	658	637
South Essex	1,364	1,104	1,136	1,316	1,153
South Humber	279	328	342	360	401
South Lancashire	318	314	425	391	389
South Staffordshire	539	723	658	705	672
Southampton and South West Hampshire	696	681	814	794	858
St. Helens and Knowsley	342	329	370	336	383
Stockport	313	296	360	378	348
Suffolk	942	1,121	1,195	1,228	1,124
Sunderland	345	370	415	378	388
Tees	570	576	685	683	692
Wakefield	301	300	342	315	349
Wales	204	180	197	210	215
Walsall	252	270	217	295	278
Warwickshire	609	587	652	677	643
West Hertfordshire	587	550	615	580	560
West Kent	1,079	1,107	1,134	1,087	1,172
West Pennine	453	500	491	508	551
West Surrey	919	857	758	710	627
West Sussex	1,179	1,242	1,006	1,115	1,174
Wigan and Bolton	484	551	611	635	669
Wiltshire	765	705	805	716	734
Wirral	490	490	473	581	490
Wolverhampton	238	162	228	266	321
Worcestershire	739	720	720	765	710
Not known	1,257	1,277	395	122	172
Total	60,718	62,307	64,967	66,792	65,814

Notes:

Figures are presented by health authority areas of residence.

Patients from other UK countries and abroad are indicated separately in the table.

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES) Department of Health

Hospital Patients

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place a copy of the Q4 2001–02 *(a)* emergency re-admissions and *(b)* delayed discharge figures in the Library, broken down by (i) age, (ii) region, (iii) health authority and (iv) reason. [58846]

Jacqui Smith: All the available information on emergency re-admissions and delayed transfers of care in Q4 2001–02 has been placed in the Library. This includes:

number and rate of emergency re-admissions for patients aged 75 and over,

length of delayed transfers of care for patients of all ages,

numbers and rate of delayed transfers of care for patients aged 75 and over, and

reasons for delayed transfers of care.

Each set of figures is provided on a national, regional and health authority basis.

Royal Shrewsbury Hospital

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for a second new linear accelerator for the Royal Shrewsbury Hospital; and if he will make a statement. [56187]

Ms Blears: Plans for the future provision of a second new linear accelerator are the subject of on-going discussions by the North-west Midlands Cancer Network, of which the Royal Shrewsbury Hospital National Health Service Trust plays a key part.

Obesity

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will support the annual National Obesity Awareness Week organised by the Obesity Awareness and Solutions Trust. [61477]

Ms Blears: The Obesity Awareness and Solutions Trust (TOAST) is supported financially by the Department through the section 64 grant scheme. We support the National Obesity Awareness Week, which forms part of their healthy living events outlined in their action plan.

BTE Digital Hearing Aids

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many BTE digital hearing aids have been issued by the NHS in *(a)* 1996, *(b)* 1997, *(c)* 1998, *(d)* 1999, *(e)* 2000 and *(f)* 2001; and in each case what proportion of the cost was borne by (i) the NHS and (ii) employers. [61973]

Jacqui Smith: The Department has never collected information separately on the numbers of behind-the-ear (BTE) or in-the-ear (ITE) hearing aids provided by the national health service. However, when the NHS issues hearing aids, the cost is borne by the NHS. I understand that the Department for Work and Pensions also issues hearing aids in some circumstances. That would be a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions.

Children in Care

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many and what percentage of pupils living *(a)* in a residential care home and *(b)* with foster parents had special educational needs (i) with and (ii) without statements in the last five years for which figures are available broken down by (A) Government office region and (B) local education authority. [63116]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 19 June 2002]:* This information is not collected centrally.

NHS Budget

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the percentage increase in real terms of the budgets of *(a)* the NHS and *(b)* local authority personal social services has been in each year since 1997; and what the projected percentage increases are for each year for which planning assumptions have been made. [64289]

Jacqui Smith: The information is requested is set out in the tables.

Table 1: NHS expenditure, 1996–97 to 2007–08

Year	Net NHS expenditure (£ billion)	Percentage real terms increase
1996–97	[1]33.0	–0.1
1997–98	[1]34.7	2.0
1998–99	[1]36.6	2.7
1999–2000	[1]39.9	6.4
2000–01	[1]44.2	7.8
2001–02	[2]49.4	8.9
2002–03	[3]53.7	6.1
2003–04	[3]61.3	7.3
2004–05	[3]67.4	7.3
2005–06	[3]74.4	7.6
2006–07	[3]81.8	7.3
2007–08	[3]90.2	7.5

[1] Outturn

[2] Estimated outturn

[3] Plan

Notes:

1. Expenditure pre 2000–01 is shown on a cash basis.
2. Expenditure figures from 2000–01 to 2002–03 are on a Stage 1 Resource Budgeting basis. This was introduced in April 2001 and introduced accruals accounting, ie accounting for resources consumed against cash paid out.
3. Expenditure figures from 2003–04 to 2007–08 are on a Stage 2 Resource Budgeting basis (to be introduced from April 2003) and include non-cash items such as capital charges and the cost of new provisions.
4. Because of the introduction of Resource Budgeting Stages 1 and 2, the figures are not consistent across the whole period.

Table 2: Local authority expenditure on personal social services, 1996–97 to 2000–01

Year	Outturn[1] (£ million)	Percentage increase
1996–97	8,991	—
1997–98	9,284	3.3
1998–99	9,677	4.2
1999–2000	10,483	8.3
2000–01[2]	10,963	4.6

[1] Outturn figures at 2001–02 prices.

[2] Latest available figures.

Notes:

No planning figures are available for future years because local authorities set budgets once central Government allocations are announced, and decisions have been taken locally about council tax. However, following the 2002 Spending Review total personal social service resources (as allocated by central Government) are set to increase by on average 6 per cent. per annum in real terms over the next three years—2003–04 to 2005–06.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 27 June 2002

TRANSPORT

Railways

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on railways in the south-east before the summer recess. [63760]

Mr. Spellar: My right hon. Friend takes an interest in all aspects of the rail system throughout the country, and will make statements to the House on rail matters as and when appropriate.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent *(a)* support and *(b)* guidance has been given by his Department to the SRA and the rail industry regarding (i) the re-opening of rail stations and (ii) the development of new lines and stations; and if he will make a statement. [64131]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government's priorities for the Strategic Rail Authority are as set out in the Secretary of State's Directions and Guidance. The Strategic Rail Authority's priorities for implementation are set out in the Strategic Plan.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what changes *(a)* have taken place and *(b)* are planned with relation to the penalty regime in the railway industry; and if he will make a statement; [64146]

(2) what *(a)* guidance has been given and *(b)* legislation is in place with regard to the penalty regime of the railways; what plans there are to change them; and if he will make a statement; [64148]

(3) what recent *(a)* discussions have taken place and *(b)* assessment there has been of the role of the penalty regime of the railways; and if he will make a statement. [64149]

Mr. Jamieson: During the periodic review of Railtrack's access charges by the Rail Regulator in 2000, a thorough review of the incentive regime was carried out. The payment rates were raised to broadly double their previous levels in order to improve incentives to run trains punctually. Similarly, the SRA are incorporating increases in train operator's incentive rates as new franchises are let.

The SRA is currently considering whether a more wide-ranging review of incentive regimes would be appropriate to reinforce the rail industry's drive to improve performance.

Investment Projects

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the transport investment projects that his Department expects to receive final approval in the next 12 months. [63764]

Mr. Jamieson: The Secretary of State will announce his final decisions in due course.

Ministerial Travel

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last travelled by train on Government business. [63766]

Mr. Darling: I last travelled by train yesterday afternoon.

Train Protection Warning Systems (Scotland)

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many miles of rail track in Scotland are fitted with train protection warning systems; and what percentage this represents of the total rail track in Scotland. [63918]

Mr. Jamieson: The fitment programme for the train protection and warning system (TPWS) is based on the number of sites to be fitted not miles of track. Railtrack advises that in Scotland TPWS is to be installed at approximately 1,600 sites by the end of 2003. To date TPWS has been installed at 1,109 sites, of which 955 are now operational and 154 are currently being tested.

London Underground

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) which assets under the PPP of London Underground are defined as grey assets; and if he will make a statement; [63974]

(2) what recent discussions he has had with *(a)* London Transport, *(b)* Transport for London and *(c)* Ernst and Young, on grey assets under the PPP of the London Underground; and if he will make a statement. [63973]

Mr. Jamieson: Grey assets are defined in the PPP contracts as those assets where a full condition assessment has not been possible, either for access reasons or lack of historical data. They tend to be older heavy civil engineering assets such as retaining walls or brick arch tunnels. The Secretary of State has had no recent discussions on such assets.

Transport 10-year Plan

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when his Department expects to respond to the Transport, Local Government and the Regions Committee on the 10-year transport plan; and if he will make a statement. [64135]

Mr. Jamieson: We will aim to respond to the Committee's report within two months of its publication in line with the normal convention.

Prestwick Air Traffic Control Centre

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the answer, on Prestwick, of 20 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 507W, what air traffic levels would make it financially prudent to commence further work at the new Scottish centre; and what current levels are. [64460]

Mr. Jamieson: The completion of the new Scottish centre depends on both air traffic levels and NATS' capital investment plan. Completion is expected to be during 2008 or 2009. NATS is currently engaged with suppliers in evaluating systems.

Air traffic movements in Scottish air space in the first 12 weeks of the current financial year total 122,627.

Rural White Paper

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what contribution his Department will make towards implementing the Government's commitment in the Rural White Paper to protect the countryside for its own sake; and if he will make a statement. [64527]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department for Transport remains committed to ensuring transport fully contributes to sustaining and improving the English countryside. Since the publication of the Rural White Paper in 2000, we have, for instance:

begun to introduce low noise surfaces on the existing trunk road network. By 2010, 60 per cent. of the network should have a low noise surface, substantially cutting road traffic noise in rural areas;

ensured that the impacts on the environment and countryside of any new road proposals—whether for the trunk road network or proposed by local highway authorities—are clearly identified and appraised using our New Approach to Appraisal; and

continued to work with local highway authorities and the Countryside Agency in order to develop local traffic management measures, which can help preserve the tranquillity of the countryside.

Annual Leave

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the average annual leave entitlement is for staff in his Department in 2002. [64643]

Mr. Jamieson: For staff below the Senior Civil Service in the Department, including the agencies, the average annual leave entitlement in 2002 is 28 days. For staff in the Senior Civil Service in the Department, including the agencies, the annual leave entitlement in 2002 is 30 days.

Operators' Licences

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport for what reason a question about financial standing has been added to application forms for an operator's licence; and if he will make a statement. [64795]

Mr. Jamieson: Holders of licences to operate heavy goods vehicles or passenger service vehicles are required by law to have available sufficient financial resources to maintain their vehicles in a roadworthy condition and to run a viable business. Licence application forms contain questions about financial resources to enable the licensing authority to decide if the applicant meets the criteria for financial standing. These questions are not a new addition to the forms.

Learner Drivers

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to require the use of dual controls by learner drivers for a specified period of time. [65022]

Mr. Jamieson: We want to improve novice driver safety—young and newly qualified drivers have a poor safety record compared to older, more experienced drivers. However, we have no evidence to suggest that the learning process is dangerous and no plans to require the compulsory use of dual controls in vehicles driven by learners. We consider that learner drivers should gain more experience before they take the driving test and earlier this year we issued a consultation paper on ways to achieve this. This included an option to introduce a mandatory requirement for a minimum amount of professional tuition.

Research indicates that a mix of professional tuition and plenty of practice with friends or relatives is the best way to learn to drive and our initial view was that the introduction of compulsory professional tuition is not justified. Nevertheless we will be considering carefully all the views we receive on this issue before taking a final decision.

Coastguard Helicopter (Portland)

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent discussions he has held with the MCA relating to the removal of the coastguard helicopter from Portland. [64384]

Mr. Jamieson: I met with my hon. Friend the member for Dorset South and the chief executive of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency on 13 June 2002 to discuss the helicopter base at Portland.

Aircraft Movements

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the daily average number of aircraft movements was for each of the 15 busiest airports in the United Kingdom over the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [65201]

Mr. Jamieson: The average daily number of aircraft movements at the 15 busiest airports in the United Kingdom over the last five years is reported in the table. These statistics relate to commercial movements only and exclude flights undertaken for private military and training purposes as well as business aviation.

Average daily commercial aircraft movements

Airport	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Heathrow	1,180	1,212	1,235	1,262	1,255
Gatwick	629	665	676	693	673
Manchester	404	446	466	489	502
Stansted	231	287	372	402	419
Birmingham	219	242	271	299	305
Edinburgh	197	208	232	244	274
Glasgow	224	236	242	248	263
Aberdeen	238	250	227	226	243
Luton	110	131	151	164	164
London City	90	103	116	137	150
Belfast International	96	107	123	118	130
Newcastle	116	118	119	120	127
East Midlands	112	118	117	119	120
Belfast City	91	95	91	91	92

South Coast Multi-Modal Study

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the costs were of the South Coast multi-modal study broken down by *(a)* staff and *(b)* other costs. [65148]

Mr. Jamieson: The current cost of contract for the South Coast multi-modal study is £1,727,000 (excluding VAT). This figure incorporates *(a)* staff and *(b)* other costs.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Committee on the Implementation of Projects Promoting Co-operation and Commercial Relations between the European Union and the Industrialised Countries of North America, the Far East and Australasia is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55395]

Ms Hewitt: EC Council Regulation 382/2001 provides for a programme of measures and actions to complement and bring added value to the efforts undertaken by member states and other European public bodies in the Japanese market, and establishes a Committee to assist the Commission in the implementation of this programme. This Regulation also provides for co-operative activities between the EC on the one hand and North America and Australasia on the other, but the Committee has had no role in these activities. The Committee has met once in the last 12 months. A British Trade International official represents the UK. It is impossible to calculate the cost of its work to public funds without incurring disproportionate cost. The Committee is currently considering the detailed arrangements for the EU trade promotion campaign towards Japan "Gateway to Japan III". Any European Community proposal that goes to the Council of Ministers would be subject to parliamentary scrutiny procedures.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to 'simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission'. As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February (COM(2001)783 Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through the website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Advisory Committee on Opening Up Public Contracts is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [61701]

Ms Hewitt: The EC Advisory Committee on Opening Up Public Contracts is composed of up to 25 independent experts whose business and industrial experience, and whose competence regarding public procurement, are widely recognised. The Committee assists the Commission in assessing the economic, technical, legal and social aspects of public procurement. It has no decision taking powers.

The European Commission appoints the members of the Committee after consultation with business and industry. The representatives from the UK are Dr. Sue Arrowsmith, Professor of Law at the university of Nottingham and Mr. Colin Maund, Chairman of the CBI's Public Procurement Contract Group.

The Committee has met on three occasions over the last year. There is no cost to public funds.

The issues discussed during the last meeting of the Committee were: electronic purchasing; the Remedies Directives; the European Parliament vote on the new legislative package; in-house contracts.

Unfair Dismissal

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if her Department will review its unfair dismissal procedure; and if she will make a statement. [55905]

Ms Hewitt: The Employment Bill contains proposals for amendments to certain aspects of the unfair dismissal legislation. My Department has no plans to review the legislation.

Arms Export Licences

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what export licences have been granted since 2 May 1997 for the export of CS pellets to Malaysia where the final end-use destination was in a different country. [60696]

Nigel Griffiths: The export of CS pellets is controlled under entries ML3, ML4 and ML7 in Part III of Schedule 1 of the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994 as amended.

Between 2 May 1997 and 10 June 2002 three Standard Individual Export Licences (SIELs) were issued covering the rating ML4 where the consignee was in Malaysia and the end user was in a different country. During that same period there were no SIELs issued covering the ratings ML3 and ML7 where the consignee was in Malaysia and the end user was in a different country. This information should be considered in light of the answer tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) on 30 October 1997, *Official Report*, columns 870–71.

The Export Control Organisation's computer database records only permitted destinations for all Open Individual Export Licences (OIELs). Details of all SIELs and OIELs are published in the Government's Annual Reports on Strategic Export Controls. Copies of the 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2000 Annual Reports are available in the Libraries of the House. The 2001 Annual Report will be published soon.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what end-use documentation British companies are required to supply when applying for licences for small arms exports to *(a)* EU or NATO countries and *(b)* non-EU or non-NATO countries. [62017]

Nigel Griffiths: Applications to export small arms to Government bodies in any country would normally need to be supported by an end-user undertaking. In certain circumstances a purchase order, or a copy of the relevant pages from a contract might be accepted in lieu of an undertaking.

Special arrangements apply to the transfer of small arms to non-Government end users in EU member states under the provisions of the EC Directive on Control of the Acquisition and Possession of Weapons "the EC Weapons Directive" (91/477/EEC). Exporters are required to obtain prior import consent from the receiving member state and complete certain transfer documentation.

For exports of small arms to non-Government end users in non EU countries, DTI would normally require, in addition to an end-user undertaking, to see a copy of an import permit or some other form of declaration issued by the authorities of the importing state to confirm that they were content for the individual or dealer to possess the weapons in the licence application.

In addition, at the request of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), an export licence for small arms to destinations covered by the moratorium on the Import, Export and Manufacture of Light Weapons will not be issued unless the ECOWAS Secretariat have issued confirmation that ECOWAS Governments have been consulted and are content.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on her policy on the grant of export licences for sale of arms to India and Pakistan. [64389]

Nigel Griffiths: All relevant export licence applications for India and Pakistan are considered on a case-by-case basis in the context of the current situation in the region, against the Consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria, and in the light of my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter statement of 15 March 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1296–98W. The Consolidated Criteria include a specific reference to the preservation of regional peace, security and stability.

I refer the hon. Member to the statement made by my noble Friend the Lord Sainsbury of Turville in another place on 28 May 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1147–1149.

Staff Training

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much the Department has spent on staff training and development in each of the last five years. [61053]

Ms Hewitt: The DTI is a recognised Investor in People.

The following table provides detail of the spend on staff training and development for the period for which the information at the level requested is readily available, together with the percentage of the total gross running costs this represents.

Year	*Total staff training and development expenditure (£ million)*	*Staff training and development as a percentage of gross running costs*[1]
1998–99	3.2	1.3
1999–2000	4.5	1.7
2000–01	4.0	1.4
2001–02	4.9	1.6

[1] Excludes ACAS, Employment Tribunals Service, Insolvency Service, Radiocommunications Agency and the National Weights and Measures Laboratory.

Meetings

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which Ministers and officials had meetings with representatives of *(a)* the Confederation of British Industry, *(b)* the Engineering Employees Federation, and *(c)* the Engineering Marine Training Authority during the last year; who they met; and what the subjects and outcomes of their discussions were. [62210]

Ms Hewitt: Ministers and civil servants have meetings with a wide range of organisations and individuals as part of the process of policy development and analysis.

As with previous Administrations it is not this Government's practice to provide details of all such meetings. All such contacts are conducted in accordance with the Ministerial Code, the Civil Service Code and Guidance for Civil Servants: Contacts with Lobbyists.

Members of Parliament (Personal Data)

Mr. Forth: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information is held by her Department on each hon. Member in relation to *(a)* personal relationships, both current and past, *(b)* financial status and dealings, *(c)* connections with companies and interest groups, *(d)* connections with Governments and *(e)* published works; and what was held in January 2002. [61833]

Ms Hewitt: Ministers and officials in this Department have access to published reference sources, as well as to the information about hon. Members made publicly available by the House authorities, for the purpose of parliamentary business.

Telecommunications (Lane Rentals)

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has made to the Department of Transport regarding section 74A of the New Roads and Streetworks Act 1991 and the potential effects the powers will have on the ability of telecommunication companies to build high bandwidth networks. [62632]

Mr. Timms: Pilot schemes to test powers under which local authorities can charge utility companies lane rental, whenever the latter dig up highways to install or maintain their apparatus, began in Camden and Middlesbrough on 4 March 2002 and are due to continue until March 2004.

The Department for Transport have appointed consultants to produce a balanced assessment of the impact of the lane rental pilots, both in terms of the effect of lane rental on the disruption caused by utility works and the costs which it imposes on those utilities. We await their first monitoring report which is due to be delivered in late autumn.

The effects on the roll out of broadband and 3G mobile networks will be taken into account before any final decision on the national implementation of lane rental charging is made.

Coal Industry

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to maintain aid to the UK coal industry. [62850]

Mr. Wilson: I am very pleased that we have reached agreement on a new European coal state aid regime. We fought hard to secure the flexibility to pay investment aid, and I am delighted that we have been successful. We are currently considering how the flexibility might most appropriately be used.

Correspondence

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) for what reason she has not answered the letters of 30 November 2001 and 10 January, from the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West; [65365]

(2) for what reason she has not answered the written question from the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (ref 51382), of 18 April. [65364]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I have today responded to the hon. Member's letter which does not appear to have been previously received by this Department.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answers of 26 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 796W; 11 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 678W; and 14 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 518W, when she expects to reply to the letters of 30 November 2001 and 10 January 2002 from the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West. [51382]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I have today responded to the hon. Members' letter which does not appear to have been previously received by this Department.

World Trade

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 26 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1128W, on GATS, if she will make a statement on progress in her Department's meetings with WTO members on the drafting of a clarification of the GATS exclusion of public services. [63428]

Ms Hewitt: My Department's contacts with other WTO members suggest that most prefer to rely on the "bottom-up" approach to scheduling commitments as the means of ensuring the exclusion of public services.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 26 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1128W, on GATS, if she will make a statement of progress on the WTO services negotiations as to whether Article VI of the GATS will apply to all service sectors. [63427]

Ms Hewitt: There has been no substantive progress on this issue, which remains under discussion among WTO members.

Consignia

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many directors of Consignia plc have *(a)* resigned and *(b)* been replaced in the past two years. [63643]

Mr. Timms: Neville Bain, chairman since March 1998, left the company on 31 December 2001. He was replaced by Allan Leighton. Other recent changes are that David Mills joined the board on 15 April 2002 as chief executive of Post Office Ltd., a subsidiary of Consignia plc. Marisa Cassoni joined the board on 1 February 2001 as finance director. Allan Leighton joined the board as a non-executive director on 2 April 2001. Mike Kinski, non-executive director, left the company on 12 February 2002. The company is currently recruiting new non-executive directors. Also worth noting is that John Roberts, chief executive officer, has announced that he will retire by the end of 2002 and the process of recruiting his successor is now under way.

Post Office

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if she will publish the terms of the Chairman's performance linked remuneration at the Post Office; [63341]

(2) whether the Chairman of the Post Office will receive a bonus if the Post Office loses less than it did in the current year. [63342]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 20 June 2002]:* Allan Leighton's basic fee for part-time Chairmanship of Consignia is £20,000 per annum. The performance-related element of his remuneration package, linked to delivery of the company's strategic plan, is being finalised and will be made public.

Post Office Network

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 28 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 66W, on the Post Office network, if she will list the funding allocated to each initiative under the sub-post office scheme. [63577]

Mr. Timms: The funding allocated to each initiative approved under the Sub-Post Office Start-Up Capital Subsidy Scheme as at end May 2002 was as follows:

£

Office	*County/Country*	*Grant awarded*
Capel Le Ferne	Kent	20,000.00
Holcombe	Devon	20,000.00
Kirk Ireton	Derbyshire	8,572.32
Buriton	Hampshire	16,730.15
Risbury	Herefordshire	208.00
Goadby Marwood	Leicestershire	1,792.75
Struan	Scotland	3,897.73
Coleby	Lincolnshire	3,862.00
Henstridge	Somerset	10,475.16
Deri	Wales	15,738.25

£

Office	*County/Country*	*Grant awarded*
Almondbank	Scotland	17,750.00
Acton Trussell	Staffordshire	1,051.00
Henlow	Bedfordshire	9,598.83
Bernisdale	Scotland	11,131.00
Winteringham	Lincolnshire	6,022.20
Lubenham	Leicestershire	9,847.35
Tortington	Kent	11,390.75
Laxay	Scotland	2,212.74
Folkingham	Lincolnshire	20,000.00
Bewcastle	Cumbria	865.50
Ollaberry	Scotland	3,410.98
Standon Mill	Staffordshire	4,689.36
Bowden	Scotland	5,000.00
North Bradley	Wiltshire	5,355.75
Stranagalwilly	Northern Ireland	5,908.20
Ysceifiog	Wales	1,160.35
Adfa	Wales	8,000.00
East Markham	Nottinghamshire	2,198.50
Ightfield	Shropshire	4,490.00
Tibberton	Shropshire	3,407.50
Douglas Bridge	Northern Ireland	7,031.12
Abergwesyn	Wales	453.55
Hayton	Yorkshire	1,468.00
Easton	Colchester	7,354.50
Kinallen	Northern Ireland	13,268.15
Brampton Bryan	Wales	4,652.40
Newton-Le-Willows	North Yorkshire	393.63
Great Dalby	Leicestershire	20,000.00
Skelton	Cumbria	14,700.00
Catworth	Cambridgeshire	15,223.50
Tallington	Lincolnshire	313.44
Ballyward	Northern Ireland	8,454.86
Gaddesby	Leicestershire	12,038.38
Rosedale Abbey	Yorkshire	1,522.19
Oddington	Gloucestershire	7,000.00
Ripponden	Yorkshire	13,838.00
Tideswell	Derbyshire	20,000.00
Skidby	Humberside	19,429.40
Bradley	Staffordshire	5,463.75
Surlingham	Norfolk	5,207.43
Leigh On Mendip	Avon	280.00
Ashill	Norfolk	4,069.50
Cheddington	Bedfordshire	8,370.78
Escomb	County Durham	1,092.00
Palterton	Derbyshire	8,183.88
Owermoigne	Dorset	5,200.00
Dudleston Heath	Shropshire	2,450.00
Lidlington	Bedfordshire	2,332.00
Haynes	Bedfordshire	20,000.00
Threapwood	Cheshire	12,355.00
New Holland	Lincolnshire	14,878.00
Abberley	Worcestershire	9,187.00

Office for Civil Nuclear Security

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) where invitations to prospective applicants for the Advisory Board of the Office for Civil Nuclear Security were placed; how many applications were received; and whether applicants were rejected on security grounds; [63848]

(2) who the members of the Advisory Board for the Office for Civil Nuclear Security are; what their qualifications for the post are; and if there are restrictions in place in respect of who may be appointed to the board. [63847]

Mr. Wilson: The members of the OCNS Advisory Board are Joan MacNaughton, the Director General for Energy and Helen Leiser, the Director of Nuclear Industries, Michael Buckland-Smith, the Director of Civil Nuclear Security, all from the Department, Jim Furness, a Deputy Chief Inspector in the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate of the Health and Safety Executive, a representative from the Security Service, and Pat Upson, Technical Managing Director of Urenco Ltd.

These appointments reflect a range of security policy, regulatory and industry experience. The members from the Security Service, and the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate of the Health and Safety Executive were put forward by their respective organisations, at the Department's invitation. To find a suitable candidate with experience of the nuclear industry, my Department invited the main bodies in the nuclear industry to propose candidates. The five candidates put forward were evaluated and Pat Upson was invited to become a member of the Advisory Board.

All Advisory Board members have appropriate security clearance.

BNFL

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to the reply of 10 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 967W, if *(a)* BNFL and *(b)* other public funds were used for the clean-up of B241 at Sellafield; and what estimate BNFL has made of the final cost of remediation of the radioactive pollution. [63908]

Mr. Wilson: As with a number of such legacy facilities at Sellafield, the costs of carrying out the various projects at B241 are met by BNFL with appropriate contributions from relevant customers. In the case of B241 financial responsibility for the liability falls primarily to the Ministry of Defence and the UK Atomic Energy Authority. Work is continuing. It is not yet clear what the final cost of cleaning up B241 will be.

Timeshare Regulations

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what plans she has to introduce a registration scheme for holiday clubs; and if she will make a statement; [64497]

(2) what plans she has to revise the Timeshare Regulations 1997 to include floating vessels; and if she will make a statement; [64499]

(3) what plans she has to revise the Timeshare Regulations 1997 to include timeshares of less than three years' duration; and if she will make a statement; [64496]

(4) if she proposes to amend the Timeshare Regulations 1997 to include holiday clubs; and if she will make a statement. [64498]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Changing the Timeshare Regulations 1997 or the Timeshare Act 1992 will not help UK consumers who often buy timeshare and new products while on holiday abroad. The EU Commission is proposing next year to review the Timeshare Directive 1994 and will be considering new products and other related issues. We will therefore work closely with the Commission to ensure that our views are taken into account and are reflected in any potential amendments to the Directive.

The Department is also seeking to tackle rogue traders operating in this area through better enforcement, more effective self-regulation within the industry and to raising consumer awareness about their rights. We are currently working in partnership with consumer bodies, enforcement agencies, timeshare trade associations and industry to take this forward.

Foot and Mouth

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which *(a)* individuals were consulted by and *(b)* companies were represented on the Foot and Mouth Science Group; and if she will make a statement. [64549]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 26 June 2002]:* Individuals on the FMD Science Group, and the Group itself, consulted at various points throughout the outbreak with a number of bodies, including farmers at regional meetings, the NFU, Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, British Cattle Veterinary Association, British Veterinary Association, Sheep and Pigs Veterinary Associations and representatives of the food industry. All these meetings and consultations were reported back to the full Group.

The Group was comprised of individuals from a range of disciplines and included Government research scientists, university academics, veterinary practitioners and representatives of Government Departments and agencies. The composition of the Group evolved over time to ensure that relevant expertise was brought in, eg practising vets joined at a later stage to provide a more direct link with events on the ground.

Trawlermen (Compensation)

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures she is taking to increase awareness among potential claimants of the Icelandic water trawlermen's compensation scheme; and if she will make a statement. [64451]

Ms Hewitt: On top of the measures already taken when the scheme was first opened, over the past months my officials have been visiting the various port areas to discuss the scheme with local trawlermen and their representatives. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Small Firms has also had a number of meetings with my hon. Friends the Members for Hull, Grimsby, Cleethorpes, Fleetwood and Aberdeen, who are highly effective ambassadors for their constituents. In addition, there have been a number of articles about the meetings and the visits, as well as the scheme in general, in the local press. I plan to issue further publicity in the relevant port areas and trade journals to announce the end of the scheme on 1 October 2002.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will extend the deadline for claims under the Icelandic water trawlermen's compensation scheme to 31 December. [64453]

Ms Hewitt: My predecessor announced when the scheme was set up that it would run for two years—from 2 October 2000 to 1 October 2002. I have no plans to extend the deadline.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate she has made of the take-up by potential claimants under the Icelandic water trawlermen's compensation scheme; and if she will make a statement. [64452]

Ms Hewitt: When the scheme was set up, it was expected that some 4,000 former trawlermen would be eligible to receive a payment. To date we have received some 11,000 claims from former trawlermen or their dependents.

Timber Impo[illegible]

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what volume of timber from Liberia was imported to the UK *(a)* in 2001 and *(b)* in the first five months of 2002; and if she will make a statement. [64353]

Ms Hewitt: The UK imported 6,098 cubic metres of timber from Liberia in 2001, and 2,917 cubic metres in January to March 2002, the latest period for which data are available.

Bhutan

Andy King: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much bilateral trade there was between the UK and Bhutan over each of the last two years; and if she will make a statement. [64296]

Ms Hewitt: Information on UK bilateral trade with Bhutan is given in the following table:

UK trade in goods with Bhutan 2000–01

£ million

	UK exports	*UK imports*	*Total trade*
2000	1.2	1.7	2.9
2001	1.6	2.3	4.0

Note:

Because of rounding, there may be slight discrepancies between the totals shown and the sums of the constituent parts.

Source:

HM Customs and Excise data

Broadband

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) when she expects broadband to be introduced into service to all of England; [64275]

(2) what percentage of geographical broadband coverage she expects to be available by 2005. [64277]

Mr. Timms: Our target is to have the most extensive and competitive broadband market in the G7 by 2005. We have not set a target for percentage coverage of the UK, though broadband via ADSL, Cable and Wireless technologies is already available to around 66 per cent. of the population. Satellite offers the potential for almost total coverage.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussion she has had with the Director General of Fair Trading about the monopoly provision of broadband. [64278]

Mr. Timms: Under the Telecommunications Act 1984, the Director General of Telecommunications has responsibilities to promote the interests of consumers, and to maintain and promote effective competition in relation to telecommunications.

The Government monitors competition in the telecoms sector in close consultation with Oftel, and will keep the situation under review.

The UK has arguably one of the most competitive broadband markets in Europe. Around 40 per cent. of the population has a choice between cable and ADSL technologies, with wireless and satellite services also available, while in the ADSL market there are around 40 resellers of BT's wholesale product. In addition Oftel have announced this week that BT will be required to offer ADSL broadband interconnection services to enable operators to connect to BT's network and therefore provide a much wider range of wholesale and retail broadband services in competition with BT.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations have been made by *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* parish councils, *(c)* town councils and *(d)* businesses on improving the broadband technology facilities available in the United Kingdom. [62101]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 18 June 2002]:* Ministers and officials continue to meet and correspond with a wide range of businesses and councils. As well as bilateral consultation with businesses and the public sector, the Government have established the Broadband Stakeholder Group, which brings together the key players in the public and private sectors. We continue to meet regularly with the Broadband Stakeholder Group to discuss our broadband strategy. The group first reported in November 2001, and the Government response can be found at www.e-envoy.gov.uk. It has produced its second report this week.

In addition, under the £30 million UK Broadband Fund, the regional development agencies and the devolved Administrations are taking forward projects to promote the benefits of broadband.

Energy Policy

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is her latest assessment of the cost of the Scotland/England West Coast Interconnector. [64342]

Mr. Wilson: The possible costs are as set out in the study by PB Power, a copy of which is available on the Department of Trade and Industry's website at: www2.dti.gov.uk/energy/west—coast—interconnector—study.pdf

Patents

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the implications for United Kingdom domestic law of the decision of the European Court of Justice in Koninklijke Philips *v.* Remington. [64494]

Ms Hewitt: In its judgment of 18 June in the Koninklijke Philips *v.* Remington case, the European Court of Justice concluded that the Trade Marks Directive (implemented in the UK by the Trade Marks Act 1994) could not be used to protect product characteristics or technical features.

The European Court of Justice's decision is broadly consistent with the submissions of the Government and largely confirms existing UK practice.

Innovation of a technical or functional nature is protectable by patents. The maximum duration of a patent is 20 years (trade mark rights can be renewed without limit), after which inventions pass into the public domain for anyone to use or develop. This period of 20 years, which accords with international norms, represents a balance between encouraging inventors to develop new products by preventing others from using their inventions for a limited time, and encouraging competition by publishing full details of patented inventions so that they may be widely used when rights expire.

On the other hand, trade marks indicate the trade origin of goods. Allowing trade mark registrations to confer on proprietors an open-ended right to product characteristics or technical features would upset the balance created by the patent law.

Consignia *v.* Russell Sealy

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the policy implications of the decision of the Court of Appeal in Consignia plc v. Russell Sealy. [64493]

Mr. Timms: Having considered the decision there appear to be no policy implications.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Genetic Engineering (Vaccinations)

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the potential use of genetic engineering in plants to provide simple vaccinations for the developing world. [63916]

Clare Short: Research has shown that plants can be genetically engineered to produce substances with the potential to induce immune responses to several diseases of animals and people. But the prospect of plant-produced vaccines for the routine prevention of diseases of poverty is still a distant one. At present, an important challenge facing many developing countries is to strengthen their health service delivery systems to achieve and sustain high coverage with existing vaccines, which are safe and inexpensive. DFID contributes to this objective as a partner in the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation (GAVI) and through its support for WHO, UNICEF and national Governments.

Bhutan

Andy King: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much aid the UK has given to Bhutan in each of the last five years. [64295]

Clare Short: The table lists aid disbursement to Bhutan from 1996–97:

Year	£
1996–97	20,000
1997–98	92,000
1998–99	14,000
1999–2000	11,000
2000–01	1,000
2001–02	[1]—

[1] Not yet available

Occupied Palestinian Territories

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the impact the division of the occupied Palestinian territories into eight separate cantons has had on the humanitarian situation in the OPT. [64320]

Clare Short: Reports estimate that 50 per cent. of the population are currently living in poverty (under $2 a day), and per capita income continues to decline significantly. On-going and intensified Israeli restrictions will exacerbate this situation—restricting movement of people to work and products to markets, prohibiting access to basic services such as health and education, increasing unemployment, substantially reducing the ability of the Palestinian Authority to sustain essential social services, and inhibiting the work of international organisations and aid agencies.

Illegal Logging

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps her Department is taking to develop a programme of action to follow on from the memorandum of understanding between the UK and Indonesia to combat illegal logging signed in April. [64352]

Clare Short: Since the signing of the memorandum of understanding on 18 April, DFID, in close conjunction with officials in other Government Departments, has taken a number of steps to implement the agreement.

In May, DFID officials visited Indonesia and agreed a detailed programme of action to implement the memorandum. Indonesian officials will visit the UK in July to finalise this programme. During this visit they will meet with British Government officials, representatives of the UK Timber Trades Federation and non-governmental organisations.

The exploitation of forest resources in Indonesia is subject to a very large number of inconsistent and often contradictory laws. Consolidated and revised legislation is not practical in the short to medium term. My Department has therefore also commissioned two consultancies (involving UK and Indonesian experts) to address two fundamental aspects of the agreement:

the establishment of workable criteria to define legality; and

the identification of possible systems of mandatory compliance.

The results of this work, which is already under way, are expected by the end of August.

Partnership Programmes

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the *(a)* number and *(b)* cost of second round partnership programme agreements. [64691]

Clare Short: We are currently negotiating with four non-governmental organisations under our second round of partnership programme agreements. This is with a view to concluding negotiations within the next few weeks. Financial allocations under these agreements have not yet been finalised.

Development Policy Forum

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the content and conclusions of the Development Policy Forum in February. [64689]

Clare Short: The Development Policy Forum held in Belfast in February was the first in this year's series of 11 forums, which are being held in different parts of the UK. The process will conclude with the forum in Birmingham on 8 July, following which we will publish a report on the process, and on the key issues raised. This year's series of forums, which follow previous rounds in 1998 and 2000, have focused on development and trade, the role of the private sector, and sustainable development. Participants come from a wide range of backgrounds, and have participated in both plenary and workshop discussions of the issues. These are designed to deepen understanding of development, and to enable participants to share views and ideas on how to reduce global poverty. Feedback from participants on the process remains, as with previous rounds, very positive; and all participants will receive a copy of the report at the end of the process.

Food Aid (Southern Africa)

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer of 19 June 2002, *Official Report,* column 387W, when she expects food aid distribution to extend to the six countries in southern Africa identified as facing severe food shortages. [64675]

Clare Short: Food distribution in the six countries involves for the most part scaling up existing responses, so it is already taking place. The World Food Programme tell us that they have a total of 100,000 tonnes of food aid in the pipeline for the region, with 25,000 tonnes either already in affected countries and being distributed, or due to arrive by 1 July. There are also NGO programmes which we and others are funding which are continuing earlier food interventions.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer of 19 June 2002, *Official Report,* column 387W, what her Department's contribution to the World Food Programme's regional appeal for Southern Africa was in respect of the 2002–03 harvest year. [64674]

Clare Short: We have committed £18.75 million to the WFP regional appeal in advance of its publication. This is part of an overall new commitment of £45 million from DFID's budget that we made on 17 June for six countries in southern Africa. My Department has also seconded a logistics expert to the World Food Programme office in Harare and is considering further support for WFP's co-ordinating unit in South Africa.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Foot and Mouth

12. **Diana Organ:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what funds her Department has made available to areas most heavily affected by the foot and mouth outbreak. [63013]

Alun Michael: The Government put in place a range of schemes to help those affected by the disease and the measures to control it. These included:

the £80 million Business Recovery Fund, managed by the Regional Development Agencies (including £25 million reprioritised funding from RDAs' existing budgets) to help businesses adjust to changes in their markets;

discretionary interest-free deferral of income tax, VAT and National Insurance contributions, with over £250 million deferred;

increased central funding for local authorities to provide rate relief for businesses facing hardship (estimated at £22 million), and bringing forward mandatory rate relief for village shops, pubs and garages;

£15 million to match charitable donations towards relief of hardship;

£3.8 million to help local authorities reopen rights of way;

£18 million for tourism promotion;

£0.5 million from the Countryside Access Recovery Fund.

The Government are continuing to work with local authorities and partnerships in the worst-affected areas to help implement their recovery strategies.

27. **Mrs. Dean:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects to receive the report of the Royal Society inquiry into the foot and mouth outbreak. [63032]

Mr. Morley: The report of the Royal Society's inquiry into infectious diseases in livestock is currently expected to be published on 16 July.

World Summit on Sustainable Development

13. **Mr. Connarty:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress there has been in preparations for the world summit on sustainable development. [63014]

Mr. Meacher: Broad agreement was reached at Bali on a Programme of Action to implement sustainable development. We also had very preliminary discussions on a Political Declaration for Johannesburg. At the EU level, the European Council at Seville has just agreed the EU's final negotiating position for Johannesburg.

Standstill Rule

14. **Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to modify the 20-day standstill rule. [63016]

Mr. Morley: Final decisions will not be made until we have seen the recommendations of the Royal Society and Lessons Learned Inquiries.

Recycling

15. **Andrew Selous:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement regarding the implementation of European recycling directives. [63018]

Mr. Meacher: The Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive came into force in 1994. It is implemented in the UK through the Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations 1997 and the Packaging (Essential Requirements) Regulations 1998. The End of Life Vehicles Directive was adopted in 2000 and member states are now transposing it. The proposed Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive is expected to be adopted by the EC later this year. It may therefore come into effect in the UK in 2004.

18. **Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the cost to local authorities of implementing the Government's recycling strategy. [63021]

Mr. Meacher: Regulatory impact assessments are developed by the Department to assess the costs and benefits of proposed measures to increase recycling. These RIAs are published in consultation documents and are available on the DEFRA website http://www.defra.gov.uk/.

Animal Welfare

16. **Mr. Watts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress her Department has made in its attempts to persuade other European Union countries to improve the welfare conditions of animals which are transported on long journeys. [63019]

Mr. Morley: The need for continuing improvements in the welfare of animals during transport is now generally accepted by member states. We will continue to press the European Commission to produce its proposals for changes to the present EU rules on the protection of animals during transport.

Flooding

19. **Mr. Simmonds:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the expenditure by the Government on flood defences in 2001. [63023]

Mr. Morley: This Department provides grant (and supplementary credit approvals to local authorities) to the Environment Agency, local authorities and internal drainage boards for flood and coastal defence capital works. The provisional outturn for 2001–02 is £91 million.

The Government also provided some £268 million in further funding for flood and coastal defence through local authority funding mechanisms. An estimated £40 million was provided from other sources.

22. **Mr. Francois:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent representations she has received from the Environment Agency regarding flooding. [63026]

Mr. Morley: Given the Environment Agency's supervisory role for flood defence, it is recognised as a key stakeholder by this Department on flood and coastal defence policy and operational issues. Therefore there is an on-going dialogue between the agency and Department, but recent representations have included the agency's response to the consultation on the Flood and Coastal Defence Funding Review.

Agricultural Shows

21. **Mr. Plaskitt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she is taking to encourage the staging of agricultural shows. [63025]

Alun Michael: We strongly support the work of agricultural shows which are staged at national, regional and local levels by independent show societies. It is a matter for these societies to decide upon the format for their events and how they will be organised, but we support the events by taking space at a number of shows each year and by attendance of Ministers and officials at several, including the Royal Show.

Farming

23. **Mr. Laurence Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement regarding the implementation of the proposals in the report published by the Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food. [63027]

Mr. Morley: The Government intend to produce a strategy for sustainable food and farming in England in the autumn, following a wide-ranging process of stakeholder engagement. The strategy will incorporate a definitive response to each of the Policy Commission's recommendations.

Refrigerators

24. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent representations she has received on the recycling of fridges and freezers; and if she will make a statement. [63028]

Mr. Meacher: We have received five representations on the recycling of fridges and freezers since 14 May 2002. The representations have mostly been from the local authorities regarding funding and from consumers on how to dispose of old fridges.

We realise local authorities are in need of further funding and intend to make an announcement as soon as possible.

A leaflet for householders advising on how to dispose of old fridges, originally only on the DEFRA website, has now been published in hard copy as well, and widely distributed. Guidance on the disposal of commercial refrigeration equipment has been placed on the website and recently published in hard copy.

28. **Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent progress has been made in implementing new recycling plants for refrigerators and freezers. [63033]

Mr. Meacher: Investors are in the process of providing a network of new recycling facilities in the United Kingdom. Two mobile plant are up and running and three further static plant will be operational by the end of July. This should be sufficient to reprocess 1.2 million fridges a year. Further plant are scheduled to come online by the end of the year.

Milk Industry (Lancashire)

25. **Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the prospects for the milk industry in Lancashire. [63029]

Mr. Morley: In Lancashire, in common with the rest of the country, the farmgate price of milk has fallen over the last few months. The most recent official figures show that for milk delivered in April the average farmgate price of milk in the UK had fallen to 16.10 pence per litre and it is likely that the average figure for May will be even lower. As a result, some dairy farmers will be receiving less for their milk than it costs to produce it. A situation that is clearly unsustainable. However, these low prices have largely been caused by factors that are temporary in nature, most notably, oversupply of raw milk in the UK and the weakness of EU and world markets for dairy products.

For the longer term, it is likely that the next round of WTO agriculture negotiations will further restrict the use of export subsidies and increase the exposure of EU markets to world markets. In addition, enlargement of the EU is likely to lead to pressure on the Community budget, if the CAP is not reformed.

In order to produce a sustainable dairy industry that can compete successfully on the growing world market for dairy products, the industry must be given the opportunity to trade free of artificial constraints imposed by the WTO, as well as by the EU dairy regime. The EU price support system is focused on butter and skimmed milk powder, both in clear surplus, hampering the development of genuine markets, while milk quotas are bureaucratic, constrain production by the most efficient farmers and represent a significant financial burden to most farmers.

The Government therefore favour the orderly phasing out of milk quotas in combination with a reduction in EU support prices to world prices, and direct but digressive aid to help farmers adjust to the new regime. During the forthcoming review of the milk quota system, due to start in June, the UK will be pressing to achieve confirmation that quotas will not continue after they lapse on 31 March 2008. These changes are intended to provider longer-term direction within the framework of the dairy regime, which farmers need in order to plan their businesses effectively.

Biodiversity

29. **Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the recent UN report on the threat to 1,000 species of mammals and on international efforts to support biodiversity. [63034]

Mr. Meacher: Information from the World Conservation Union (IUCN) on the conservation status of species is reported in UNEP's Global Environment Outlook (GEO 3) published recently. The IUCN analysis from the year 2000 estimated that about 24 per cent. (1,130) of mammals and 12 per cent. (1,183) of birds are considered to be globally threatened. Since IUCN's previous assessment in 1996 the number of critically endangered species has increased from 169 to 180 mammals and from 168 to 182 birds. These figures are a stark warning of the need for action to conserve biodiversity and to protect species and an indication of the size of the challenge. It needs international co-operation to address problems on this scale. We are working within existing international agreements to this end and will be looking to the World Summit on Sustainable Development for a renewed level of commitment.

Many mammal species in danger of over-exploitation through trade are listed on the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). This regulates trade in animals and plants, and products derived from them, to ensure it is carried out in a sustainable way to safeguard the long-term survival of species. Trade in the most endangered species is banned while that in species which may become endangered is carefully regulated and monitored through a system of import and export permits. There are approximately 30,000 species listed on CITES, around 5,000 of which are mammals.

The UK is taking action at home and abroad to conserve biodiversity. The Darwin initiative launched at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 is a fund to assist countries that are rich in biodiversity but poor in resources to conserve their biological diversity. The fifth report on the Darwin Initiative was published on 17 July and copies placed in the Library of the House. So far it has provided £27 million to over 270 projects with links to some 80 developing countries. Through the UK's contributions the Global Environment Facility (GEF) we are helping developing countries and countries with economies in transition to meet their obligations under the Convention on Biological Diversity. We are aiming for a significant replenishment of the GEF as soon as possible. And DFID are supporting sustainable forest management programmes in a number of developing countries.

Agrimonetary Compensation

30. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent representations she has received on applying for agrimonetary compensation for farmers; and if she will make a statement on the rationale behind her Department's decision not to apply for much funding. [63035]

Mr. Morley: The Government has received representations from the industry and from hon. Members. While we acknowledge the difficulties the agricultural sector is facing and we are working with them on the recommendations of the Policy Commission on Farming and Food, we decided not to pay any further tranches of this subsidy given the many competing demands on the Exchequer at present. More than 80 per cent. of the cost would in effect have to be met by the British taxpayer.

Coastal Protection

31. **Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the complexity of procedures for coastal protection. [63036]

Mr. Morley: Responsibility for deciding which flood and coastal defence projects to promote and their timing rests with operating authorities. This Department provides grants for flood and coastal defence capital works and associated studies, which meet essential technical, economic and environmental criteria and achieve an appropriate priority score. This Department has also provided the operating authorities with guidance on scheme appraisal.

In the case of coast protection there are specific requirements in the Coast Protection Act 1949 which require a proposed scheme to be advertised. Anyone can object to a proposed scheme and, if the objection is not withdrawn, the Secretary of State must determine it.

The procedures are kept under review and suggestions for change are considered carefully.

Fisheries

32. **Mr. Carmichael:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on recent moves towards reform of the common fisheries policy. [63037]

Mr. Morley: The Commission published its first set of proposals for reform of the common fisheries policy on 28 May 2002. Our preliminary assessment is that the aims of the proposals are broadly in line with the UK view developed in the light of our consultation with stakeholders last year about the Commission's Green Paper on the subject. We shall in coming weeks be assessing, again in consultation with all interested parties in the UK, all the possible implications of the Commission's proposals.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the European Commission proposals for the reform of the common fisheries policy. [63020]

Mr. Morley: Our preliminary assessment is that the aims of the proposals are broadly in line with the UK view developed in the light of our consultation with stakeholders last year about the Commission's Green Paper on the subject. We shall in coming weeks be assessing, again in consultation with all interested parties in the UK, all the possible implications of the Commission's proposals.

Bali Conference

33. **Mr. Simon Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the Bali prepcomm meeting. [63039]

Mr. Meacher: Progress was made on the importance of sanitation in eradicating poverty and meeting the millennium development goal on safe drinking water. Broad agreement was also reached on key issues such as the urgent need to restore fish stocks and address illegal fishing, and on the important role non-governmental actors can play in achieving sustainable development. The meeting also recognised the need for a strong focus on Africa.

Other difficult issues remain outstanding, such as how the summit can address trade and finance issues to complement the Monterrey Consensus and the Doha Development Agenda. There are also specific targets on sanitation, biodiversity loss and energy which have yet to be agreed. We are continuing to ensure a successful outcome for Johannesburg, including concrete actions and coherent work programmes on energy, water and sustainable patterns of consumption and production.

Nitrate-vulnerable Zones

Sir Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the introduction of nitrate-vulnerable zones. [63030]

Mr. Meacher: I refer you to the statement I am making today which outlines the action we are pursuing to tackle the problem of diffuse pollution of water by agriculture, including the designation of new nitrate vulnerable zones.

Water Pollution

Mrs. Fitzsimons: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action is being taken to address diffuse pollution of water by agriculture; how the Government intend to implement the nitrates directive in England; and if she will make a statement. [65668]

Margaret Beckett: One year after the creation of DEFRA, it gives me enormous pleasure that what were different Departments are now working well together to develop an integrated approach to the problems of pollution, and especially diffuse pollution from agriculture.

The increased intensification of farm production and the great steps made to reduce point source pollution from factories and sewage works mean that, as the Policy Commission on Food and Farming noted, agriculture is now clearly one of the major contributors to the pollution of water. It is also a significant polluter of air.

Over time we will need to take further steps to reduce pollution from agriculture, but in a cost-effective way. We therefore need to involve farmers very closely in continuing work to achieve a cleaner and healthier environment. Many farmers are committed to protecting and enhancing the environment, but much more needs to be done to raise standards across all farms to the standards of the best, and to tackle the specific problem of diffuse pollution.

Over the next few years we will be implementing the EU directives we have signed up to in order to improve water quality. As part of this work, later this year we will be holding a more detailed consultation with all sectors to follow up our first general consultation on implementing the water framework directive.

Over 70 per cent. of nitrates and over 40 per cent. of phosphates in English waters originate from agricultural land. Up to a half of England's bathing waters are affected by short-term contamination by agricultural pollution, mainly by microbes from livestock manure being washed off farm land after rain. Excessive loads of fine silt are generated by soil erosion from intensively farmed land. Pesticides are contaminating drinking water sources, requiring expensive additional treatment at water works to remove pesticides before water can be supplied to consumers.

No one farmer is responsible for this, but cumulatively diffuse pollution from farms is having a substantial impact on the quality of English waters. That is why we have begun a strategic review of diffuse water pollution from agriculture, to identify cost-effective policy measures to prevent and control this pollution and to improve the sustainability of agriculture. We are co-ordinating this review with work announced in the Budget to review the particular role that economic instruments could play in tackling such pollution.

As part of the open approach to policy development that we are seeking to adopt in the new Department, I am publishing today a discussion document, "The Government's Strategic Review of Diffuse Water Pollution From Agriculture in England", so that we can start a debate with farmers and other stakeholders about the problems that we face and how we can best solve them. This marks the beginning of a process for working with stakeholders to develop a package of policy measures to reduce pollution.

Part of what we need to achieve is improved control of the application of manures and fertilisers to land. Through the review we are considering the full range of policy mechanisms that could play a part in the future in encouraging and assisting farmers to improve their management of manure and nutrients. But we also have to implement some measures now, to comply with the European Court of Justice judgment that we have failed to meet our obligations under the 1991 Nitrates Directive to tackle agricultural nitrate pollution of waters.

We published proposals for implementing the directive in December 2001. We have carefully considered the responses to the consultation, and I am today publishing an analysis of these responses. We have decided to apply the minimum regulation consistent with our obligations under the directive, to avoid closing off other options for tackling the wider problem of diffuse pollution that might be identified through the current review.

We will designate new nitrate vulnerable zones (NVZs) covering 47 per cent. of the land area of England, which will take the total designated area in England to 55 per cent. These are areas draining into rivers, ground water and other waters which are affected by nitrate pollution. In consequence, farmers using manufactured nitrogen fertilisers or organic manures will be required to follow an action programme to reduce pollution.

This action will help to prevent and reverse damaging impacts of eutrophication, and improve the quality of drinking water sources. Better control of manure spreading will also cut microbiological inputs to water, helping to maintain and further increase the quality of bathing waters and shellfish waters.

The overall extent of the new designations will be less than was originally estimated in the consultation document, as a result of work to define and quantify the NVZ areas more accurately than was possible at the time the consultation document was issued. Some new areas have been added, as was anticipated in the consultation document; but more areas have been removed.

I am today publishing a revised regulatory impact assessment, which estimates that the compliance costs incurred by farmers will amount to about £20 million per year. Costs will vary considerably from farm to farm, but I acknowledge that some farmers, particularly those who need to construct additional slurry storage facilities, will incur substantial costs. To assist those farmers who are most affected, we will extend the existing farm waste grant scheme to the new NVZ areas to help finance improvements to slurry storage facilities required to implement the action programme.

Formal designations setting down the precise boundaries of the new zones will follow as soon as possible, and it will become a legal requirement to follow the action programme from 19 December 2002. By the end of July, DEFRA will make available detailed interactive maps of the new NVZ areas. As soon as these are available, we will write to farmers to explain how to access these maps. We will also send all farmers in affected areas explanatory guidance material, together with sources of further advice on how to comply with the measures and details on the availability of grant under the farm waste grant scheme.

We are also taking action to reduce phosphate and nitrate pollution of waters from other sources, and are announcing, separately, additional designations under the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive that will require water companies to reduce phosphate or nitrate discharges from certain sewage treatment works.

We are also committed to improving air quality. 85 per cent. of the ammonia which enters the atmosphere in the UK comes from fertilisers and manures used in agriculture. We will be publishing a booklet later this summer, which will explain the problems caused by ammonia emissions, to initiate debate on how to tackle this related problem.

This all adds up to a substantial agenda for change. I recognise that we must secure these changes in ways which maximise the beneficial impact on the environment while minimising the regulatory burden on farmers. As we said in "Working Together", we need to explore joined-up ways of working; to develop whole farm approaches; and to identify smarter ways of regulating. For example, several of the measures I have mentioned could affect the ways farmers handle manures and fertilisers, pointing to the benefits of more integrated approaches.

Mrs. Fitzsimons: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the outcome was of the 2001 review of sensitive areas as required by the Urban Waste Water Treatment (England and Wales) Regulations 1994; and if she will make a statement. [65669]

Margaret Beckett: Based on recommendations from the Environment Agency I have reviewed the identification of Sensitive Areas in England in accordance with the criteria in Part 1 of Schedule 1 of the Urban Waste Water Treatment (England and Wales) Regulations 1994 (which transposes the European Council Directive (91/271/EEC) concerning urban waste water treatment).

This review has resulted in the identification of 33 more water bodies in England as Sensitive Areas. 32 are because the waters have since the last review in 1997 been found to be eutrophic, or that they may in the near future become eutrophic if protective action is not taken. Eutrophic waters are those which are, or may be, adversely (in terms of their ecology and quality) affected by discharges from sewage treatment works serving communities of more than 10,000 inhabitants.

The remaining water body, the River Itchen in the midlands, which supplies drinking water, has been identified on the basis of elevated levels of nitrate under the terms of the regulations.

Identification of these areas will result in more stringent treatment being provided at 53 qualifying treatment works by water companies. This treatment involves reducing levels of phosphorus and/or nitrogen in discharges to tackle eutrophication and nitrate levels of these waters.

These new requirements on water companies to remove these nutrients from sewage treatment work discharges will complement and add to the action required by farmers under the Nitrates Directive, and by my Department on diffuse pollution, which I also announced today.

Lists of the new sensitive areas have today been deposited in the Libraries of both Houses. Maps showing the location of all current sensitive areas (eutrophic) and (nitrate) will be deposited in the Libraries of both Houses and at offices of the Environment Agency in due course.

Radioactive Waste

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the results were of the consultation on managing radioactive waste supply. [63038]

Mr. Meacher: We received 330 replies to the consultation paper "Managing Radioactive Waste Safely" published last September by the UK Government and the devolved Administrations for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. We are evaluating the outcome, and we shall shortly publish a summary of responses as well as announcing what we plan to do next.

Farmers (Bureaucracy)

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent assessment she has made of the length and complexity of the forms that her Department requires farmers to complete. [63017]

Mr. Morley: Many of the forms farmers are required to complete relate to CAP support schemes. These forms are reviewed each year for need and content. No overall assessment of the Department's forms aimed at farmers has been made since the creation of DEFRA. The Department is currently considering its overall approach to reviewing forms.

Empty Properties

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the *(a)* average and *(b)* recommended turnaround time has been over the last 12 months for making affordable empty homes available for new tenants. [61177]

Mr. McNulty: I have been asked to reply.

The average time taken by local authorities in England to re-let their housing stock is one of the best value performance indicators for housing (BVPI 68) for 2001–02. The Audit Commission expects to publish information on authorities' performance against this indicator in 2001–02 in January 2003. The latest available information is in respect of lettings during 2000–01, as reported to the Audit Commission, and can be found in their publication "Local Authority Performance Indicators 2001/2002 Council Services Compendium for England, Volumes 1 and 2". Because of variations in the way local authorities maintain lettings records and compile these estimates, average figures and any comparisons between authorities should be treated with caution.

BVPI68 is a "top quartile" performance indicator. The Government expect local authorities to set targets for these BVPIs which are consistent with reaching the performance standard set by the top quartile of authorities over five years (i.e. by 31 March 2005). For 2001–02 the top quartile performance standards were:

	Days
London boroughs	42
Metropolitan boroughs	29
Unitaries	28
District councils	25

Corresponding information in respect of re-lettings by registered social landlords (RSLs) is collected by the Housing Corporation and a summary of the most recent data, for 2000–01, was published in "Housing Associations in 2001: Performance Indicators" (Source Research 56). The Housing Corporation's regulatory code does not set recommended turnaround time for RSLs to make affordable empty homes available to new tenants.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Convention on the Future of Europe

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what correspondence he has received from the European Academy of Sport with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64049]

(2) what correspondence he has received from Service Civil International with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [63991]

(3) what correspondence he has received from the European Federation of Youth Service Organisations with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [63987]

(4) what correspondence he has received from Youth of European Nationalities with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64038]

(5) what correspondence he has received from the European Writers' Congress with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64074]

(6) what correspondence he has received from A Seed Europe with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64004]

(7) what correspondence he has received from the European Union of Music Competition for Youth with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64029]

(8) what correspondence he has received from the Coordination Committee for International Voluntary Service with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64021]

(9) what correspondence he has received from the European Humanities University, Minsk-Belaruss with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64057]

(10) what correspondence he has received from the Association of the International Cultural Youth Exchange with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64003]

(11) what correspondence he has received from the Trans European Policy Studies Association (TEPSA) with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64046]

(12) what correspondence he has received from Global Legislators for a Balanced Environment with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64066]

(13) what correspondence he has received from the European Playwork Association with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64000]

(14) what correspondence he has received from the European Alliance of YMCAs with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [63988]

(15) what correspondence he has received from the European University Institute (research) with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64085]

(16) what correspondence he has received from Youth Action for Peace with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [63993]

(17) what correspondence he has received from the International Association of Civil Engineering Students with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64039]

(18) what correspondence he has received from the Invisible College, Chisinau-Moldavia with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64059]

(19) what correspondence he has received from the World Federation of Democratic Youth with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64010]

(20) what correspondence he has received from the European Movement with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64064]

(21) what correspondence he has received from the Food First Information Act Network with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64052]

(22) what correspondence he has received from the European Institute for Asian Studies with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [63981]

(23) what correspondence he has received from the Foundation of Journalists with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64047]

(24) what correspondence he has received from the Information Point Europe with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64051]

(25) what correspondence he has received from Youth for European Educational Exchanges with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [63990]

(26) what correspondence he has received from the European Confederation of Junior Enterprises with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64002]

(27) what correspondence he has received from the Belgrade Open School with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64056]

(28) what correspondence he has received from Notre Europe with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64076]

(29) what correspondence he has received from the Centre for HR at the University of Pretoria with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64081]

(30) what correspondence he has received from Contact-2013 with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64007]

(31) what correspondence he has received from the International Forum of Decision Makers on Youth with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64027]

(32) what correspondence he has received from the Forum for European Alternatives with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64070]

(33) what correspondence he has received from the European Bureau for Conscientious Objection with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64032]

(34) what correspondence he has received from European Youth Forest Action with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64020]

(35) what correspondence he has received from the Hellenic University Association of European Studies with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64061]

(36) what correspondence he has received from the International Council of Jewish Women with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64053]

(37) what correspondence he has received from the European Law Students' Association with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64015]

(38) what correspondence he has received from the Democrat Youth Community of Europe with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64019]

(39) what correspondence he has received from Ciemen (Mercator) with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64078]

(40) what correspondence he has received from the International Union of Socialist Youth with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [63986]

(41) what correspondence he has received from the Alliance of European Voluntary Service Organisations with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64024]

(42) what correspondence he has received from the European Policy Centre (EPC) with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64044]

(43) what correspondence he has received from the International Federation of Liberal and Radical Youth with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [63997]

(44) what correspondence he has received from the European Confederation of Youth Club Organisations with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64017]

(45) what correspondence he has received from Yourope-The European Festival Organisation with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities

with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64025]

(46) what correspondence he has received from EFAH/FEAP with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64071]

(47) what correspondence he has received from the Experiment in Europe Association with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64014]

(48) what correspondence he has received from Stichting World Student Christian Federation Europe with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64034]

(49) what correspondence he has received from the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [63984]

(50) what correspondence he has received from the European University Institute (archives) with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64084]

(51) what correspondence he has received from the University of Sarajevo with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64079]

(52) what correspondence he has received from the Academy of European Law with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64083]

(53) what correspondence he has received from the International Association of Agricultural Students with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64006]

(54) what correspondence he has received from Euromet with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64042]

(55) what correspondence he has received from the European Bureau for lesser used Languages with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64088]

(56) what correspondence he has received from the European Citizens' Action Service (ECAS) with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64065]

(57) what correspondence he has received from the European Union Federation of Youth Hostel Associations with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its

publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [63999]

(58) what correspondence he has received from the Organizing Bureau of European School Student Unions with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [63995]

(59) what correspondence he has received from Europe 99 with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64054]

(60) what correspondence he has received from the European Good Templar Youth Federation with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64016]

(61) what correspondence he has received from International Young Naturefriends with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64012]

(62) what correspondence he has received from the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64045]

(63) what correspondence he has received from the Erasmus Student Network International with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64037]

(64) what correspondence he has received from the European Union Net Art with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64073]

(65) what correspondence he has received from Syndesmos-The World Fellowship of Orthodox Youth with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64011]

(66) what correspondence he has received from CIREM, Barcelona with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64062]

(67) what correspondence he has received from the European Institute of Public Administration with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64082]

(68) what correspondence he has received from Youth of the European People's Party with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64008]

(69) what correspondence he has received from the European Institute for Outdoor Adventure Education with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body;

what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64028]

(70) what correspondence he has received from Youth for Development and Co-operation with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64009]

(71) what correspondence he has received from the European Federation for Intercultural Learning with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64001]

(72) what correspondence he has received from the European Policies Research Centre at the University of Strathclyde with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64055]

(73) what correspondence he has received from the Informal European Theatre Meeting with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64075]

(74) what correspondence he has received from ETUC Youth with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64018]

(75) what correspondence he has received from the World Federalist Movement with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64080]

(76) what correspondence he has received from the Federal Trust with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64068]

(77) what correspondence he has received from World Organisation of the Scout Movement European with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [63989]

(78) what correspondence he has received from St. Stephen's University, Södöllö-Hungary with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64063]

(79) what correspondence he has received from the Church and Society Commission with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64067]

(80) what correspondence he has received from the European Youth Card Association with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [63998]

(81) what correspondence he has received from the International Pharmaceutical Students' Federation with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of

Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64026]

(82) what correspondence he has received from the European Council of Artists with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64072]

(83) what correspondence he has received from United for Intercultural Action with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [63985]

(84) what correspondence he has received from European Democrat Students with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64023]

(85) what correspondence he has received from the Ecumenical Youth Council in Europe with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64043]

(86) what correspondence he has received from the College Europe, with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64086]

(87) what correspondence he has received from the Fritz Brauer Institute with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64048]

(88) what correspondence he has received from the European Rotaract Information Centre with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64036]

(89) what correspondence he has received from the University College of Wales (Mercator) with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64077]

(90) what correspondence he has received from the Jean Monnet Foundation with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64069]

(91) what correspondence he has received from the Peace Child Charitable Trust with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64031]

(92) what correspondence he has received from European Students of Industrial Engineering with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64035]

(93) what correspondence he has received from ECRE with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it

by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [63982]

(94) what correspondence he has received from the Pax Christi International Youth Forum with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [63994]

(95) what correspondence he has received from the International Federation of Catholic Parochial Youth with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64040]

(96) what correspondence he has received from the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64060]

(97) what correspondence he has received from the International Sonnenberg Association with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64013]

(98) what correspondence he has received from the European Committee for Young Farmers' and 4 Clubs with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64005]

(99) what correspondence he has received from the Association of Voluntary Service Organisations with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64033]

(100) what correspondence he has received from Youth and Environment Europe with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64041]

(101) what correspondence he has received from the Fryske Academy (Mercator) with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64087]

(102) what correspondence he has received from the European Social Action Network with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64030]

(103) what correspondence he has received from the International Delphic Council with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64050]

(104) what correspondence he has received from Youth for Exchange and Understanding with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [63992]

(105) what correspondence he has received from the Jean Monnet Association with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the

target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [63979]

(106) what correspondence he has received from the International Sport and Culture Association with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [63996]

(107) what correspondence he has received from Stichting AIESEC International with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [63983]

(108) what correspondence he has received from IREL with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [63980]

(109) what correspondence he has received from the International Falcon Movement-Socialist Educational with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64022]

(110) what correspondence he has received from the European Institute of Cyprus with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe; when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audiences of its publications have been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64058]

(111) what correspondence he has received from the Auschwitz Foundation with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe, when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audience of its publications has been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities, with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64983]

(112) what correspondence he has received from the Union of European Federalists with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe, when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audience of its publications has been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities, with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64984]

(113) what correspondence he has received from the Strasbourg Centre of European Studies with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe, when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audience of its publications has been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities, with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64985]

(114) what correspondence he has received from the Institute for the Study of A Spinelli with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe, when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audience of its publications has been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities, with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement; [64986]

(115) what correspondence he has received from the International Press Centre in Brussels with particular reference to the Convention on the Future of Europe when he last met representatives from that body; what his policy is towards continuing funding of it by the European Union; what the target audience of its publications has been; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of their use in schools and universities, with the requirements in the Education Act 1996 for balance in the provision of information; and if he will make a statement. [64982]

Peter Hain: The hon. Member asks about a huge range of organisations. The Convention on the future of Europe encourages the widest possible discussion at all levels, and we welcome the engagement of as many NGOs as possible to bring balance to this debate. It was exactly this requirement for balance across the political spectrum which the 1996 Education Act stipulated.

Parliamentary Questions

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will estimate the cost of answering the parliamentary questions tabled by the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) on 19 June concerning correspondence received by his Department;

and if he will make a statement on ways in which hon. Members may make inquiries of his Department and the cost of each method. [64279]

Mr. Straw: Although the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) tabled over 120 parliamentary questions on correspondence we had received from various NGOs concerning the Convention on the Future of Europe, my right hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Peter Hain) answered all his questions with a single answer.

In a written answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Stevenage (Barbara Follett) on 11 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 582W, the then Financial Secretary my right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South (Mr. Paul Boateng) announced that the average estimated cost of answering a written parliamentary question was £129. No equivalent exercise is done for the cost of responding to MPs' letters.

Turkey (Human Rights)

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment his Department has made recently of the human rights situation in Turkey, with particular reference to the use of torture. [64318]

Peter Hain: On 19–20 June, a senior official from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office led a UK delegation at the first formal UK/Turkey Human Rights Dialogue, in Ankara. The dialogue was frank and constructive. There was detailed discussion of the steps Turkey has recently taken to improve the human rights situation, and of what remains to be done, including to eradicate torture. As expressed at the recent European Council in Seville, we welcome the changes Turkey has made, but implementation remains key. The European Commission will publish a further assessment of the situation in October.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations his Department will make to Turkish Government officials during their meetings in June about *(a)* the continuing use of torture by Turkish authorities and *(b)* the implementation of the European Court of Justice ruling on Leyle Zana and her fellow imprisoned members of Parliament. [64319]

Peter Hain: On 19–20 June, a senior official from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office led a UK delegation at the first formal UK/Turkey Human Rights Dialogue, in Ankara. There was a frank and constructive discussion on the human rights situation in Turkey, the measures recently taken to improve it and what remains to be done, including to eradicate torture. We welcomed the changes in policy concerning incommunicado detention and the fact that some cases have been brought against those suspected of torture. We also discussed the recent judgment on the case of Leyla Zana. We look to the Government of Turkey to abide by the decision of the European Court of Human Rights in this case, as in others.

Bhutan

Andy King: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what recent discussions he has had with colleagues in the European Union concerning religious freedom in Bhutan; and if he will make a statement; [64301]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 30 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 655W, what recent discussions his Department has had with representatives of the Royal Government of Bhutan concerning the persecution of Christians in Bhutan; [64299]

(3) what steps the UK Government are taking to encourage Bhutan to provide constitutional guarantees for religious liberty in accordance with Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards; [64298]

(4) what steps the UK Government are taking to encourage Bhutan to ratify *(a)* the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, *(b)* the International Covenant on Economic, Cultural and Social Rights and *(c)* the UN Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; [64300]

(5) what plans *(a)* Her Majesty's Government and *(b)* the European Union have to encourage the Royal Government of Bhutan to draw on the expertise of the international community, particularly with regard to (i) shared legal expertise and (ii) good practice on constitutional drafting. [64297]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We have received occasional NGO reports suggesting mistreatment of Christians in Bhutan. Although we have made no recent representations, we have in the past expressed our concern to the Royal Government of Bhutan that the right to choose, declare, and practice one's religion should be respected. We understand the position of the Royal Government of Bhutan is that there is freedom of individual religious practice in Bhutan. We have had no reason to discuss the issue with our European Union colleagues.

During a visit to Thimphu in May 2001, the Deputy High Commissioner in New Delhi raised with the Royal Government of Bhutan the desirability of an early Bhutanese accession to the UN Convention Against Torture. We understand that the Royal Government of Bhutan need to pass additional legislation before they can ratify this and several other human rights conventions.

The form and content of the Bhutanese constitution is a matter for the Government and people of Bhutan. The Commission established by HM the King in 2001 has been tasked with drafting a constitution that reflects international norms and democratic practices. The Commission has yet to produce its first report. HMG would be glad to respond to any request from Bhutan to share legal expertise and good practice on constitutional drafting.

Royal Visits

Mr. Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list each official visit made by each member of the Royal Family, excluding Her Majesty the Queen, in each of the past 10 years, indicating the country, date and duration of visit. [64567]

Mr. Straw: The list of official visits by each member of the Royal Family in each of the past 10 years with the exception of Her Majesty The Queen, indicating the country visited, and the dates, has been deposited in the Library of the House of Commons.

From 1998 details of such visits are available in the Annual Report of the Grant-in-Aid for Royal Travel by Air and Rail, issued by The Keeper of the Privy Purse.

Indonesia

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Government of Indonesia since 1 January 2001 regarding the activities of Laskar Jihad; and if he will make a statement. [64585]

Mr. Straw: The British Government has consistently made clear its view that long-term solutions to regional conflicts in Indonesia can be achieved only through negotiation and consultation, and that extremists who break the law should be dealt with firmly to allow space for reconciliation efforts to take root.

Ministers and senior officials have regularly raised the issue of extremism and, specifically, Laskar Jihad with the Indonesian Authorities.

British Council

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent activities the British Council has undertaken in other European countries on combating racism and intolerance. [64678]

Mr. MacShane: The British Council has been involved in a number of initiatives, helping bring together local authorities, NGOs and others in the UK and in Italy, Sweden, France, Denmark, Germany and Belgium for exchanges on tolerance and diversity. These have included seminars and conferences covering issues such as local government practice, citizenship education, and managing cultural diversity in schools.

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of work undertaken by the British Council in *(a)* promoting human rights, *(b)* leadership training, *(c)* strengthening civil society and *(d)* providing support for non-governmental sectors in Africa in preparation for the implementation of the New Partnership for Africa's Development. [64676]

Mr. MacShane: The British Council plays a distinctive public diplomacy role in Africa which complements the work of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development. The council builds people to people partnerships to support change from within—an approach consistent with the thinking behind the New Partnership for Africa's Development initiative.

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the impact of the expansion of British Council activities in Russia in the past two years. [64681]

Mr. MacShane: The British Council opens its 14th centre in Russia this week in Rostov-on-Don. The extension of the Council's regional network in Russia in recent years has played an important role in helping extend UK reach and influence there. Additionally, 200–300 people per day are already visiting the Council's web portal, launched in March; the portal provides access to 70,000 British sites and is targeted at the younger generation.

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent work the British Council has done to meet the demand from young people in China for contact with the United Kingdom. [64679]

Mr. MacShane: The British Council has been very active and successful in promoting educational links with China. The number of Chinese students in higher and further education, and in schools in this country in 2001 was 50,000, an increase of 30 per cent. The FCO Chevening scholarship scheme, adminstered by the British Council, brought 177 postgraduates to the UK in the academic year 2000–01, an increase of 29 students on the previous year. Under a DfES funded programme managed by the Council, school links increased from 20 to 80.

Together with the BBC World Service and China's Open University, the Council launched its "in2english" project which reaches 250,000 teachers and students of English in China. 58,000 candidates sat English languages tests in some 20 cities in 2001, an increase of 100 per cent. on the previous year. 30 schools in the UK now teach Chinese.

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the findings are of the British Council's Connecting Futures research into attitudes towards the United Kingdom in the Arab and Muslim worlds; and if he will make a statement. [64682]

Mr. MacShane: Overall the results of the Connecting Futures research confirm a favourable attitude towards the UK among young people in the Arab and Muslim world, with 63 per cent. of those polled placing the UK high on their list of favourite nations. A high regard for British education and admiration for the consistently strong British economic performance were the two positive messages cited most often by respondents. Full details of the research findings are available via the internet at www.britishcouncil.org/connectingfutures.

The research will be valuable in informing FCO and British Council efforts to further improve and build mutually beneficial relationships between these countries and the UK.

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress the British Council has made in promoting United Kingdom science abroad; and if it will increase its levels of funding for the promotion of excellence of UK science internationally. [64677]

Mr. MacShane: The British Council's recent work in this area has included the initiation of new UK collaboration with India in digital technology, biotechnology, the environment and medical research. Partnerships with broadcasting organisations have also enabled the Council to reach significantly wider audiences in promoting UK science in Hungary, Japan and Malaysia.

The British Council is committed to increasing its share of Foreign and Commonwealth Office grant-in-aid funding to science from £5.4 million in 2001–02 to £8 million in 2003–04. This funding will be used to project UK science as innovative and internationally competitive, and to promote understanding in science in society, raising awareness of scientific themes of importance to the UK abroad.

WALES

Annual Leave

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what the average annual leave entitlement is for staff in his Department in 2002. [64650]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 1 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 574W.

Staff Training

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much the Department has spent on staff training and development in each of the last five years. [61058]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I refer the hon. Member to the response I gave him on 26 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 501W.

Departmental Reports

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many Wales Office departmental reports were sold in *(a)* 2000, *(b)* 2001 and *(c)* 2002. [63104]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The numbers of Wales Office departmental reports sold in each of those years is:

(a) 739

(b) 724

(c) 699.

Ministerial Salaries

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what the annual cost was of ministerial salaries in his Department in *(a)* 1997–98 and *(b)* 2001–02. [60949]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The level of ministerial salaries are recommended by the Senior Salaries Review Body.

My Department came into existence on 1 July 1999. From June 2001 it has had one Cabinet Minister at an annual salary of £68,157 and one Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, at an annual salary of £26,835.

CABINET OFFICE

Departmental Report

Kali Mountford: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office when he will publish the Cabinet Office departmental report 2001–02. [65476]

Mr. Collins: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office when the Cabinet Office departmental report for 2002 will be published. [63579]

Mr. Alexander: Copies of the Cabinet Office departmental report 2001–02 were yesterday laid before Parliament, copies of which are available in the Libraries of both Houses.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Temporary Land Use

Mr. Anthony D. Wright: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans the Government have to change controls for temporary use of land under Part 4 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995. [65613]

Mr. McNulty: On 24 January 2002 a consultation paper was issued on possible options for change to the current temporary use provisions. The paper put forward six options for change as well as inviting proposals for alternative options. A preferred option was not given. The closing date for responses was 24 April 2002.

We have had a significant response to the consultation paper and those views will be given due weight when considering any possible changes. Any changes that are made will only be after further consideration and decisions will not be taken lightly. However, the Government have no intention of disturbing urban and rural communities' traditional social and sporting activities through changes in this area.

Affordable Housing

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister which regional plans include estimates of the need for affordable housing in their region; and what the estimate is in each case. [63905]

Mr. McNulty: Regional planning guidance in the south-east, south-west, east midlands and Yorkshire and the Humber all have indicators for monitoring the provision of affordable housing. All regions have policies on affordable housing in regional planning guidance.

The indicators for monitoring affordable housing are 18,000–19,000 affordable homes per annum in the south-east region outside London, 6,000–10,000 per annum in the south-west, 3,400 dwellings per annum in the east midlands and 4,000 per annum in Yorkshire and the Humber.

Groundwork

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, pursuant to the answer by the Under-Secretary of State for International Development, the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble) of 23 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 509W, on Groundwork, if he will indicate what the time scale is for reaching a decision on a Lancashire-wide Groundwork Trust. [64386]

Mr. McNulty: We are currently awaiting further information from Groundwork UK in respect of the relationship and implications of the proposed pilot for a Lancashire-wide Groundwork Trust and the strategic functions currently carried out by existing Groundwork Trusts in the county, and on the arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the pilot. We plan to reach a decision before the summer recess.

Council Tax

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the percentage change in the council tax in county, district and unitary authorities in each of the past three years. [63022]

Mr. Raynsford: Decisions on council tax levels are for local authorities to take, after consulting their local electorate and taxpayers.

The table shows the percentage changes over the past three years in the average Band D (2 adults) council taxes set by shire county councils, shire district councils and unitary authorities.

Percentage increase in average Band D (2 adults) council tax

Class of authority	*2000–01 over 1999–2000*	*2001–02 over 2000–01*	*2002–03 over 2001–02*
Shire county councils	6.7	6.3	9.3
Shire district councils	5.4	6.3	8.6
Unitary authorities	5.7	6.1	8.2

High Hedges

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if his Department has issued a leaflet on guidelines to local authorities on dealing with high hedges complaints. [64530]

Mr. McNulty: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has no plans to issue a leaflet on guidelines to local authorities on dealing with high hedge complaints. Until there is a change in the law, local authorities have no powers to intervene in these matters.

We are preparing a leaflet for members of the public, advising them how they might approach their neighbours to try to agree a solution to their hedge problems. The leaflet will include information on a range of factors that people might consider in settling on the right hedge height for their particular circumstances. It will cover such matters as what heights will ensure privacy; those at which a hedge can be safely maintained; and those likely to block light to neighbouring properties.

We expect to publish the leaflet later in the summer and will provide copies to all Members of Parliament.

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what progress is being made to introduce legislation on controlling high hedges. [64529]

Mr. McNulty: The Government supported the high hedges Bill introduced last session by the hon. Member for Solihull (John M. Taylor MP). Unfortunately, it fell due to lack of time before the election. Although it has not been possible to bring forward a high hedges Bill in the current session, we remain committed to legislation allowing local authorities to deal with complaints about high hedges as soon as parliamentary time can be found.

Fire-fighters

Chris Grayling: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on recent representations he has received about fire-fighters' pay. [64268]

Mr. Raynsford: We greatly appreciate the valuable contribution to public protection made by the fire service, and by the other emergency services. Our emergency services are rightly held in high regard for their professionalism and dedication.

The Government have no statutory role in determining fire-fighters' pay. Representatives from local government, representing the employers, and from the Fire Brigades Union, representing employees, are responsible for negotiating fire-fighters' pay and conditions of service. These groups meet in the National Joint Council for Local Authorities' Fire Brigades. We understand that the two sides are currently in discussion on the Fire Brigades Union pay claim, which was formally tabled on 28 May. It would not be appropriate for the Government to comment on the progress of these negotiations.

Neighbourhood Renewal Fund

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to extend economic support to disadvantaged and deprived areas through the neighbourhood renewal fund beyond its allocation until 2003–04. [63961]

Mr. McNulty: We are considering the future of the neighbourhood renewal fund in the context of spending review 2002, on which decisions will be announced in July.

Housing (Older People)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he will publish the Choice and Quality in Housing for Older People strategy guidance that has been developed with the Department of Health. [64516]

Mr. McNulty: The Government are producing two documents relating to older people's housing and related support. These will both be published late summer.

The first document, "Quality and Choice for Older People's Housing: A Strategic Framework. The Story So Far", is the follow-up report on the actions for Government set out in the original strategic framework document published by the then Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and the Department of Health in January 2001.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, with the Department of Health and the Housing Corporation has also co-commissioned work on guidance for local authorities and their partner organisations in preparing older people's strategies.

Housing (Key Workers)

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many station houses have been provided for key workers in London in each year since 1997. [64371]

Mr. McNulty: The Government no longer allocate specific funding to local authorities for housing improvement grants. Each housing authority must decide how much it will allocate towards this purpose from the total capital funding provided to it by the Government each year.

Total capital resources made available for housing purposes for all authorities in England for 2002–03 is £2.5 billion. For Gloucestershire the figure for 2002–03 is £16.6 million, an increase of 85 per cent. on 1997–98.

Homelessness (Castle Point)

Bob Spink: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what proportion of the national allocation to tackle homelessness, announced in the March 2002 report, "More Than a Roof", has been allocated to Castle Point borough council. [64264]

Mr. McNulty: The Government are investing £125 million this financial year to tackle homelessness. I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave, *Official Report*, (64265), which states that the Homelessness Directorate has not received an application for funding from Castle Point borough council towards implementing their homelessness strategy.

£8 million per annum has been provided to local authorities (through the local government finance settlement, with effect from 2001–02) to implement the Homelessness Act. A further £10 million will be allocated in 2002–03 to assist local authorities to deliver the priority need order. It has not yet been decided what proportion of this money will go to individual local authorities. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Local Government Association are currently considering how the money will be shared.

Bob Spink: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if Castle Point borough council has submitted an action plan to show how it will reduce numbers and length of stay for homeless families with children in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. [64266]

Mr. McNulty: Based on 2001 statistics, Castle Point was not identified as one of the highest users of bed-and-breakfast hotels (B&B). The authority was not, therefore, required to submit a B&B reduction action plan in the first round of applications for funding to reduce numbers of families with children in B&B. However, the latest data from Castle Point indicates that is has 20 homeless households in B&B, of which 16 are families with children. We will be contacting the authority shortly to discuss their proposals to meet the commitment that, by March 2004, no homeless family with children is in B&B except in an emergency and even then for no more than six weeks.

Castle Point, like all authorities has been sent a 10-point check list of good practice, outlining the key 'building blocks' which we expect every authority to have in place to deliver reductions in B&B hotel use. In addition, the changes to housing benefit subsidies provide an incentive for authorities to lease private sector homes as a better quality alternative to B&B hotels.

Bob Spink: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if the Homeless Directorate in his Department has received a bid for funding to help local homeless people, from Castle Point borough council. [64265]

Mr. McNulty: On 14 March 2002, local authorities were invited to submit proposals to the new Homelessness Directorate in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for funding for local homelessness strategies. These are being considered at the moment. Castle Point borough council have not submitted any proposals for funding.

Bob Spink: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what proportion of the additional money per year provided to local authorities in the revenue support grant to help them meet their new statutory obligations under the Homelessness Act 2002 has been allocated to Castle Point borough council. [64263]

Mr. McNulty: The Government added £6.5/8/8 million to the general grant for 2001–02 to 2003–04 to meet local authorities' new statutory obligations under the Homelessness Act 2002. General grant is distributed to councils through standard spending assessments (SSA) which take account of various broad social and economic factors such as population. It is not possible to estimate how much of an authority's SSA relates to additional provision for particular responsibilities. It is, of course, for local authorities to decide how to allocate their general grant. Local authorities' responsibilities under the Homelessness Act 2002 are within the Environmental, Protective and Cultural Services SSA Block.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Evans: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the total cost of local government in the north-west was in the last financial year. [64541]

Mr. Raynsford: Local authorities within the north-west region have reported revenue expenditure 2001–02 budget figures totalling £8.3 billion. Revenue expenditure is expenditure funded by council tax, general Government grants, specific Government grants inside aggregate external finance and use of reserves.

The 2001–02 forecast figure for total capital expenditure in the north-west region is £1.5 billion.

Regional Policy

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many central Government Departments are not represented at a regional level within the network of Government offices; and what plans there are to increase the remit and responsibilities of regional staff. [63101]

Mr. Raynsford: The Government offices support the work of nine Departments: the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister; Department for Culture, Media and Sport; Department for Education and Skills; Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; Department for Transport; Department for Work and Pensions; Department of Health; Department of Trade and Industry; and Home Office.

The Government will continue to look for further opportunities to integrate more closely other regional activities and networks within Government office structures.

DEFENCE

Forces Health (Afghanistan)

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures have been taken to prevent further outbreaks of illness among British forces in Afghanistan. [64489]

Dr. Moonie: An infection control specialist and infection outbreak investigation team were deployed during the outbreak. Their recommendations have lead to a tightening up of existing sanitary and hygiene measures.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the field hospital at Bagram has re-opened following its closure as a result of illness. [64490]

Dr. Moonie: 34 field hospital at Bagram never closed although for a time it did not accept trauma patients, a measure that was lifted on 19 May 2002.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on hygiene standards of sanitary facilities used by British troops in Afghanistan. [64488]

Dr. Moonie: Afghanistan is a challenging environment which does place some limits on the sanitary facilities that can be provided. For example, there is not an unlimited supply of water. However, basic sanitary facilities are in place. Troops have access to showering facilities and the medical advice is that the deep trench latrines that are in place do not compromise hygiene standards, if well maintained.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the condition of the Royal Marines in Afghanistan who were struck down by illness during May. [64487]

Dr. Moonie: All British troops in Afghanistan who were suffering from winter vomiting disease during May have now recovered.

Seville European Council

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Prime Minister's statement of 24 June on the Seville European Council, if he will make a statement on the relationship between ESDP and NATO; and if it is the policy of the Government for NATO's Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe to play the central role in military planning to meet crises and contingencies for NATO and ESDP operations. [64810]

Mr. Hoon: The European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) complements and reinforces NATO. The Government are continuing to work within both the EU and NATO to conclude agreement on the arrangements to enable the EU to have assured access to NATO's planning capacities. These arrangements, which cover the role of D/SACEUR, are crucial to the success of ESDP.

EU Rapid Reaction Force

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans there are for the extension of the EU Rapid Reaction Force's mandate to the fight against terrorism; and if he will make a statement. [64811]

Mr. Hoon: There is no standing European Rapid Reaction Force. The European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) seeks to enable the European Union to deal with the full range of conflict prevention and crisis management missions defined in the Amsterdam treaty, the "Petersberg Tasks". The European Council at Seville agreed a declaration concerning the contribution of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy, including ESDP, in the fight against terrorism. This can already include the use of military forces if appropriate.

Nuclear Test Veterans

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what arrangements are in place to test the blood and saliva of British nuclear test veterans for evidence of irradiation. [50688]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 17 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 394W, to the hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Weir).

Computers

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures are *(a)* in place and *(b)* under discussion in his Department in order to ensure compliance with the WEE Directive. [60741]

Dr. Moonie: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to him on 12 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 1266W, by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Wilson).

Staff Numbers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many staff were employed by his Department on *(a)* 2 May 1997 and *(b)* 31 May 2002. [60896]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 13 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 1402W, by the Minister of State, Cabinet Office, (Mr. Alexander).

Strategic Sealift Capability

Mr. Laxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made toward finalising the arrangements for the UK's future military strategic sealift capability. [65664]

Dr. Moonie: I am pleased to announce that negotiations with AWSR Shipping Ltd. have been concluded and a PFI contract that will run until 2024 has been signed. The full service will be available from 2003. AWSR will provide, operate, maintain and manage six roll-on roll-off vessels and supply crews for the whole of the period of their contract. 180 new jobs for British seafarers will be created. After a phase in period, crews will be sponsored reserves. Based on a projected usage, the service is worth some £950 million, of which some £800 million is likely to be spent in the United Kingdom.

All six ships will not be needed all the time for Ministry of Defence work. When not engaged on MOD tasks they will be available for commercial trade.

The service will play a central role in fulfilling our strategic defence review commitment to enhance the armed forces' equipment lift requirements and allow the movement of the joint rapid reaction forces quickly to overseas theatres as required.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

National Lottery

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the review of the licensing and regulation of the National Lottery. [65667]

Tessa Jowell: I am today publishing a consultation document, setting out a number of possible changes to the future licensing and regulation of the lottery.

The document addresses the licensing arrangements which should apply when Camelot's second licence expires in January 2009. Our principal aim is to consider in good time therefore whether, and if so what, changes to the law governing the operation of the lottery are needed to ensure effective competition at that point, in the interests of maximising the income for good causes which it raises. The document takes account of the views of reports by the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee and by the National Audit Office into the award of the second licence.

The document also invites views on the issue of whether the lottery should continue to be regulated by the National Lottery Commission, or brought within the remit of the Gambling Commission which we propose to establish, as described in "A safe bet for success".

We shall shortly be publishing a further document which sets out our thinking on the arrangements for the distribution of lottery income, with a view to ensuring that the money for good causes is spent to best effect.

In this way, looking at both the income and distribution sides of the lottery, we aim to underpin its long-term success and appeal, so that the public can have confidence in supporting it.

I am arranging for copies of the consultation document to be deposited in the Libraries of both Houses. The consultation document is also available on the DCMS website at www.culture.gov.uk; and copies may be obtained, free of charge, from the Department. I shall be glad to consider comments on it.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Security Force Collusion Investigation

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make available the terms of reference according to which Mr. Justice Peter Cory will conduct his investigation into allegations of security force collusion. [65614]

Dr. John Reid: At the Weston Park talks last summer, the British and Irish Governments undertook to appoint a judge of international standing to conduct an investigation into allegations of collusion by the security forces in six particular cases. The two Governments announced the appointment of Mr. Justice Peter Cory, a former member of the Supreme Court of Canada, on 29 May 2002. I have placed a copy of the judge's terms of reference, which are set out in his letter of appointment, in the Library.

Police Service Annual Report

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he hopes to make available the annual report for 2001–02 of the Chief Constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland. [65615]

Dr. John Reid: Copies of the Chief Constable's annual report for 2001–02 will be placed in the Library tomorrow. It is a general report on the carrying out of the PSNI of their functions during 2001–02 financial year which is submitted to the Northern Ireland Policing Board and also to me for laying before Parliament in accordance with Section 58 (4) of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000.

Police Reserve

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he will make a decision about the future of the Police Full-Time Reserve in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [64215]

Jane Kennedy: The Government remain committed to the objective of phasing out the Full-Time Reserve in line with the Patten report and the Implementation Plan.

The Policing Board has asked the PSNI in the context of the service's overall human resources strategy, to prepare detailed proposals, including the Full-Time Reserve, to be considered by the board. I look forward to hearing the board's views, in conjunction with the chief constable's assessment, before final decisions are made.

I understand the effect of uncertainty on officers and their families. I hope that it will be possible to reach conclusions on this issue shortly. In the meantime, the contracts of Full-Time Reserve officers will continue to be renewed.

Forensic Science

Mr. Salter: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he has made a decision on the future of forensic science in Northern Ireland. [55340]

Dr. John Reid *[pursuant to his reply, 8 May 2002, c. 199W]:* I have agreed that the executive agency status of Forensic Science Northern Ireland should be continued until 31 March 2006. In addition, I have agreed with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury that Forensic Science will become a Trading Fund from 1 April 2004. My decisions follow the completion of Stage 1 of a quinquennial review which examined the past performance of Forensic Science and the alternative organisational arrangements available for the delivery of forensic services in Northern Ireland. Generally the agency was found to have performed well and I commend its staff for their dedication through a difficult period. Stage 2 of the review will now be carried out to look at ways of improving the delivery of services by the agency. Copies of the Stage 1 report have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses and will be available in due course on the NIO and Forensic Science websites.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Funding (Luton, South)

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what moneys have been provided *(a)* directly and *(b)* via agencies for which the Department has responsibility to the Luton, South constituency since 1997. [58586]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested can be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Departmental budgets are allocated on a national and regional basis and not by constituency.

Ministerial Meetings

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which Ministers and officials had meetings with representatives of *(a)* the Confederation of British Industry, *(b)* the Engineering Employees Federation, and *(c)* the Engineering Marine Training Authority during the last year; who they met; and what the subjects and outcomes of their discussions were. [62204]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Ministers and civil servants have meetings with a wide range of organisations and individuals as part of the process of policy development.

As with previous Administrations, it is not this Government's practice to provide details of all such meetings. All such contacts are conducted in accordance with the Ministerial Code, the Civil Service Code and Guidance for Civil Servants: Contacts with Lobbyists.

Children (Deafness)

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate she has made of the number of children with deafness in full-time education in each in the last three years. [61417]

Mr. Stephen Twigg *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* Information on numbers of children with specific types of special need is not available centrally.

The Department is considering introducing a requirement for schools and local education authorities to provide this information from 2004.

School Rolls

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the total roll number was of the *(a)* January 2001 Year 10 and *(b)* January 2002 Year 11. [62660]

Mr. Miliband: The requested information is not collected by year group. The nearest equivalent data collected by [illegible] age is shown in the table.

Maintained secondary schools[1]: number of full-time pupils by age
England

Position at January of each year	*Aged[2]*	*Number of pupils*
2001	14	559,422
2002[3]	15	547,654

[1] Including middle-deemed
[2] At 31 August of previous year
[3] Provisional
Source:
Annual School Census

Specialist Teaching

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what provision is available to teachers to assist them to deliver a wider range of specialisms and cross-curricular activities, particularly in vocational subjects. [62458]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 18 June 2002]:* From September 2002 all those training to teach 11 to 14-year-olds will be trained in the Key Stage 3 Strategy emphasising the importance of cross curricular work. Those training to teach 14 to 18-year-olds will train to teach whatever national qualifications are relevant to their subject, including vocational qualifications, key skills and work related learning. An extensive programme of staff training and free support materials for schools and colleges is being funded by my Department to coincide with the introduction of new vocational GCSEs in September 2002. This is in addition to existing professional development opportunities which teachers can use to address any training needs on specialist or cross curricular activities.

Teacher Workload

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps her Department has taken *(a)* to reduce the number of new initiatives and *(b)* to improve the rigour of assessment of those initiatives following the publication of the School Teacher's Review Body report on teacher workload. [63167]

Mr. Miliband: We are consulting on the School Teachers' Review Body report on teacher workload. One of the recommendations concerns the management of initiatives and reporting requirements. We are discussing the best ways forward on this and other aspects of the report with the school workforce remodelling working party, which includes teacher and head teacher representatives. Following the current consultation exercise, we expect to make formal proposals in the autumn.

Our strategic document "Education and Skills: Delivering Results A Strategy to 2002" describes how we will be working to improve delivery of our targets. We have worked with Cabinet Office to improve how we assess the impact of our policies on delivery partners, including the workload implications. This includes greater involvement of and consultation with schools about the best method of implementing new policies.

The Government are committed to helping teachers raise standards in schools. Departmental initiatives are designed to spread good practice, tackle poor practice and sponsor innovate practice. Sometimes this involves streamlining departmental programmes—for example the national supplementative of the standards fund.

Schools (Voluntary Support)

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what information she has on the number of hours of voluntary support provided in schools and early years settings. [63886]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 24 June 2002]:* The Government do not collect this information.

Staff Recruitment

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what information she collates on the number of new staff recruited each year by schools, colleges and early years settings. [63885]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 24 June 2002]:* The Department collects information from teacher pension records on teachers in service in the maintained schools sector in England at 31 March each year. From this information, numbers of new teachers can be compiled. The most recent data available are for 31 March 2000.

The Department does not collect numbers of new staff recruited to further education colleges and early years settings, or numbers of new staff recruited to non-teaching posts in schools.

Criminal Records Checks

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what estimates she has made of the number of criminal records checks which need be carried out each year by school, colleges and early years settings; [63884]

(2) if she will estimate the annual cost of criminal records checks to schools, colleges and early years settings. [63887]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 24 June 2002]:* There are no estimates of numbers or costs available in respect of schools and colleges. My Department does not collect the kind of information about the number of staff and volunteers in these areas that would enable estimates to be made, and therefore the information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Ofsted arranges checks for those working in early years settings, such as childminders and day care staff, and it expects to request over 350,000 checks this year. We have set aside a sum of money to ensure that individuals in early years settings will not have to meet the CRB fee during the current financial year.

Examination Results

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of pupils gained *(a)* five GCSEs at grade A-C and *(b)* two A-Levels in each local education authority in each year since 1999–2000, ranked by order of the most recent year. [63888]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 24 June 2002]:* The information requested has been placed in the Libraries.

Teacher Numbers

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to ensure all schools in England and Wales have sufficient teachers for the beginning of the new academic year. [64524]

Mr. Miliband: Schools are the employers and have primary responsibility for recruitment. Since 1997 the Government have introduced a series of measures to increase the number of teachers available to schools. They include measures to stimulate recruitment to initial teacher training, such as Training Salaries and "Golden Hellos"; a major boost to the Graduate Teacher programme for experienced entrants; a funded strategy for teachers' continuing professional development; extra pay flexibilities to allow schools to reward staff with scarce skills; extra support on behaviour management in the classroom; and funding for local Recruitment Strategy Managers within local education authorities. There were 9,400 more teachers in our schools in January 2002 than in January 2001—the biggest year-on-year rise for 20 years. There were also 26,700 more support staff in schools, and a 5 per cent. increase in the numbers of people starting initial teacher training courses.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many students have failed the *(a)* numeracy and *(b)* literacy skills tests prior to entering teaching in each year since tests were introduced. [64558]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 26 June 2002]:* The 1999–2000 teacher training cohort was the first to take a paper-based numeracy skills test. Following the first opportunities to take the test, 852 individuals had still to pass. Individuals had unlimited opportunities to pass the test throughout their induction period.

The 2000–01 teacher training cohort took the computerised literacy and numeracy tests. As at 5 September 2001, 355 had still to pass either the numeracy or literacy skills tests. These individuals could enter teaching as unqualified teachers for up to five years and continue to have unlimited opportunities to pass the tests.

The majority who fail the tests decide to re-sit. Figures are not available for this year as students are still taking the tests.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to ensure that children in England and Wales are taught by teachers with the relevant subject qualifications. [64557]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 26 June 2002]:* It is for schools, as employers, to employ the best available qualified people to teach their pupils and to deploy them appropriately. Preparations are in hand for a Secondary Schools Curriculum and Staffing Survey which will collect information on teachers' subject qualifications.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many children in England are being taught at *(a)* KS3 and *(b)* KS4 by teachers who do not have a qualification relevant to the subject being taught. [64556]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 26 June 2002]:* The percentage of lessons taught by full-time teachers at November 1996 that were taught by a teacher with no post A-level qualification in that subject were as follows, by subject:

	Percentages of periods	
Subject	*KS3*	*KS4*
Mathematics	11	8
English	14	8
Biology[1]	17	9
Chemistry[1]	6	1
Physics[1]	7	3
General Science[1]	5	4
Other Sciences	79	63
French	11	9
German	20	15
Spanish	28	27

Subject	Percentages of periods KS3	KS4
Other Modern Languages	76	49
Design and Technology[2]	35	27
Information Technology[2]	65	56
Combined Technology[2]	34	31
Home Economics	20	16
Business Studies	25	33
Classics	25	12
History	17	6
Religious Education	24	20
Geography	15	8
Other Social Studies	58	44
Combined Arts/Humanities/Social Studies	84	78
Music	4	1
Drama	36	26
Art	7	5
Physical Education	5	6
Careers Education	92	88
Personal and Social Education	96	95
General Studies	13	99
Total[3, 4]	20	16

[1] Teachers qualified in general science are treated as qualified to teach biology, chemistry, or physics. Teachers qualified in biology, chemistry or physics are treated as qualified to teach general science.

[2] Teachers qualified in other technology are treated as qualified to teach design and technology or information technology. Teachers qualified in design and technology or information technology are treated as qualified to teach combined technology.

[3] Teachers are counted once against each subject which they are teaching.

[4] 'Other' not included in total percentages.

Note:

This is the most recent available information.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many individual students who failed *(a)* numeracy and *(b)* literacy skills tests for entering into teaching have not re-applied to take the tests. [64555]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 26 June 2002]:* 79 individuals in the 2000–01 cohort who failed *(a)* numeracy or *(b)* literacy skills tests for entry into teaching have not re-applied to take the test(s).

The majority of those who fail decide to re-sit the tests. Figures are not available for this year as students are still taking the tests.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list average salary for *(a)* primary teachers, *(b)* secondary teachers, *(c)* graduates in all other sectors and *(d)* all employees in each year since 1974. [64373]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 26 June 2002]:* Average salaries for full-time teachers, for others in employment with a degree or above and for all full-time employees is shown in the following table.

	Full-time teachers[1]			
	Nursery and primary	Secondary	Employees with a degree or better[2]	All employees[3]
1974	2,120	2,390	[4]—	2,170
1975	3,220	3,550	[4]—	2,820
1976	3,790	4,110	[4]—	3,350
1977	4,180	4,460	[4]—	3,660
1978	4,410	4,680	[4]—	4,120
1979	4,900	5,180	[4]—	4,670
1980	5,920	6,220	[4]—	5,750
1981	7,430	7,790	[4]—	6,510
1982	8,090	8,460	[4]—	7,120
1983[3]	8,670	9,050	[4]—	7,730
1983[3]				7,690
1984	9,160	9,580	[4]—	8,310
1985	9,660	10,160	[4]—	8,920
1986	10,490	11,120	[4]—	9,630
1987	11,970	12,740	[4]—	10,370
1988	12,920	13,780	[4]—	11,390
1989	13,850	14,830	[4]—	12,500
1990	14,500	16,020	[4]—	13,720
1991	16,490	17,720	[4]—	14,850
1992	18,450	19,950	[4]—	15,880
1993	19,970	21,470	[4]—	16,520
1994	20,280	21,630	23,570	16,980
1995	20,860	22,200	23,880	17,540
1996	21,370	22,730	26,280	18,340
1997	22,080	23,480	26,910	19,170
1998	22,700	24,130	27,320	20,050
1999	[5]23,570	[5]25,060	28,890	20,860
2000	[5]24,390	[5]25,930	30,090	[5]21,880
2001	[6]26,143	[6]27,917	30,660	23,170

[1] Average salary of full-time teachers in the maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools sector of England and Wales at 31 March of each year 1974 to 2001. Figures cover all grades and include any allowances paid. Figures up to 1993 include sixth form colleges. The 2001 salary figures include those threshold pay increases that were made before March 2001. However, they do not include threshold pay increases relating to people who passed the threshold in September 2000 and had not received their payment by March 2001. This money was backdated after March 2001 and therefore the average salary for March 2001 will be understated. The estimated average salary in March 2001 for primary and secondary schools combined, including all threshold pay increases, is £27,800. Source: DfES Database of Teacher Records.

[2] Average salary of those in full-time employment in the UK with a degree or better qualification, in the spring of years shown. Excludes teachers with such qualifications. Source: Labour Force Survey (as the New Earnings Survey does not include qualifications data). Gross weekly and hourly earnings data are known to be underestimated in the LFS. Earnings data is based on information from about two-fifths of all respondents. Respondents with hourly pay greater than £100 are excluded.

[3] Average salary of those in full-time employment in GB whose pay for the survey period was not affected by absence, at April of each year. Figures from 1974 to first row for 1983 are compiled on the basis of men aged 21+ and women aged 18+. Figures for second 1983 row and onwards are compiled on the basis of employees on adult rates. Figures for 1997 and 1998 include late receipts. Source: New Earnings Survey.

[4] Not available.

[5] Revised.

[6] Provisional.

Pupil Participation

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent representations she has received on including in Ofsted's framework of school assessments measures that are being taken by schools to encourage and improve pupil participation in the school's decision-making process. [63654]

Mr. Stephen Twigg *[holding answer 26 June 2002]:* No recent representations have been received about including an assessment of measures to encourage and improve pupil participation in Ofsted's framework.

Public Appointments

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many days elapsed between the departures of chief executives and the arrivals of successors for each non-departmental body funded by her Department and its predecessor Departments since 1979. [59711]

Estelle Morris *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* The information requested for NDPBs currently funded by my Department are as listed. Information on NDPBs previously funded by my Department but which no longer exist, could be provided only at disproportionate cost:

Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI): David Sherlock, the first and current chief inspector, was appointed on 1 April 2001.

British Educational Communications and Technology Agency (BECTA)—formerly National Council for Educational Technology (NCET): Noel Thompson was appointed as the first chief executive of NCET on 1 April 1990, he left the post on 28 February 1992. Between 1 March and 2 August 1992 the post was held by an interim chief executive, Graham Walters. Between 3 August 1992 and 31 January 1997 the post was held by Margaret Bell. Between 1 February and 2 September 1997 the post was held by another interim chief executive, Michael Littlewood. Between 3 September and 31 December 1997 Owen Lynch held the post on secondment. On 1 January 1998 Owen Lynch was appointed as the first chief executive of BECTA, a post he currently holds.

Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE): Professor Graeme Davies was appointed as the first chief executive in 1992, he left on 30 September 1995. Between 1 October 1995 and 30 September 2001 the post was held by Brian Fender. Sir Howard Newby, the current chief executive, was appointed on 1 October 2001.

Investors in People UK (IIP UK): Mary Chapman, the first chief executive, left the post in May 1998. Ruth Spellman, the current chief executive, was appointed on 1 October 1998.

Learning and Skills Council (LSC): John Harwood, the first and current chief inspector, was appointed on 1 October 2000.

National College for School Leadership (NCSL): Heather Du Quesnay, the first and current director, was appointed on 1 September 2000.

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA): Dr. Nick Tate was appointed as the first chief executive in 1997, he left the QCA on 31 August 2000. Between 1 September 2000 and 31 December 2001 the post was held by Professor David Hargreaves. The post is currently filled temporarily by Beverley Evans, Ken Boston will take up post on 16 September 2002.

Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA): Christopher Duff, the current chief inspector, was appointed on 22 April 2002.

Student Loans Company (SLC): Ron Harrison was appointed as the first chief executive on 10 January 1990, he left the post on 10 March 1995. Between 11 March and 31 December 1995 the post was vacant. Colin Ward, the current chief executive, was appointed to the post on 1 January 1996.

Teacher Training Agency (TTA): Anthea Millett was appointed as the first chief executive on 1 January 1995, she left on the post on 31 December 1999. Ralph Tabberer, the current chief executive, was appointed on 7 February 2000.

Children Leaving Care

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what financial assistance is offered to children who leave care at the age of 16 years to remain in full or part-time education. [62657]

Jacqui Smith: I have been asked to reply.

The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, which commenced on 1 October 2001, places a duty on local authorities to help care leavers with education and training, as appropriate in light of the individual young person's needs to the end of their agreed programme. Local authority support may be extended until a care leave's 24th birthday and can continue for longer if this is necessary to complete an agreed programme of education and training.

TREASURY

Overpayments (Crown Immunity)

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his policy towards Crown immunity in cases where taxpayers sue for the refund of overpayments made to the Inland Revenue. [64379]

Dawn Primarolo: My understanding is that the Inland Revenue does not have a legal right to claim Crown immunity where taxpayers claim refund of an overpayment of tax.

Landfill Tax Credit Scheme

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress has been made in the consultation on the landfill tax credit scheme. [64378]

John Healey: The consultation on the future of the landfill tax scheme closed on 17 June. A summary of responses will be produced shortly.

Illegal Meat Imports

Mr. Collins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the priority given by HM Customs and Excise to the prevention of illegal meat imports into the UK. [64876]

John Healey: Import controls to detect illegal import of meat and meat products are the responsibility of the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and local or port health officers. HM Customs and Excise does not therefore specifically target its checks against the risk of illegal import of meat and meat products.

Customs does however support the controls to prevent illegal import of meat and meat products by:

Dealing with meat and meat products found in the course of checks made in relation to the wide range of controls for which Customs does have lead responsibility;

Participating in joint exercises organised by DEFRA or local or port health officers;

Supporting DEFRA and local and port health officers with information to assist in detection of illegal imports; and

Contributing to the DEFRA led illegal imports programme, for example by assisting in developing risk assessment.

Network Rail

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place the accounting advice given by the Office for National Statistics concerning Network Rail in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [65059]

Mr. Boateng: Yes, the letter from the Office for National statistics of 20 June 2002 giving accounting advice concerning Network Rail will be placed in the Library.

Mr. Howard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of the treatment of Network Rail debt on potential UK obligations under EMU convergence programmes and the stability and growth pact. [64880]

Mr. Boateng: Network Rail will be classified to the private sector in national accounts. It would pose no threat to UK obligations under EU treaties that concern excessive government deficits.

Mr. Howard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what submissions his Department has made to the ONS about the treatment of Network Rail debt in the national accounts; and if he will set out the reasoning behind those submissions. [64881]

Mr. Boateng: Over the months since October 2001 Treasury has kept ONS informed about the developing proposals for the constitution and financing of Network Rail in order to give ONS the opportunity to ask questions affecting the sector classification.

On 14 June 2002 Treasury wrote to ONS asking for a formal decision on the sector classification of Network Rail in national accounts. ONS replied on 20 June saying that, subject to NR's members confirming the board of directors, and further checking of the legal documents, NR would be classified to the private sector in national accounts. The reasoning behind the submissions was to obtain ONS's view on the sector classification of Network Rail, and to make sure that ONS received in good time all the information it needed to make that decision and raise any queries.

Mr. Howard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with the Department for Transport about the treatment of Network Rail debt in the national accounts. [64872]

Mr. Boateng: Treasury officials have advised the Department for Transport that the Office for National Statistics (ONS) would classify Network Rail (NR) to the private sector in national accounts once its board of directors had been confirmed by a meeting of NR's members.

"Modernising Annuities"

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library the figures underlying the graph on page 19 of "Modernising Annuities" published by the Inland Revenue in February; what the date is in each year for which the figures are valid; and what the source is of the date used for earnings, annuity rates and value of maturing personal pension funds. [61084]

Mr. McCartney: I have been asked to reply.

The information in the table sets out the figures underlying the graph on page 19 of "Modernising Annuities" published by the Inland Revenue and the Department of Work and Pensions in February.

Year started contributing	*Retire at end year*	*Years of contribution*	*Lump sum built up (£)*	*Lump sum in 2000 earnings terms (£)*	*Annuity rate in last year of contribution*	*Pension at retirement (nominal terms, £ weekly)*	*Pension at retirement (2000 earnings terms, £ weekly)*
1956	1986	31	17,681	38,694	14.1	48	105
1957	1987	31	21,066	42,786	14.0	57	115
1958	1988	31	23,845	44,503	13.7	63	117
1959	1989	31	25,578	43,792	14.0	69	118
1960	1990	31	27,866	43,460	15.2	82	127
1961	1991	31	34,243	49,608	14.6	96	139
1962	1992	31	41,169	56,297	13.2	105	143
1963	1993	31	53,666	71,268	11.7	121	161
1964	1994	31	47,497	60,865	11.6	106	135
1965	1995	31	57,034	70,893	11.3	124	154
1966	1996	31	60,718	72,850	11.0	129	154
1967	1997	31	71,040	81,762	10.4	141	163
1968	1998	31	85,598	93,743	9.4	155	169
1969	1999	31	80,168	83,738	8.9	138	144
1970	2000	31	85,438	85,438	9.1	149	149
1971	2001	31	83,936	80,348	8.9	143	137

The figures are based on hypothetical modelling of the return from contributing to a pension fund using the following assumptions:

A person contributes to a personal pension for 31 years.

The earnings of each individual go up in line with average earnings.

Each individual contributes 10 per cent. of their earnings into a personal pension.

For the first 21 years, the fund is invested in equities, providing a return in line with the FT30 price index (dividends are ignored to allow for the effect of charges).

Over the last 10 years of contributions, the fund is switched into gilts at a rate of 10 per cent. of the fund each year.

The return on gilts is in line with the Barclays capital total return index.

A further annual charge of 1 per cent. of the fund under management is paid out of the fund each year.

Upon retirement on 31 December of the given year, an annuity is purchased at the prevailing rate of that year.

Date and sources of information:

Historical annuity rates provided by Annuity Direct; and the rates refer to level annuity for a male aged 65, single life, guaranteed 5 years.

The annuity rates were calculated by taking the average of monthly rates for each year. The annuity rates for 2001 refer to the average of monthly rates from January to October only.

Earnings:

The average earnings series from 1963 to December 2001 is taken from National Statistics publication, 'The Abstract of Statistics for Social Security Benefits and Contributions and Indices of Prices and Earnings, 2001 Edition'.

Two indices have been put together to form a monthly average earnings series, starting from 1963. The Index of Average Earnings from 1963 to 1975 covered employees in all industries and services, except postal services, banking and medical services. The Average Earnings Index (whole economy) from 1976 to present covered all employees.

Prior to 1963 the earnings series was constructed by back calculating using the annual growth in average earnings of full time male manual employees.

Figures for 2001 refer to the average of monthly rates from January to October only.

The FT 30:

Figures taken from: Economic Trends Annual Supplement, Office for National Statistics.

Figures for 2001 refer to the average of monthly rates from January to September only.

Gilt Rates:

Barclays capital total return index

Figures for 2001 refer to estimates after the end of October 2001.

Treasury Building PFI

Mr. Bacon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the total professional fees were for the Treasury Building PFI deal, broken down by *(a)* payer and *(b)* payee. [57829]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 22 May 2002]:* Further to my right hon. Friend the former Chief Secretary's reply to the hon. Member on 5 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 840W, the total professional fees paid by Exchequer Partnership and HMT to date are as follows:

(i) Professional fees paid by EP to date total £22.08 million. £6.968 million of these fees were accounted for in the earlier reply. Of the remaining £15.112 million, the major payees were Foster and Partners (architects) £5.68 million, Waterman Partnership (structural engineers) £1.63 million, Jaros Baum and Bolles (mechanical and electrical engineers) £1.57 million, Hanscomb (quantity surveyors) £1.48 million and Stanhope plc (property developers) £1.47 million.

(ii) Professional fees payable by HMT to date total £3.223 million and were payable to the firms listed in the table. Of this sum, £2.637 million was accounted for in the earlier answer.

		£ million
GTMS	Project Management and Technical Advice	0.802
Berwin Leighton	Legal Advice	1.345
Dresdner Kleinwort Benson	Financial Advice	0.660
DEGW	Change Management Advice	0.16
Cecil Denny Highton	Advice on Accommodation requirements	0.101
CB Hillier Parker	Specialist property-related Advice	0.013
Roger Preston and Partners	Mechanical and Electrical Engineering Advice	0.043
Willis Corroon	Insurance Advice	0.006
PriceWaterHouseCoopers	Accountancy Advice	0.033
		3.223

Customs and Excise

Mr. Weir: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on how many occasions Customs and Excise have seized pirated *(a)* video cassettes, *(b)* compact discs and *(c)* DVDs at UK ports of entry in each of the last five years; and what quantities were seized on each occasion. [59661]

John Healey: Customs do not maintain separate totals of seizures in the categories requested. Details of all seizures of such goods are provided to the European Commission who now compile annual statistics and publish them on their website at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/taxation—customs/customs/counterfeit—piracy/statistics/uk—en.pdf.

These statistics show video cassettes, compact discs and DVDs as a single category. For the year 2000 there were 556 seizures totalling 38,138 items seized. This includes both pirated items (i.e. those breaching copyright) and counterfeit items (those with false trade marks). Figures for earlier years are not available.

ECOFIN Council

Roger Casale: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the outcome was of the ECOFIN Council held on 20 June; what the Government's stance was on the issues discussed, including its voting record; and if he will make a statement. [64363]

Mr. Gordon Brown: I attended the ECOFIN meeting on 20 June.

ECOFIN agreed the Commission's recommendations for the broad economic policy guidelines for 2002 to 2003. The UK supports the guidelines which emphasise the importance of further structural reform in Europe. Following discussion at the Seville European Council the guidelines were adopted by ECOFIN on June 21.

ECOFIN discussed arrangements for launching the Euro-Mediterranean Facility in the European Investment bank. It was decided that the facility would be launched in the autumn on the basis of the commission's funding plan but that the European Investment bank, the commission and the council would take forward discussions on the allocation of funds for the facility.

The council agreed two reports to go to the European Council at Seville. The first was a progress report on energy taxation, and the second an updated report on the tax package, following the launch of negotiations with the Swiss on the tax on savings.

Commissioner Bolkestein gave a short oral report to the council on the work of the financial action task force in combating terrorist financing and ECOFIN noted that this work was progressing satisfactorily.

ECOFIN was also updated by the chair of the Economic and Financial Committee on on-going work to improve corporate governance in the EU.

The council also reached political agreement on a directive on taxation of biofuels.

No votes were taken at the meeting.

Earnings Statistics

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what the *(a)* weekly median earnings and *(b)* distribution of earnings for those earning (i) under the point below which 10 per cent. of earners fall and (ii) the point above which 10 per cent. of earners exceed, are in (A) Scotland and (B) each of the unitary local authority areas in Scotland, broken down by (1) all manual, (2) all non-manual and (3) all workers; [63696]

(2) what proportion of full-time workers in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* each of the unitary local authority areas in Scotland and *(c)* Great Britain have hourly earnings (i) including and (ii) excluding overtime below (A) £7.97, (B) £7.32, (C) £5.38 and (D) £4.10 broken down by categories (1) male manual, (2) male non-manual, (3) all male workers, (4) female manual, (5) female non-manual, (6) all female workers, (7) all manual, (8) all non-manual and (9) all workers. [63697]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 25 June 2002]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Annabelle Ewing, dated 27 June 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent questions on the distribution of weekly earnings and average hourly earnings for workers in Great Britain, Scotland and the unitary authorities in Scotland. (63696 & 63697)

I am placing in the House of Commons Library, tables showing average weekly earnings, both including and excluding overtime, (Table 1) and the proportion of people earning below the different thresholds you listed, both including overtime (Table 2) and excluding overtime (Table 3).

The New Earnings Survey (NES) can provide earnings data for small geographical areas. The release of NES data is restricted to figures that are derived from a sufficiently large sample of employees, and have an acceptable level of accuracy and I have provided the available data for Scotland, the unitary authorities in Scotland and Great Britain only for those areas where the samples are large enough. These are based on the 2001 NES, the latest survey for which data are available.

Age Discrimination

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies have a policy of not considering applications for employment by persons over a particular age. [59456]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* HM Treasury and its executive agency, the Debt Management Office, do not apply age restrictions on applications for employment, with the exception that we cannot consider applicants above our maximum retirement age of 60.

NATS

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the answer of 17 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 130W, on NATS, what arrangements have been put in place to succeed the Troika insurance scheme. [64705]

Ruth Kelly: The Government's Troika insurance scheme for aviation third party terrorism risks was due to come to an end on 30 June. Provision of insurance under Troika has now been extended for a further 60 days, and will now come to an end at 23:59 on 29 August. Discussions are continuing in Europe on possible insurance arrangements to succeed individual government insurance schemes for aviation, and on developments in the commercial aviation insurance market.

Capital Returns

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he has collated on the pre-tax rate of return on capital employed for the UK *(a)* banking, *(b)* pharmaceutical and *(c)* telecommunications industry in each year since 1990. [64962]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Pullinger to Mr. Peter Lilley:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question concerning what information has been collected on the pre-tax rate of return on capital employed for the UK (a) banking, (b) pharmaceutical and (c) telecommunications industry in each year since 1990. I am replying in his absence. (64962)

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) publish data on the rates of return for Private Non-Financial Companies in the "Profitability of UK Companies" Press Notice (which is available to download free from the www.statistics.gov.uk website). The most detailed breakdown available in this release covers total Manufacturing and total Service Sector rates of return. No further disaggregation into Pharmaceutical or Telecommunications Industries is available. The ONS does not have any information on the rates of return for Financial Companies (including Banks).

Annual Leave

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the average annual leave entitlement is for staff in his Department in 2002. [64651]

Ruth Kelly: The annual leave entitlement for staff below the senior civil service is:

25 days on entry and 30 days after seven years service.

The annual leave entitlement for members of the senior civil service is currently set by the Cabinet Office at 30 days.

Information about average leave entitlement can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Insurance Cover

Brian Cotter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what procedures are in place to assess and monitor information compiled by the insurance industry as a basis for determining contracts of cover. [64935]

Ruth Kelly: Determining whether to offer cover, and terms and prices of contracts, are for the commercial judgment of insurers. Except for certain specified circumstances, insurers are free to gather and use whatever obtainable information they believe is relevant. It is in insurers' interests to only use relevant and accurate information. Government does not assess or monitor the compilation of such information.

Flooding

Brian Cotter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations his Department has received on the accuracy of information compiled by the insurance industry relating to flood risks; and what action he plans to take. [64936]

Ruth Kelly: The Treasury regularly receives representations on a wide variety of issues. The Environment Agency is working hard to improve the availability of accurate flood risk information; this includes liaison with the Association of British Insurers.

Nauru

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what counter measures the United Kingdom Government have taken in respect of the Financial Action Task Force recommendations concerning Nauru; and if he will make a statement. [65106]

Ruth Kelly: The UK has implemented all the FATF counter measures against Nauru, through guidance issued by the Joint Money Laundering Steering Group.

UK financial institutions conduct enhanced scrutiny of business dealings with financial institutions from all countries on the FATF's Non Co-operative Countries and Territories list. In the case of Nauru, UK financial institutions would treat business dealings with even greater caution and would be more likely to make a Suspicious Transaction Report to the National Criminal Intelligence Service.

Ministerial Visits

Keith Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many EU applicant countries he has visited since 1 May 1999. [65402]

Ruth Kelly: The Chancellor of the Exchequer visited Malta on 20 September 2000 to attend the Commonwealth Finance Ministers Meeting.

Ministerial Meetings

Keith Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he last met the Chairman of the IMF. [65401]

Ruth Kelly: The Chancellor of the Exchequer regularly meets Horst Köhler, the Managing Director of the IMF, including at the international meetings of the IMF, World bank and G7 Finance Ministers' Meetings.

Early Retirement

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would have been the impact on *(a)* tax revenues, *(b)* pension funds and *(c)* gross domestic product if all those who have taken early retirement had instead worked until their statutory retirement age for the period 1982 to 2002. [65018]

Ruth Kelly: Between 1984 and 2000 activity rates of individuals aged 50 and over have remained broadly constant at just under 70 per cent., with the male activity rate falling slightly while the female rate has risen. Currently, only 39 per cent. of men are still in employment at age 64, 47 per cent. of women at age 59.

With increasing life expectancy, pensions will have to last longer requiring more pension saving by individuals themselves and through occupational arrangements. The Government have policies in place to enable and encourage people to work longer and save more for retirement. The new deal 50 plus was introduced nationally in April 2000, and has helped over 60,000 older people find work. The Government are also, through the Age Positive campaign, challenging ageist employment practices; and is committed to legislating against age discrimination in employment and training by 2006.

SCOTLAND

Ministerial Training

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much has been spent by her Department on training in leadership skills for Ministers and officials in each of the last five years. [52721]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* The Scotland Office was established on 1 July 1999.

Since that date my Department has incurred no expenditure in leadership skills for Ministers. Officials in my Department have access to a wide range of training and development opportunities including leadership skills. Leadership is often one element of a wider personal development programme. Information on the amount attributed to development of leadership skills from such programmes could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Data Protection

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans she has to propose legislation on the application of the Data Protection Act 1998 in relation to unstructured personal information in manual form, so that the rights of access granted to data subjects are the same in Scotland as they are in England; and if she will make a statement. [59207]

Mrs. Liddell: While the subject matter of the Data Protection Act 1998 is reserved, the amendments made by the Freedom of Information Act 2000 to extend the scope of the Data Protection Act to cover unstructured personal data held by UK public authorities (as defined in the Freedom of Information Act) do not apply to such data held by Scottish public authorities. However, the Scottish Executive has indicated that it intends to provide the same rights of access to personal information held by Scottish public authorities as those contained in the Freedom of Information Act 2000 as regards personal information held by UK public authorities.

Certified Timber

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will list the refurbishment projects that *(a)* are in progress and *(b)* will start within the next six months; and what action is being taken to ensure that these will procure certified timber. [59773]

Mrs. Liddell: My Department has no refurbishment projects in progress or planned within the next six months.

Scottish Older People's Consultative Forum

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many seats the Scottish Older People Advisory Group has on the Scottish Older People's Consultative Forum. [64845]

Mrs. McGuire: The Scottish Older People's Consultative Forum is chaired by the Scottish Executive and considers devolved matters. Therefore, any questions about its composition are for the Scottish Parliament.

ADVOCATE-GENERAL

Ministerial Training

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Advocate-General how much has been spent by her Department on training in leadership skills for Ministers and officials in each of the last five years. [52722]

The Advocate-General *[holding answer 26 April 2002]*: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Benefits

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many persons were entitled to receive each benefit and tax credit at the most recent date for which information is available; and how many had *(a)* become entitled and *(b)* ceased to be entitled, in the preceding 12 months. [35217]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 11 June 2002]:* We aim to ensure that people are in an informed position to make choices on whether to claim benefit and we are the first Government to encourage the active pursuit of take-up initiatives as a means of tackling pensioner poverty. On 30 May 2000 we launched the minimum income guarantee (MIG) take-up campaign and this resulted in a further 127,371 successful MIG claims.

The available information on benefit take-up is published in the Income-Related Benefits Estimates of Take-Up in 1999–2000, a copy of which is available in the Library. Tax credits are the responsibility of the Inland Revenue.

Information on the number of people receiving social security benefits is available in the Library in the following publications:

Attendance Allowance and Disability Living Allowance—Disability, Care and Mobility Benefits Quarterly Statistical Enquiry, August 2001;

Income Support—Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry, November 2001; Jobseeker's Allowance; Jobseeker's Allowance Quarterly Statistical Enquiry, November 2001.

Incapacity Benefit/Severe Disablement Allowance—Incapacity Benefit and Severe Disablement Allowance Quarterly Summary Statistics November 2001;

Housing Benefit/Council Tax Benefit—Housing Benefit & Council Tax Benefit Quarterly Summary Statistics for November 2001; and

Retirement Pension—Retirement Pension Summary of Statistics, September 2001.

The available information on the number of people who have stopped and started receiving social security benefits has been placed in the Library. In addition, this table gives the number of people receiving bereavement benefits, child benefit, guardians allowance, industrial injuries disablement benefit, invalid care allowance, maternity allowance and reduced earnings allowance.

Benefits

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the planned phases for the transfer of benefit payments to automated credit transfer. [60843]

Malcolm Wicks: Customers will be moved from order books and girocheques to payment into a bank or building society account on a benefit by benefit basis. This will start in 2003 and we plan to finish two years later. We plan to start to contact the first customers in late 2002. Even after the move to payments directly into accounts, customers will still be able to continue to collect their benefits in cash from the Post Office if they wish.

Carers

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what assessment has been made of the additional cost to a person of caring for a disabled person; and what element of this is provided for in the state pension; [62371]

(2) what representations he has received regarding the rule that invalid care allowance cannot be paid to people of pensionable age; and what plans he has to review this rule. [62372]

Maria Eagle: No estimates of the additional cost to a person of caring for a disabled person are available and the state pension does not contain an element in respect of caring responsibility, but carers entitlement to state pension is protected through contribution credits and the home responsibilities protection scheme. In addition, from April this year some 2 million carers are able to build up entitlement to an additional pension through the state second pension.

As part of the substantial package of measures to help carers announced in autumn 2000, the Government have responded positively to representations made by older carers and their organisations by abolishing the age 65 upper age limit for claims to invalid care allowance. This change comes into effect on 28 October 2002. It will enable older carers with little of no retirement pension to receive the allowance, while those with low incomes will benefit by gaining access to the carer premium paid with income-related benefits, and follows the substantial increases to the carer premium and to the earnings limit for entitlement to invalid care allowance made in April 2001. Overall these measures, together with the continued payment of invalid care allowance for up to eight weeks after the death of the severely disabled person being cared for, will provide over £500 million in extra support for carers over three years.

In-work Benefits (Administration)

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what *(a)* costs associated with moving in-work benefit administration from his Department to the Inland Revenue and *(b)* other costs his Department incurred in each year since 1999–2000 with regard to the working families tax credit. [62604]

Malcolm Wicks: The project costs to this Department associated with replacing family credit with working families tax credit in 1999 are estimated at £1.5 million for 1998–99 and £1.6 million for 1999–2000.

No figures are available for the on-going costs—information provided to customers about working families tax credit is part of the package of information given to them about the benefits of moving into work.

Pensions

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 22 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 378W, on pensions, if he will update his estimates based on the Family Resources Survey 2000–01 of *(a)* median pensioner incomes, excluding means-tested benefits, by (i) age, (ii) sex and (iii) marital status, and *(b)* the size of each group. [62693]

Mr. McCartney: The information required is in the table.

	Age 60–64	*Age 65–69*	*Age 70–74*	*Age 75–79*	*Age 80+*
Single males					
Median income (£)	n/a	138	141	136	132
Number	n/a	230,000	260,000	240,000	290,000
Single females					
Median income (£)	132	127	127	116	109
Number	380,000	470,000	630,000	670,000	1,000,000
Couples					
Median income (£)	n/a	296	258	236	211
Number	n/a	980,000	760,000	510,000	410,000

Notes:

1. The definition of income used here is gross income, that is income gross of the following items: income tax payments, national insurance contributions, contributions to occupational and personal pension schemes, local taxes, maintenance, child support payments and parental contributions to students living away from home.
2. "Median income" represents the income of the person or family exactly in the middle of the range of ranked incomes of the age group. For each age group there is a wide range of incomes.
3. The data are from the Family Resources Survey 2000–01 and are rounded to the nearest £1 or 10,000.
4. Estimates are for pensioner units. Pensioner units are defined as single (non-cohabiting) people over state pension age (65 and over for men, 60 and over for women) and couples (married or cohabiting) where the man is over state pension age.
5. Pensioner units are allocated to age categories according to the age of the head. The head of a couple is defined as the man.
6. Estimates have not been split by gender for couples as the extent of income sharing within pensioner units is not known.
7. Means tested benefits refer to minimum income guarantee, working families' tax credit, housing benefit, council tax benefit and social fund grants.
8. These results are based on survey respondents' identification of different elements of benefit income, and are therefore subject to misreporting.

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if it is his policy to regard money purchase pension schemes as broadly comparable with final salary pension schemes; and if he will make a statement. [63169]

Mr. McCartney: Both defined benefit and defined contribution pensions have their advantages and disadvantages. However, the Government's principal concern is to ensure that as much money goes into the pension pot as possible, and is not spent on the cost of selling or running the pension fund.

Over a whole working life, if contributions to a defined benefit scheme were the same as those to a defined contribution scheme we would expect the pension benefits to be broadly comparable.

New Deal

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in Portsmouth, South constituency found permanent employment as a result of the New Deal for *(a)* long term unemployed 25 plus, *(b)* lone parents, *(c)* disabled people and *(d)* 50 plus in each of the years since they were introduced; and if he will make a statement. [63370]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Information on the New Deal for Disabled People is not available at constituency level. Such information as is available is in the table.

	Programme		
	New Deal 25 plus[1]	*New Deal 50 plus*[2]	*New Deal for Lone Parents*[2]
Total number of people entering sustained employment[3], *in Portsmouth, South*			
1998–99	30	[4]—	20
1999–2000	20	[4]—	100
2000–01	10	50	120
2001–02	60	70	140

[1] In April 2001 New Deal 25 Plus was extended and enhanced, to provide a flexible, more individually-tailored service to help more people get jobs and remain in them.

[2] Figures for sustained employment are not given for the New Deal 50 plus and the New Deal for Lone Parents. The figures given are therefore the total number of jobs gained.

[3] Sustained employment is defined as employment lasting more than 13 weeks.

[4] Figures are not available as the New Deal 50 plus was only introduced nationally from April 2000.

Source:

New Deal Evaluation Database.

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much funding has been given for investigating benefit fraud in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [63681]

Malcolm Wicks: For details of the Department's spending, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) on 10 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 618W.

Bereavement Benefits

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will review the rules on awarding backdated benefits to men widowed before the introduction of the 2001 changes to bereavement benefits. [63691]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 21 June 2002]:* We have no plans to do so. There is continuing litigation and the matter will be kept under review.

We reformed benefits in widowhood by introducing bereavement benefits from 9 April 2001. Before then there was no statutory basis to make payments of widow's benefits to men. The Government have said already that in making those reforms their obligation was to future widowers and widows. The reforms in 2001 met this obligation and went further. The new widowed parents allowance was available to existing widowers from its introduction in April 2001.

Stakeholder Pensions

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on compliance by small and medium enterprises with stakeholder pension notification arrangements. [64290]

Mr. McCartney: Firms with five or more employees are required to designate a stakeholder pension scheme for their staff, unless exempted from doing so because they provide an occupational scheme for their work force or allow their staff access to a personal pension scheme to which the employer makes a contribution of at least 3 per cent. of the employee's basic pay. Part of this designation process involves consulting relevant employees prior to selection of a scheme and then notifying them of the name and address of their designated stakeholder pension scheme. They must also allow representatives of the designated scheme reasonable access to their employees in order to supply them with information about the scheme. The Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority (Opra), which has responsibility for regulating compliance with all aspects of the designation process, has received no specific reports of firms failing to notify employees of their stakeholder arrangements. However it is a matter that they sometimes come across on following up a report alleging non-designation. Reports to Opra tend to be of a general nature rather than alleging a specific breach of one part of the designation requirement. To date Opra has received 361 reports alleging lack of workplace access to a stakeholder pension scheme, of which 327 have been resolved.

Figures on designations of stakeholder pension schemes are not broken down by size of company. However the majority of employers required to designate a stakeholder pension scheme for their work forces are small to medium enterprises. The Association of British Insurers (ABI) has reported that around 322,000 of those 350,000 employers estimated as required to do so had designated a stakeholder pension scheme for their staff by the end of March 2002. This represents a compliance rate of around 90 per cent.

Overseas Residents (Benefits)

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list in chronological order each reciprocal bilateral agreement involving the UK for the vertical payment of social security benefits, indicating restrictions on their payment in full to beneficiaries resident abroad. [64291]

Malcolm Wicks: The main purpose of such reciprocal agreements is to protect the social security position of workers moving between the two countries during their working lives. They prevent employees, their employers and the self-employed from having to pay social security contributions to both the home state and the state of employment at the same time and ensure that such workers' rights to certain benefits are maintained. They vary to some extent from country to country depending on the nature and scope of the other country's social security scheme. Generally, they cover contributory benefits in respect of the following contingencies: sickness, invalidity, unemployment, retirement, bereavement and industrial injuries. Workers who have contributed to both countries schemes during their working lives can usually receive an old age pension from each country which reflects the proportionate amount of their insurance in, or contributions to, each country's scheme.

The reciprocal bilateral social security agreements involving the UK are as follows:

The National Insurance and Industrial Injuries (Italy) Order 1953/884

The National Insurance and Industrial Injuries (Luxembourg) Order 1955/420

The National Insurance and Industrial Injuries (Netherlands) Order 1955/874

The National Insurance and Industrial Injuries (France) Order 1958/597

The Family Allowance, National Insurance and Industrial Injuries (Belgium) Order 1958/771

The Family Allowance, National Insurance and Industrial Injuries (Yugoslavia) Order 1958/1263

The Family Allowance, National Insurance and Industrial Injuries (Denmark) Order 1960/211

The National Insurance and Industrial Injuries (Republic of Ireland) Order 1960/707

The National Insurance and Industrial Injuries (Turkey) Order 1961/584

The Family Allowance, National Insurance and Industrial Injuries (Germany) Order 1961/1202

The National Insurance (Republic of Ireland) Order 1966/707

The Family Allowance, National Insurance and Industrial Injuries (Switzerland) Order 1969/384

The Social Security (Bermuda) Order 1969/1686

The National Insurance (Republic of Ireland) Order 1971/1742

The Family Allowance, National Insurance and Industrial Injuries (Gibraltar) Order 1974/555

The Family Allowance, National Insurance and Industrial Injuries (Spain) Order 1975/415

The Social Security (Isle of Man) Order 1977/2150

The Social Security (Portugal) Order 1979/921

The Social Security (Austria) Order 1981/605

The Social Security (Mauritius) Order 1981/1524

The Social Security (Cyprus) Order 1983/1698

The Social Security (New Zealand) Order 1983/1894

The Social Security (Finland) Order 1984/125

The Social Security (Israel) Order 1984/354

The Social Security (United States of America) Order 1984/1817

The Social Security (Iceland) Order 1985/1202 (as amended by SI 1982/3211)

The Social Security (Sweden) Order 1988/590 (as amended by SI 1982/3213)

The Social Security (Philippines) Order 1989/2002

The Social Security (Norway) Order 1991/767 (as amended by SI 1982/3212)

The Social Security (Barbados) Order 1992/812

The Social Security (Jersey and Guernsey) Order 1994/2802

The Social Security (Canada) Order 1995/2699

The Social Security (Malta) Order 1996/1927 (replaced 1956/1987 and 1958/727)

The Social Security (Jamaica) Order 1997/871 (replaced 1972/1587)

The Social Security (United States of America) Order 1997/1778 (supplementary to SI 1984/1817 above).

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if it is possible for jobseeker's allowance claimants to have their records removed from the Department computer system. [64870]

Malcolm Wicks: Procedures are already in place to ensure that customer records are routinely deleted from the jobseeker's allowance computer system where they have been inactive for four years. There are important business reasons for retaining customer information for this period, for example, because these records may be needed to support Inland Revenue tax rebates.

Any information recorded by the Department must be factually correct. If a person believes that we have recorded inaccurate information about them, they should in the first instance approach the Department to request its amendment or removal.

Pensioner Poverty (Stroud)

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners have been lifted out of poverty in the Stroud constituency since 1997. [65009]

Mr. McCartney: Poverty and social exclusion are complex concepts, affecting many aspects of people's lives; including their living standards, health, housing and quality of environment. The third annual report, "Opportunity for All—Making Progress" (CM 5260), sets out the Government's strategy for tackling poverty and social exclusion and presents the latest information on the indicators used to monitor progress against this strategy. A copy is available in the Library.

The minimum income guarantee (MIG) was introduced in April 1999 to provide money for the poorest pensioners as quickly as possible. 2,600 pensioners are receiving the MIG in the Stroud constituency.

To ensure that all pensioners share in rising prosperity, the basic state pension has risen by £3 a week for single pensioners and £4.80 for couples on top of above-inflation increases last year. This is in addition to the introduction of winter fuel payments, currently £200 per household, made to 22,100 pensioners in the Stroud constituency and free TV licences for the over-75s.

Source:

Income Support Statistical Enquiry, February 2002.

City and County of Swansea Council

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he will publish the inspection report of the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate in respect of city and county of Swansea council. [65665]

Malcolm Wicks: The Benefit Fraud Inspectorate's (BFI) report on the city and county of Swansea council was published today and copies of the report have been placed in the Library.

This follow-up inspection report shows that the council has progressed from being a poorly performing authority in 1999 to one that was now performing to a satisfactory level in most areas.

The first inspection found that Swansea had struggled to administer housing benefit and council tax benefit effectively and that a backlog of work had built up. However, the follow-up inspection found that the council had taken steps to address the recommendations in BFI's first report, which had reduced the level of outstanding work.

BFI's first report stated that the council's counter fraud performance was suffering due to a lack of management control. Inspectors found that this had improved at the time of the follow-up inspection and Swansea was committed to the personal and collective development of the investigation team.

Swansea administered some £59.1 million in housing benefits in 2000–01.

The report makes recommendations to help the council address weaknesses and to improve the administration of housing benefit and council tax benefit, as well as counter fraud activities.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is now considering the report and will be asking the council for its proposals in response to the findings and recommendations of the BFI.

Cardiff County Council

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he will publish the inspection report of the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate in respect of Cardiff county council. [65666]

Malcolm Wicks: The Benefit Fraud Inspectorate's (BFI) report on Cardiff county council was published today and copies of the report have been placed in the Library.

The report finds that, generally, the council performed well in administering benefits but needed to improve counter fraud work.

Inspectors found a marked difference in performance between the city hall and area office teams. Performance was poorer, and sickness levels higher, at the city hall which was dealing with a backlog of 4,500 documents.

The report notes good performance in a number of areas including the verification of claims, a good working relationship with the Benefits Agency, excellent complaints procedures and good internal audit practices.

Areas of poor performance included decision notices that did not comply fully with legislation, fraud investigations which were curtailed too early meaning that Cardiff was unable to prosecute fraudsters, and the lack of a counter fraud publicity policy and risk analysis of fraud.

There was mixed performance in dealing with overpayments of benefit with the classification of overpayments being poor. Inspectors note that the council had begun to improve in this area.

The council had a service improvement plan in place prior to the inspection. This comprehensive plan addresses many of the points that the report identifies. Elected members and staff are jointly driving through the objectives of the plan.

Cardiff administered some £80 million in housing benefits in 1999–2000.

The report makes recommendations to help the council address weaknesses and to improve the administration of housing benefit and council tax benefit, as well as counter fraud activities.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is now considering the report and will be asking the council for its proposals in response to the findings and recommendations of the BFI.

Special Advisers

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many special advisers were employed by himself and his predecessor *(a)* between 1 May and 31 December 1997 and *(b)* in each year from 1998 to 2001 inclusive; and what the total amount spent on special advisers by the Department was in each of those years. [41261]

Mr. McCartney: Two special advisers were employed by the Department of Social Security and subsequently by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in each year from 1997 to 20 January 2002. From 21 January 2002, in recognition that DWP now has a Minister who attends Cabinet, it employed three special advisers.

Details of costs for special advisers with individual Departments are not given in order to protect the privacy of the individuals concerned.

Independent Remuneration Panel

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the work of the independent remuneration panel. [61950]

Mr. Raynsford: I have been asked to reply.

Local authorities are required to establish and maintain an independent remuneration panel. The purpose of this panel is to make recommendations to the authority about the allowances to be paid to elected members. Authorities are under a duty to have regard to the recommendation of their independent remuneration panel when establishing their scheme and levels of allowances.

Means-tested Benefits

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the estimate is of the cost of means-tested benefits for *(a)* men over 65 and *(b)* women over 60 for 2002–03. [61259]

Mr. McCartney: The information is not available in the format requested. The costs of means tested benefits, that is the minimum income guarantee, housing benefit and council tax benefit, to people aged 60 and over for 2002–03 are estimated to be £10.415 million.

Source:

Departmental Report 2002.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Immigration Appellate Authority

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what reasons have been given for adjournments in hearings dealt with by the IAA since January 2001; and how many adjournments have been granted under each reason. [63460]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The reasons for adjournments are wide ranging, therefore, I have listed the top 10 reasons for adjournments since 1 June 2001–31 May 2002.

In adjudicator hearings these are:

Reason given	*Number of adjournments granted*
Lack of court time	1,821
For further evidence to be supplied by representative	1,367
Representative need to supply medical report	1,173
Home Office reconsidering their decision	1,140
Other reasons for representatives needing more time	1,060
Document needs to be authenticated or translated	993
Appellant sick	768
Home Office documents missing	671
New Home Office issue raised	630
Representative sick	622

In tribunal hearings they are:

Reason given	*Number of adjournments granted*
For further evidence to be supplied by representative	100
Other reasons for representatives needing more time	55
New Home Office issue raised	40
Home Office reconsidering their decision	27
Other reason for representative's non attendance	25
Representative sick	22
Representative need to supply medical report	14
Needs a combined hearing	12
Representatives instructed late	11
Document needs to be authenticated or translated	11

Figures prior to June 2001 are not available.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Leggatt Report

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Solicitor-General if she will make a statement on the Government's response to the Leggatt report on tribunal justice. [64535]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I have been asked to reply.

The Government are considering its response to the Leggatt review and will announce its conclusions later in the year.

The Government's response will take into account the public consultation exercise completed in December 2001, which generated over 350 responses.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Staff Numbers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff were employed by his Department on *(a)* 2 May 1997 and *(b)* 31 May 2002. [60897]

Beverley Hughes: In respect of *(a)* 2 May 1997, I refer the hon. Member to reply given to him by my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, South (Mr. Alexander) on 13 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 1158W.

In respect of *(b)* 31 May 2002, while published figures for 1 April 2002 have not yet been centrally compiled, estimates are available from the Home Office Personnel Information Manpower Management System (PIMMS) and the personnel systems of the Home Office Agencies, and I have provided them in the table.

Full-time equivalents

Home Office area[1]	*1 April 2002*
Home Office main[2]	13,573
Forensic Science Service	2,448
(United Kingdom Passport Agency)	2,807
Her Majesty's Prison Service	43,420
Grand total	64,251

[1] The Fire Service College moved to the Department of the Enviroment in the machinery of Government changes 8 June 2001.

[2] The number includes 4,511 extra staff recruited since 31 March 2002 to deal with immigration and asylum work within the Immigration and Nationality Directorate.

Street Crime

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the street crime initiative courts in London; how they are proposed to operate and for what purpose; what role is envisaged for the Witness Service in relation to them; and if he will make a statement. [60540]

Hilary Benn: There are 19 specially designated street crime courts in London. Of these nine are Crown courts and 10 are magistrates courts.

The Crown courts are: Blackfriars, Croydon, Harrow, Inner London (designated Youth Crown court for Inner London), Isleworth, Kingston, Middlesex Guildhall, Snaresbrook, and Wood Green.

The 10 magistrates courts designated as special street crime courts are: Acton, Balham, Brent, Camberwell Green, Croydon, Harringay, Stratford, Thames, Waltham Forrest, and West London

As well as fast tracking street crime cases the designated courts are designed to ensure that victims and witnesses have separate facilities, such as secure waiting areas, to avoid the risk of intimidation from alleged offenders. The Witness Service, provided by victim support also provides support to witnesses before, during and after they give evidence, to lessen the number of cases failing to proceed.

The specialist street crime courts are part of a package of measures across the Court Justice Service and other Government departments, designed to tackle street crime by dealing swiftly and effectively with the perpetrators of these offences.

Extradition Laws

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans the Government have to improve the UK's extradition laws. [65175]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: At present it takes too long to extradite someone from the United Kingdom. Not only is this against the interests of justice and the victims of crime but it is the British taxpayer that foots the bill: paying for the fugitive to be detained and often funding their legal battle.

The previous Home Secretary launched a review of extradition law and the Home Office published proposals for consultation in March last year. Since then the attacks on 11 September have added impetus to European Union (EU) plans for an EU-wide arrest warrant.

The Government has already announced that we intend to legislate to bring this into effect. This will dramatically speed up the extradition process between EU states, but not at the expense of fugitive's rights.

It should also make it possible in some circumstances to return people to the United Kingdom who, under the old system, would not have been extradited.

We also plan to streamline procedures for non-EU countries too.

I am today publishing a consultation paper containing a draft Extradition Bill which outlines our proposals and invites all of those with an interest to comment.

An Extradition Bill will be introduced when parliamentary time allows.

Royal Prerogative

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what decisions have been made by his Department in the last year under authority from the royal prerogative. [63132]

Mr. Blunkett: *[holding answer 25 June 2002]:* Records are not kept of the individual occasions on which powers under the royal prerogative are exercised, nor would it be practicable to do so.

Prisoners (Educational Standards)

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the standards of literacy and numeracy among prisoners; and what information he collects on these subjects. [60829]

Hilary Benn: The majority of prisoners have serious basic skills needs which must be addressed if we are to help them re-settle effectively into the community on release. In 2001–02 prisoners achieved over 24,000 basic skills qualifications. Almost 16,000 were at level 2—an increase of 30 per cent. over the previous year. The basic skills target for 2002–03 is 28,800 at all levels.

We collect monthly information on the number of basic skills qualifications gained at establishment level. The Prisoners' Learning and Skills Unit (PLSU), based in the Department for Education and Skills, supports establishments which are falling short of expectations.

We have ensured that prisons are part of national developments in basic skills, and have been piloting new national curriculum materials and tests in seven prisons. Additional capital resources over this year and next from the Capital Modernisation Fund will help us to deliver improvements in basic skills by supporting initial assessment, the integration of basic and key skills into prison workshops and the transformation of Libraries into learning resource centres.

From April 2002, education and training in prisons—including basic skills provision—has been inspected against the criteria set out in the Common Inspection Framework, which covers all post-16 learning. With the support of the PLSU, the majority of prisons have established quality improvement groups to secure better planning and delivery of all their learning provision and to respond to the findings of inspection reports. We expect the remaining prisons to do so shortly.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the *(a)* cost and *(b)* saving from the pursuit of the Department's Public Service Agreement targets in each year since they were introduced. [60891]

Beverley Hughes: The Home Department's Public Service Agreement sets out the key outcomes it is committed to deliver with the resources provided, and its Service Delivery Agreement sets out the key steps towards delivery of those targets. Every year the Department publishes performance against its targets—including on value for money—and the resources it has used, in its departmental report.

Departmental Website

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the procedures for information appearing on his Department's website. [54520]

Mr. Blunkett: I apologise for the delay in replying.

The Home Department's website is not only used to communicate policy, but it is pivotal as a tool for consultation as well. Content is developed in co-operation with policy owners, who are responsible for its currency and accuracy. Information on the site is updated or removed whenever required, ensuring that the contents are as reliable as possible. This immediacy allows our content to reflect the activities of the Department across all its responsibilities in England and Wales for the criminal law, crime reduction, policing, prisons and probation as well as for immigration and asylum policy across the United Kingdom. Other areas of the site reflect the Department's lead on active communities, race equality and family policy.

National Security

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what reasons of national security compel the Home Office to retain sections of PRO file PRO/30/60/13/2 dating from 1887 to 1896 closed under section 3.4 of the Public Records Act 1958. [61284]

Mr. Blunkett: The Home Office retained those sections of PRO file PRO/30/60/13/2 that were considered sensitive as defined under schedule 3 of the Intelligence Services Act 1994. The continuing sensitivity relates to honouring commitments to keep certain matters secret and so retain the confidence of those who do or would co-operate with the authorities on intelligence and security matters as well as protecting the identities of family members and descendants who might in some circumstances be placed at risk. I will continue to keep this under review.

Criminal Records Bureau

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received regarding the time taken by the Criminal Records Bureau to process applications from local authorities for information; and if he will make a statement. [61516]

Hilary Benn: A number of representations have been received directly or indirectly. Measures are being taken to address the initial operating difficulties, which have resulted in delays in responding to applications for disclosure. We are determined that the Criminal Records Bureau will be in a position, as soon as possible, to meet the high standards of service that it has set itself.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is taking to *(a)* reduce delays in conducting Criminal Records Bureau checks and *(b)* maintain security of such checks when outsourced to other countries. [61346]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* The information is as follows.

(a) The Criminal Records Bureau has introduced a number of measures as part of a performance improvement plan in order to reduce delays in conducting Criminal Record Bureau checks. These measures include:

Rapid recruitment and training of additional staff.

Additional resources to deal with the older applications.

Extensions to working hours to increase output.

Revised procedures to deal with errors/omissions. These remove such applications from mainstream processes thereby increasing the efficiency of processing both correctly completed applications and the exceptions.

Significant increase in call centre staffing levels to cope with demand.

Return of incomplete or incorrectly completed application forms to the registered body for correction.

The Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) has also introduced the following short-term contingency measures:

The CRB will carry out and issue the results of a List 99 check, for all teachers, in advance of a full disclosure check.

The CRB has introduced a contingency plan to deliver a very limited number of manual criminal record checks.

Outsourcing most of the backlog of applications to the data entry facility of Hays Plc in Chennai (Madras, India).

Letters have been issued to Lead Countersignatories about the situation.

(b) The concept of processing data overseas is not a new one and has been carried out successfully for a number of years. The security of criminal records checking should in no way be jeopardised by the outsourcing of the data capture process. The company carrying out the work in this case, Hays Plc has undertaken work for other public bodies.

A number of proposed sites were researched, both in the United Kingdom and abroad. The site in Chennai was chosen for many reasons, including:

Hays have extensive experience in this sector and have been employing staff in this line of work for over 12 years.

Hays staff are already engaged in processing data for several overseas clients whose data are not dissimilar to that of the CRB.

A comprehensive security audit has been carried out on the staff, premises and processes involved.

Hays Plc in India offer the greatest capacity and flexibility to meet the CRB's needs.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the *(a)* date, *(b)* location and *(c)* purpose was of visits by Ministers in his Department to Wales since 1997; and when he next intends to visit Wales. [62079]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* Information in respect of United Kingdom travel is not held centrally and a full answer could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, I have visited Wales (North and South) on official business three times this year already including a keynote address at the Justices' Clerks Society Annual Conference in Cardiff. I plan to visit South Wales later this year to speak at a Crime and Drug Related conference.

All travel is undertaken fully in accordance with the guidelines set out in the Ministerial Code and Travel by Ministers, copies of which are available in the Libraries.

Community Policing

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his oral answer of 10 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 589, what steps he has taken to familiarise himself with the situation in Nottingham; and if he will make a statement. [61755]

Mr. Denham: Day to day arrangements for the policing of Nottingham is an operational matter for the Chief Constable. The Chief Constable of Nottinghamshire (Stephen Green QPM) has told me of the proposed changes to the policing of the Nottingham (C) Division planned by the Divisional Commander (Chief Superintendent Johnson). I understand that the changes to beat policing have yet to be finalised and implemented, but they do have the support of the Chief Constable and Nottingham city council.

Nottinghamshire force was reorganised on 1 April this year with a view to improving policing in the county. This resulted in a change in the structure of Nottingham Division. In addition, Chief Superintendent Johnson (the new Divisional Commander) decided that he needed to increase the number of beat managers in Nottingham. The proposed changes are designed to deliver this.

I am told the Divisional Commander also plans to address the different policing needs of Nottingham and recognise the heavy work load that Nottingham beat managers have through the changes he wishes to make.

Increasing the number of beat managers will not reduce officers out on the streets as beat managers also patrol their beat. It is intended that there should be teams of two to three shift working beat managers assigned to a beat over seven days. This should give better coverage than the present arrangements under which beat managers work Monday to Friday; give officers improved ownership of the beat, and more responsibility in policing the area. This should help the team to build better relationships with local communities.

The Government are committed to increasing the resources available to the police service. You may like to know therefore that in addition to a good police funding settlement in Spending Review 2000, we have, through the Crime Fighting Fund (CFF), allocated 157 CFF recruits to Nottinghamshire Constabulary over the three years to March 2003. On 31 January 2002 the force had 2,313 police officers which is 38 more than it had on 31 March 2001.

Prisons

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions fire services have attended each category B prison in the last 12 months for which information is available. [62377]

Hilary Benn: In the period June 2001 to May 2002, there were a total of 58 occasions on which the fire services attended category B prisons. These have been broken down by prison as follows:

Prison	*Number of times visited*
Albany	0
Blundeston	3
Dovegate	0
Garth	7
Grendon	1
Gartree	1
Lowdham Grange	0
Maidstone	3
Parkhurst	8
Kingston	0
Rye Hill	2
Swaleside	33

Non-UK Minors

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many girls aged *(a)* under 16 and *(b)* aged 16 and 17 years were arrested for prostitution in (i) 1999, (ii) 2000 and (iii) 2001; how many of these were not UK nationals; and what nationalities were those who were not UK nationals. [62217]

Hilary Benn: The information is not collected centrally.

National Probation Service

Martin Linton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what funding he has made available to the National Probation Service for 2002–03; what criteria the NPS has used to fund the 42 probation areas; and what the areas' budgets are for *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03. [62052]

Hilary Benn: The provisional funding for the National Probation Service for 2002–03 is £666.7 million. This is used to meet

(a) central costs of the National Directorate (including Estates and Information Technology costs for the local areas)

(b) the cost of training Probation Officers

(c) the operating costs of local boards, allocated to local boards and

(d) the cost of Hostels, which is also allocated to local boards.

The target funding to the 42 probation areas for operational costs (c above) is calculated, *(a)* 85 per cent. on the basis of a formula which assesses relative need, and *(b)* 15 per cent. on the basis of workload. Since some local boards were historically funded significantly above the implied formula funding level, a minimum increase of 3 per cent. has been applied as a transitional measure.

The areas' budgets for operating costs (excluding short-term adjustments and before transfer of £20 million for Drug Testing and Treatment Orders to Department of Health) for 2001–02 and 2002–03 total £515 million and £537 million (provisional) respectively and are shown in the following table. Budgets for Hostels are £39.7 million and £40.6 million for 2001–02 and 2002–03 respectively.

Probation boards' allocations before transfers

	A *Base position from 2001–02 (£ million)*	*B* *Increase (£ million)*	*C* *Initial allocation 2002–03 (£ million)*	*D* *Percentage increase*
Avon and Somerset	12.893	0.387	13.280	3.0
Bedfordshire	4.917	0.148	5.065	3.0
Cambridgeshire	5.309	0.224	5.533	4.2
Cheshire	8.826	0.431	9.257	4.9
Cumbria	4.932	0.148	5.080	3.0
Derbyshire	8.234	0.321	8.555	3.9
Devon and Cornwall	12.516	0.375	12.891	3.0
Dorset	5.237	0.157	5.394	3.0
Durham	6.092	0.899	6.991	14.8
Essex	12.513	0.375	12.888	3.0
Gloucestershire	4.650	0.140	4.790	3.0
Hampshire	14.029	0.872	14.901	6.2
Hertfordshire	6.994	0.210	7.204	3.0
Humberside	8.976	0.869	9.845	9.7

Probation boards' allocations before transfers

	A *Base position from 2001–02 (£ million)*	B *Increase (£ million)*	C *Initial allocation 2002–03 (£ million)*	D *Percentage increase*
Kent	13.802	0.414	14.216	3.0
Lancashire	14.831	0.445	15.276	3.0
Leicestershire	8.241	0.341	8.582	4.1
Lincolnshire	5.390	0.184	5.574	3.4
Norfolk	6.347	0.330	6.677	5.2
Northamptonshire	4.856	0.471	5.327	9.7
North Yorkshire	5.590	0.527	6.117	9.4
Nottinghamshire	10.801	0.474	11.275	4.4
Staffordshire	8.809	0.350	9.159	4.0
Suffolk	5.085	0.153	5.238	3.0
Surrey	6.692	0.201	6.893	3.0
Sussex	10.485	0.315	10.800	3.0
Teeside	7.618	0.325	7.943	4.3
Thames Valley	16.000	0.480	16.480	3.0
Warwickshire	4.031	0.121	4.152	3.0
West Mercia	8.865	0.346	9.211	3.9
Wiltshire	4.747	0.187	4.934	3.9
Greater Manchester	30.685	0.921	31.606	3.0
Merseyside	18.508	0.555	19.063	3.0
Northumbria	16.838	0.572	17.410	3.4
South Yorkshire	14.990	0.661	15.651	4.4
West Midlands	31.149	1.360	32.509	4.4
West Yorkshire	23.916	0.928	24.844	3.9
Greater London	90.072	2.702	92.774	3.0
Dyfed-Powys	4.491	0.478	4.969	10.6
Gwent	5.613	1.208	6.821	21.5
North Wales	5.970	0.908	6.878	15.2
South Wales	14.486	0.461	14.947	3.2
Total	515.026	16.603	537.000	4.3

HEALTH

Health Screening

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his Department's policy is on developing health screening for all people over the age of 60 years. [53685]

Jacqui Smith: General practitioners (GPs) are required, under their existing terms of service, to offer an annual health check to their patients who are over 75. The Department will consider with the GP professional bodies the best way of assessing the health of older people proactively in primary care, in the light of the single assessment process that is to be implemented shortly.

Royal Shrewsbury Hospital

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many accident and emergency admissions there were at the Royal Shrewsbury hospital in each year since March 1997. [56184]

Ms Blears: The data requested is shown in the table.

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
First attendances	35,705	36,730	36,224	37,526	37,111
Follow up attendances	3,950	4,810	5,094	4,447	4,624
Total Accident and Emergency attendances	39,655	41,540	41,318	41,973	41,735

Source:
KH09—Outpatient and Ward Attenders

West Park Development, Epsom

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will withdraw the plan to construct a new roundabout on Christchurch Road in Epsom as part of the proposed West Park development. [55638]

Ms Blears: The proposed roundabout is intended to provide access to the West Park site in conjunction with the existing access from Horton Lane.

Two vehicular access points into the site represents good practice in terms of road design and safety, urban design, public transport, emergency access and egress as well as an advantageous traffic management plan to both the retained health care uses and the proposed new development.

Homeless People

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of *(a)* rough sleepers and *(b)* people living in temporary accommodation are registered with a general practitioner. [56567]

Ms Blears: This information is not collected centrally. However, the Government are committed to ensure that all children in temporary accommodation receive regular health checks from health professionals, and to increase access to general practitioners and health care for all homeless people. The absence of a permanent address should not be a bar to registering with a general practitioner.

Vaccines

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients in each of the last five years have received the pneumococcal vaccine. [56921]

Ms Blears: The number of people who have received pneumococcal vaccine can be estimated by the number of prescription items dispensed in the community for pneumococcal vaccine. The amount of pneumococcal vaccine dispensed in England for the last five years is given in the table.

Number of prescription items dispensed in the community for pneumococcal vaccine, 1997 to 2001

England

	Prescription items (thousands)	*Net ingredient cost (£000)*	*Number of vaccines (thousands)*
1997	646.0	6,422.6	646.2
1998	445.4	4,428.5	445.7
1999	550.5	5,415.0	551.8
2000	539.1	5,244.3	540.3
2001	468.1	4,682.9	468.4

Radio Systems (Emergency Services)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment has been made of the interoperability of the new ambulance radio system with those of other emergency services; and if he will make a statement. [56682]

Mr. Lammy: It is our intention to undertake a national procurement exercise for a new national digital radio network for ambulance services starting in July 2002. Increased interoperability and resilience has been built into the user requirement specification for the new network based on the expert advice of the professional heads of the ambulance, police and fire services.

Cancer Treatment

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last met the Government's National Cancer Director to discuss cancer treatment in the NHS; and how often such meetings take place. [59285]

Ms Blears: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State last met Professor Mike Richards, National Cancer Director on 18 June. They also usually meet informally at least once a month to discuss cancer services. Other Ministers also regularly meet Professor Richards.

Mental Health

Matthew Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to create the world class mental health service envisaged in the Wanless report; and if he will make a statement. [59859]

Jacqui Smith: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Budget statement outlined substantial additional resources to ensure a modern health service. There is no doubt that increase in national health service expenditure over the next decade will see substantial increases in spending on mental health. The Department is studying the Wanless report with great interest and it will be an important source of analysis and information in the allocation of resources to the service.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many of the new graduate primary care mental health worker posts have been *(a)* created and *(b)* filled in (i) England and (ii) North Yorkshire; [60508]

(2) how many of the new primary care trusts have employed graduate primary care mental health workers to assist GPs *(a)* in England and *(b)* North Yorkshire; [60505]

(3) how many of the new primary care trusts have employed gateway workers to provide a round-the-clock co-ordinating service to specialised care in *(a)* England and *(b)* North Yorkshire; [60506]

(4) how many of the mental health gateway worker posts have so far been *(a)* created and *(b)* filled in (i) England and (ii) North Yorkshire. [60509]

Jacqui Smith: The new graduate primary care mental health workers and mental health gateway workers announced in the NHS Plan will be employed to help general practitioners manage and treat common mental health problems in the financial year 2003–04. Further information to support their recruitment, and to monitor their establishment, will be available in due course. A special session on new primary care workers and 'Gateway' workers was held at 23 November 2001 conference 'Fast-forwarding Primary Care Mental Health' (www.doh.gov/fastforward).

Pilot projects for new graduate primary care workers have recently started in Northumbria and Birmingham. A mental health primary care team, established in Scarborough in 1998, with the aim of strengthening primary care mental health provision, also achieved NHS Beacon status in April 1999. The service provides one model of how gateway staff might work in other parts in the country.

This year, £2.5 million has been made available to establish new training programmes to support new primary care workers when they are employed. This initiative is being led by South Trent Work Force Development Confederation.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the extent of under-investment in core mental health services (i) in London and (ii) nationally over the past 20 years; and if he will make a statement. [62911]

Jacqui Smith: Health authorities and now primary care trusts as commissioners of local services are required to spend money based on their assessment of need.

The Department has recently received the details of a mental health finance mapping exercise that was completed by mental health national service framework local implementation teams at the end of October 2001.

The NHS Plan announced substantial additional investment in mental health services. In 2002–03 an additional £93.5 million revenue and £70 million capital, and in 2003–04 an additional £312 million revenue and £17 million capital will be made available.

The finance mapping exercise will provide an opportunity to track this investment through to local service provision.

Myeloma

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the most common form of treatment is for myeloma patients. [62719]

Ms Blears: Chemotherapy, usually combined with steroids, is the main treatment for myeloma.

UK Biobank

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of company access to anonymised genetic and lifestyle data from UK Biobank. [62277]

Ms Blears: Details of how companies may gain access to anonymised genetic and lifestyle data held by the UK Biobank have not yet been finalised. A monitoring body, independent of the UK Biobank funders, will be established to protect the interests of Biobank participants and the general public. This monitoring body will be responsible for finalising, and overseeing the implementation of, policies on access to anonymised samples and data by all users, whether in the commercial or academic sectors, taking into account the results of consultations with the public and other stakeholders. An open meeting with industry representatives is being planned for later this year to discuss possible access arrangements. All projects, whether funded from the public or private sector, will need to have ethical approval and will be reviewed by the scientific management committee.

Chiropody and Podiatry Services

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Warrington, North of 24 May, *Official Report*, column 691W, what the terms of reference were of the review of chiropody services, "Feet First II"; and if he will list the members of the task force assembled during the research of the review of chiropody services, "Feet First II". [60723]

Jacqui Smith: The following aims were agreed for the review of "Feet First":

To review whether the recommendations made in "Feet First" were still relevant or needed updating in the light of national health service developments in the late 1990s; and

To examine levels of service currently being provided and the role of podiatry in the prevention of social exclusion by considering:

evidence of reductions in service;

shortcomings not related to funding; and

outcome measures that are likely, within available resources, to be feasible and acceptable to the NHS.

The following were members of the working party for the review of "Feet First":

Chairman

Dr. A. Muir Gray, Director of the Institute of Health Sciences, Oxford University

Members

Avril Imison, Head of Policy—Therapy Services NHS Executive

Marie Lancett, Chiropody Adviser—NHS Executive

Paul Riley, Policy Manager NHS Executive

Christine Farrell, NHS Executive

Anne Stephens, Head of Podiatry Services—Camden and Islington CHS NHS Trust

John Rom, Chief Executive—Northampton Community Healthcare NHS Trust

Pamela Sabine, Chairman—Society of Chiropodists and Podiatrists, Thameside Community Health NHS Trust

Peter Graham, Chiropody Services Manager—Merton and Sutton Community NHS Trust

Jackie Haynes, Chief Executive—Buckinghamshire Health Authority.

Weight Management

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to make the database of weight management services developed by the Department available at local practitioner level. [61476]

Ms Blears: The database of weight management services was completed in 1997 and made available at each national health service regional office for local dissemination on request. There are no plans to make it available at local practitioner level.

Sexual Health and HIV

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the action plan outlining implementation of the sexual health and HIV strategy will be published; and if he will make a statement. [61076]

Ms Blears: The sexual health and HIV strategy implementation action plan was published on the Department's website on 24 June. This sets out in detail how we will work both through the national health service and in partnership with other Government Departments and the voluntary sector to modernise services and tackle sexual ill-health and inequalities.

Tuberculosis

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance his Department gives for screening for TB in England. [61083]

Ms Blears: The Department has published recommendations in two documents. One in June 1996, "Recommendations for the prevention and control of tuberculosis at local level" and again in September 1998 in the document entitled "UK guidance on the prevention and control of transmission of HIV-related tuberculosis and drug-resistant, including multiple drug-resistant, tuberculosis".

Macular Degeneration

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations he has received regarding the use of photodynamic therapy for macular disease; and if he will make a statement. [61513]

Mr. Lammy: Since January 2002, the Department has received eight letters from members of the public, 88 letters from Members of Parliament on behalf of constituents, and 16 parliamentary questions about the availability of photodynamic therapy as a treatment for age-related macular degeneration.

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence are currently carrying out an appraisal of photodynamic therapy. NICE published their final appraisal determination on the use of photodynamic therapy as a treatment for age-related macular degeneration on 12 June. The appraisal process has not yet been completed and NICE have not made any recommendations on photodynamic therapy. NICE are seeking the views of consultees during the appeal process and will consider carefully any points that are made. NICE's recommendations may change as a result of the appeal process. The earliest guidance could be available is at the end of July or early August.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many people in the UK suffer from age-related macular degeneration; what assessment he has made of the treatment available to them; and if he will make a statement; [62564]

(2) if he will make a statement on the prescribing of photodynamic therapy for sufferers of wet age-related macular degeneration. [62565]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* A study sponsored by the macular disease society in 2001 estimated that there were 182,000 people with age related macular degeneration with a best eye visual acuity below that judged appropriate for certification as blind or partially sighted. Around 10 to 15 per cent. of those will have the 'wet' type of the condition, for which photodynamic therapy is intended as a treatment. However it is not possible to say in how many cases the treatment would be effective.

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) are currently carrying out an appraisal of photodynamic therapy. NICE published their final appraisal determination on the use of photodynamic therapy as a treatment for age related macular degeneration on 12 June. The appraisal process has not yet been completed and NICE have not made any recommendations on photodynamic therapy. NICE are seeking the views of consultees during the appeal process and will consider carefully any points that are made. NICE's recommendations may change as a result of the appeal process. The earliest guidance could be available at the end of July or early August.

In August 1999 the Department issued Health Service Circular 1999/176 which asks the NHS bodies to continue with local arrangements for the managed introduction of new technologies where guidance from NICE is not available at the time the technology first became available. These arrangements should involve an assessment of all the available evidence.

Departmental Grants

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which organisations which were in receipt of a grant from him in 1997–98 no longer are; what the annual saving is; which organisations which were not in receipt of a grant in 1997–98 now are; and what the annual cost of each is. [61391]

Jacqui Smith: I refer the hon. Member to the response given by my right hon. Friend, the Chief Secretary to Her Majesty's Treasury on 17 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 137W.

Winter Vomiting Disease

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what additional support the NHS is providing to Whipps Cross University Hospital Trust to deal with the outbreak of winter vomiting disease (SRSV) and its aftermath; and if he will make a statement. [62013]

Mr. Hutton: Following a meeting at the North East London health authority (HA) on the 27 May about the outbreak of winter vomiting disease at Whipps Cross University Hospital national health service trust, all trusts in the local health economy made available any spare capacity they had should it have been necessary. Although unused, the Homerton and Barking, Havering and Redbridge NHS trusts offered help as did Barts and the London and Newham trusts, both of which took patients from Whipps Cross. As such the local health economy was able to minimise the disruption of services for patients.

The public health team from the local primary care trusts (PCTs) has attended daily incident management team meetings, to control the outbreak. Rapid communication channels are in place between general practitioners and other healthcare professionals in the PCTs.

The public health team at the PCTs also liaised with the communicable disease surveillance centre and the regional epidemiologist to advise the incident team on outbreak management based on lessons learnt elsewhere across the country.

The directorates of health and social care London region, communicable diseases surveillance centre and the North East London health authority are working extremely closely together to monitor and contain the spread of this virus. No patients and staff at the trust are seriously ill and all are expecting to make a full recovery.

Pain Control

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what *(a)* guidelines he has issued to health professionals relating to and *(b)* arrangements are in place for effective pain control for people sent home from hospital in their dying weeks; and if he will make a statement. [62327]

Ms Blears: Health Service Circular 1998/115 (June 1998) enclosed copies of guidance produced by the national council for hospice and specialist palliative care services including 'Guidelines for Managing Cancer Pain in Adults' and 'Changing Gear—Guidelines for Managing the Last Days of Life in Adults'. The circular and booklets were sent to national health service trust chief executives, nurse executive directors and medical directors. A supportive and palliative care strategy is being developed under the NHS Cancer Plan to ensure best treatment and care from when cancer is first suspected and throughout the illness through to death and bereavement.

E-Medicine

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to develop an infrastructure for secure electronic health data communications. [62356]

Ms Blears: The NHS Plan set the context for the major modernisation of the national health service in England. It clearly sets out a vision of a health service designed around the patient, and which enables integrated care to be delivered by a range of organisations. The commitments of the NHS Plan to new ways of working can only be achieved through the well-planned implementation of an information technology (IT) and systems infrastructure.

In line with the NHS Plan, and in response to feedback from the NHS and the supplier community, we are introducing a far more robust approach to standardisation. An infrastructure based on universal internet technology, government-wide standards and those developed specifically to meet the needs of the NHS will give all staff the means to access the right information in the right places at the right time.

Subject to approval of funding and spending plans from April 2002 to April 2003 we will work on developing the NHS' IT management structure, capacity and capability. We will also define the data, and data interchange standards we will require in the future. We will build the essential system specifications to deliver the national health record service. We will also develop the infrastructure, including broadband capacity, needed to lay the basis for key applications.

Subject to approval of funding and spending plans, between April 2003 and April 2005 we plan to put in place

Broadband access (more than 128kbs) to every clinician and support staff in the NHS

increased bandwidth to minimum—2Mbps between trusts and across NHS Net Gateways

Access and authentication available for all NHS staff

National NHS directory service

Domain to domain encryption.

Subject to approval of business cases, formal open procurement exercises are planned for NHS networking services (to replace the existing framework contracts that expire in 2003–04), and for NHS public key infrastructure services.

North Cumbria Health Action Zone

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been paid by the North Cumbria Health Action Zone to the Countryside Alliance in the last two years. [62360]

Jacqui Smith: Over the past two years, £100,000 has been allocated to the Countryside Alliance by the North Cumbria Health Action Zone in respect of the food development project.

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who the Chair is of the board of the North Cumbria Health Action Zone; and if he will list its membership. [62358]

Jacqui Smith: The chair of the North Cumbria Partnership for Health Board is Mr. Patrick Everingham.

The complete membership of the board is listed.

Name	
Mrs. Ruth Popple	Chair, Carlisle and District Primary Care Trust
Mr. Graham Ogden	Chief Executive, Carlisle and District Primary Care Trust
Mr. Allan Buckley	Vice Chair, Eden Valley Primary Care Trust
Mr. Peter Kohn	Chief Executive, Eden Valley Primary Care Trust
Mr. Doug Scott	Director of Planning, Eden Valley Primary Care Trust
Mr. Patrick Everingham (chair)	Chair, West Cumbria Primary Care Trust
Ms Veronica Marsden	Chief Executive, West Cumbria Primary Care Trust
Cllr Barbara Cannon	Chair, North Cumbria Acute Hospitals Trust
Mr. Nick Wood	Chief Executive, North Cumbria Acute Hospitals Trust
Mr. Eric Urquhart	Chair, North Cumbria Mental Health and Learning Disabilities Trust
Mr. Brian Clayton	Chair, Cumbria Ambulance Service NHS Trust
Mr. Alan Donkersley	Chief Executive, Cumbria Ambulance Service NHS Trust
Mr. John Cain	Environmental Health Officer, Allerdale Borough Council
Cllr C. McCarron-Holmes	Executive Member, Allerdale Borough Council
Cllr Ray Bloxham (Vice Chair)	Portfolio Holder Health, Carlisle City Council
Mr. Laurie Brewis	Head of Housing Provision, Carlisle City Council
Mr. John Stanforth	General Manager, Copeland Borough Council
Cllr Brian Dixon	Executive Member, Copeland Borough Council
Mr. Louis Victory	Chief Executive, Cumbria County Council
Cllr John Mallinson	Executive Member, Cumbria County Council
Mr. Mike Siegal	Director of Social Services, Cumbria County Council
Mr. Ruth Atkinson	Policy and Strategy Manager, Eden District Council
Cllr Bryan Metz	Executive Member, Eden District Council
Mrs. Jessica Riddle	Chair, Carlisle Council for Voluntary Service
Mrs. Pat Black	Chair, Eden Council for Voluntary Service
Mrs. Kay Pitchford	Chair, West Cumbria Council for Voluntary Service
Mrs. Elaine Steven	Chair, East Cumbria Community Health Council
Mrs. Jennifer Drouet	Chair, West Cumbria Community Health Council
Mr. Tony Potter	North Cumbria Health Action Zone

Note:

A nomination for a director of public health for the North Cumbria Primary Care Trusts has not yet been confirmed.

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who is the landlord of the North Cumbria Health Action Zone headquarters; and what the annual rental cost is. [62359]

Jacqui Smith: The landlord for the North Cumbria Health Action Zone headquarters is the North West Development Agency. The annual rent for 2001–02 was £16,217.52.

Primary Care Trusts (Berkshire)

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the salary of the chair and the chief executive and the total spending and capitation fee of each of the Berkshire primary care trusts; and if he will list the distance from target of the annual spend in each primary care trust area in *(a)* 2000–01, *(b)* 2001–02 and *(c)* 2002–03. [63112]

Ms Blears: The information requested is shown in the table for the years 2001–02 and 2002–03. The primary care trusts were not in existence in 2000–01.

	Chair's salary	*Chief executive's salary*	*Total spend*	*Final approved expenditure limit*	*Capitation position*	*Distance from target*[1]
2001–02						
Bracknell Forest PCT[2]	—	—	—	—	—	—
Newbury and Community PCT	12,970	69,305	63,414	63,433	64,710	(2.0)
Reading PCT	12,589	75,000	149,398	149,565	153,334	(2.5)
Slough PCT	12,967	71,792	90,337	91,094	93,066	(2.2)
Windsor, Ascot and Maidenhead PCT[2]	—	—	—	—	—	—
Wokingham PCT	12,967	65,300	84,862	85,585	83,891	2.0
Total	51,493	281,397	388,011	389,677	395,001	—
2002–03[3]						
Bracknell Forest PCT	16,017	65,000	—	—	66,752	5.6
Newbury and Community PCT	16,017	77,700	—	—	69,508	(1.5)
Reading PCT	18,154	75,000	—	—	152,261	(2.4)
Slough PCT	16,017	74,377	—	—	93,394	(2.9)
Windsor, Ascot and Maidenhead PCT	18,154	80,000	—	—	118,277	1.6
Wokingham PCT	18,184	67,500	—	—	90,012	2.0
Total	102,543	439,577	—	—	590,204	—

[1] Figures in brackets equal under target.

[2] Bracknell Forest and Windsor, Ascot and Maidenhead PCTs came into existence on 1 April 2002 (all other PCTs on 1 April 2001).

[3] Final approved expenditure limit for 2002–03 is not currently available.

Digital Hearing Aids

Mark Tami: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to extend the availability of digital hearing aids in the NHS. [63063]

Jacqui Smith: We are committed to extending the benefits of digital hearing aids, provided as part of a modernised service. We have invested over £30 million in the modernising hearing aids services project over the past three years. This will bring the number of sites providing a modernised service to 50 by the end of this financial year, with at least 15 more sites having the equipment and training to enable them to start fitting digital aids from April 2003.

Audiology departments were informed, on 11 June 2002, that James Strachan, chief executive at Royal National Institute for the Deaf and the national health service purchasing and supply agency (PASA), working with the Department, have now negotiated an excellent deal on the price of digital hearing aids. All NHS audiology departments are free to purchase from these contracts, whether they are currently part of the project or not, provided they have the necessary infrastructure in place and relevant experience of fitting digital hearing aids.

Medication (HIV Patients)

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he has issued on the availability of tuberculosis medication for HIV patients; and if there are any circumstances in which an HIV patient would be expected to pay for tuberculosis medication. [63465]

Ms Blears: Guidance on the treatment of patients with HIV-related tuberculosis was published in the report "The Prevention and Control of Tuberculosis in the United Kingdom: UK Guidance on the Prevention and Control of Transmission of 1. HIV-related Tuberculosis 2. Drug-resistant, Including Multiple Drug-resistant, Tuberculosis", by the interdepartmental working group on tuberculosis.

If the medication is supplied to a patient and administered at a hospital it is free of charge. If the medication is supplied otherwise than for administration at a hospital normal prescription charging arrangements apply. No charge will be payable if the patient qualifies for free prescriptions on any grounds, such as low income.

NHS Dentistry (Yeovil)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action is being taken to improve access to NHS dentistry in Yeovil constituency; and if he will make a statement. [63371]

Mr. Lammy: Arrangements are now in place to ensure that everyone who requires national health service dentistry will be directed to available services simply by phoning NHS Direct. Over the last 18 months we allocated over £210,000 to extend and improve existing

NHS dental facilities in Somerset. In February 2001 the capacity of these services was further increased when a dental access centre was opened in Yeovil.

We are aware of the need for further improvements and during 2001 the chief dental officer led a working group to look at options for change to modernise NHS dentistry. This group has completed its deliberations. The proposals in 'Options for Change' need practical testing and demonstration sites will be set up, working with the NHS Modernisation Agency. We will begin the process of identifying the demonstration sites over the coming months.

MS Patients

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the necessary structures and systems will be operating in Essex, to assess MS patients' eligibility for disease modifying therapies for MS. [63146]

Ms Blears: The five acute trusts in Essex have assessed the arrangements necessary to implement the scheme to assess multiple sclerosis (MS) patients' eligibility for disease modifying therapies for MS.

All trusts highlighted a need for additional special[illegible]t nurse support. Applications have been made to the MS Society for access to their specialist nurse fast-track scheme and these applications are currently being processed. Once approved, recruitment will commence as soon as possible. Identification of potentially eligible new patients has taken place and this information has been passed to primary care trusts.

Once the infrastructure is in place within the centres, these patients will be reviewed and if they meet the required Association of British Neurologists criteria, will commence treatment.

Care Homes and Nursing Homes

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many cases each responsible local authority would be expected to deal with under the formula for transferring funding for residents of care homes and nursing homes on preserved rights from the Department of Work and Pensions to local authorities; [63157]

(2) what unit of funding was used in arriving at the formula for the transferred responsibility for residents of care homes and nursing homes with preserved rights to local authorities. [63153]

Jacqui Smith: The national budget for the preserved rights grant was determined principally on the basis of the expected number in mid 2002–03 of residents formerly entitled to preserved rights. The allocation for individual local authorities was calculated in proportion to the distribution of residents with preserved rights as at December 2000. The caseloads of people under 65 and over 65 were considered separately. The data for December 2000 were provided by the Department for Work and Pensions. These data were adjusted by information provided by councils on the numbers of preserved rights residents supported outside their area. These adjusted data are available on the Department of Health's website at http:/www.doh.gov.uk/scg/incom-sup.htm.

(3) what attempts were made to assess the capacity of the private sector to meet the assessed care needs of individual residents in care homes and nursing homes with reserved rights before arriving at the funding formula for transfer of undertaking to local authorities. [63154]

Jacqui Smith: Until March this year, responsibility for the regulation and inspection of independent sector residential care homes and nursing homes lay respectively with local councils and the national health service. Part of this function included checking that homes were able to meet the needs of their residents. On 1 April 2002, this responsibility passed to the National Care Standards Commission, for care homes in England. Until the abolition of preserved rights to higher levels of income support there was no requirement on councils to assess the care needs of residents with preserved rights unless the council was topping up their care home fees.

Children in Care

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the number of children in the care of London boroughs in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001 were from (i) black and (ii) ethnic minority backgrounds. [64105]

Jacqui Smith: The available information for children looked after in London boroughs at 31 March 2001 is shown in the table. Information for earlier years is not available, as 2001 was the first year information was collected on the ethnic origin of children looked after by local councils in England.

Children looked after in London boroughs, by ethnic origin, as at 31 March 2001

Percentage

		Ethnic origin			
London boroughs	*All children*	*White*	*Mixed origin*	*Black or Black British*	*Other ethnic groups*
London	100	52	10	25	12
Inner London					
Camden	100	50	18	25	8
Greenwich	100	66	7	15	12
Hackney	100	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Hammersmith and Fulham	100	39	4	37	21
Islington	100	39	21	22	18
Kensington and Chelsea	100	31	30	32	7
Lambeth	100	37	10	47	7
Lewisham	100	46	5	35	14
Southwark	100	50	13	32	5

Children looked after in London boroughs, by ethnic origin, as at 31 March 2001

Percentage

London boroughs	*All children*	*White*	*Ethnic origin*		
			Mixed origin	*Black or Black British*	*Other ethnic groups*
Tower Hamlets	100	45	16	15	24
Wandsworth	100	49	4	40	6
Westminster	100	44	19	27	11
Outer London					
Barking and Dagenham	100	73	6	5	16
Barnet	100	69	12	14	5
Bexley	100	87	—	8	—
Brent	100	34	13	46	6
Bromley	100	81	10	—	—
Croydon	100	71	11	14	4
Ealing	100	50	18	19	13
Enfield	100	63	—	—	19
Haringey	100	38	15	43	3
Harrow	100	55	10	16	19
Havering	100	79	—	—	13
Hillingdon	100	50	8	27	14
Hounslow	100	68	15	11	6
Kingston upon Thames	100	84	—	10	—
Merton	100	75	—	20	—
Newham	100	36	4	32	27
Redbridge	100	71	12	14	—
Richmond upon Thames	100	77	—	—	13
Sutton	100	84	—	9	—
Waltham Forest	100	49	20	29	2

[1] Indicates not available.

Notes:

1. Figures for children looked after in this table exclude children looked after under an agreed series of short term placements.
2. Small percentages, particularly where the number is less than five, together with all data for the City of London, have been suppressed for reasons of confidentiality. All suppressed data in the table are indicated by the symbol "—".

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children were in the care of *(a)* London boroughs and *(b)* local authorities in England and Wales in (i) 1999, (ii) 2000 and (iii) 2001. [64106]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested for London and local councils in England is shown in the table. Information on the number of children looked after by local councils in Wales is a matter for the Welsh Assembly.

Children looked after at 31 March 1999 to 2001, England and London

Number

	1999	*2000*	*2001*
England	55,500	58,100	58,900
London	9,590	10,400	10,970

Notes:

1. Figures for children looked after in this table exclude children looked after under an agreed series of short term placements.
2. Figures for London have been rounded to the nearest 100. All figures include estimates for missing data.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many and what percentage of children between the ages of 16 and 18 years living *(a)* in a residential care home and *(b)* with foster parents were not in education, employment or training for the last five years for which figures are available. [63113]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 19 June 2002]:* The information requested is not collected centrally. A new departmental statistical return (OC3) will collect data from social services departments in England concerning the educational or employment status of care leavers on their 19th birthday. The return requires councils to report whether each care leaver, who was looked after on 1 April in their 17th year, is in education, training, employment, or is sick or unemployed. This data will be published for the first time in autumn 2002.

Occupational Health (NHS Staff)

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the adequacy of occupational health provision for NHS staff. [63832]

Mr. Lammy: Data collected by the Department in 1999 show that all national health service staff in the hospital sector have access to occupational health services. In 60 per cent. of NHS trusts these services are provided in house, while the other 40 per cent. buy in services from neighbouring NHS organisations. The NHS Plan announced a further £21 million of funding for the extension of occupational health services to general practitioners and their staff.

In order to address this the Department has issued service delivery standards for occupational health as part of the improving working lives standard. The effective management of occupational health and safety services in the NHS was issued in November 2001, and is available in the Library. The Department is currently working with occupational health providers on further standards related to pre-appointment checks.

More than half of NHS occupational health units that also provide services to small and medium sized enterprises through NHS Plus. In these trusts the chief executive has signed a declaration that services to staff are already of an adequate standard and will not be affected by implementing NHS Plus. A percentage of income generated through NHS Plus is reinvested in improving occupational health services to NHS staff.

Colchester Primary Care Trust

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects that the Colchester Primary Care Trust will achieve fair weighted capitation; and if he will make a statement. [64222]

Mr. Lammy: We will announce allocations to primary care trusts for the three years 2003–04, 2004–05 and 2005–06 in the autumn. Our aim is to move primary care trusts towards their fair shares determined by the weighted capitation formula as quickly as practicable.

Correspondence

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the letter of Dr. Seward of Milford on Sea of 12 May. [63830]

Jacqui Smith: The Department has no record of receiving this correspondence. The Department's Ministerial Correspondence Unit is seeking a copy of this correspondence.

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells, of 2 May requesting a meeting to discuss the MRI scanner facilities at the Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS trust. [58610]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 25 May 2002]:* A reply was sent on 25 June 2002.

Respite Care

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many respite care places were available in each year since 1997 *(a)* in Wiltshire and *(b)* in England. [63829]

Jacqui Smith: Information on the number of respite care places is not available centrally.

Delayed Discharges

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many delayed discharges there are in the Portsmouth, South constituency that are waiting to leave; and if he will make a statement. [64478]

Ms Blears: Information on delayed discharges is collected at health authority rather than constituency level. All available information has been placed in the Library. Figures for Quarter 4 of 2001–02 show that the former Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire health authority area had 97 delayed discharges.

The Government recognise that delayed discharges are a problem across the south-east. Health and local authorities are working together to take action to improve the situation. In October 2001 the Government announced an extra £300 million in the "Cash for Change" initiative to tackle bed blocking in 2001–02 and 2002–03. Last year Hampshire received over £2 million, this year over £5 million.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many delayed discharges there were in *(a)* North Yorkshire and *(b)* England in the last three months. [63082]

Jacqui Smith: I refer the hon. Member to the response I gave her on 26 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 976W.

Non-executive Directors

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many vacancies there are for non-executive directors of PCTs. [64339]

Mr. Lammy: The national health service appointments commission is responsible for non-executive appointments to the boards of primary care trusts (PCTs). PCT boards are themselves now responsible, within certain limits, for determining their complement of non-executive members. As a result, the chief executive of the appointments commission wrote to all PCT chairs on 14 June to establish the planned size of their board for 2002 and the number of new non-executives they would like the commission to recruit to fill the vacancies. Responses have been requested by 30 July.

Parkinson's Disease

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what funding the Government are making available to provide specialist nurses to treat Parkinson's disease in *(a)* England and *(b)* Gloucestershire; and if he will make a statement; [64448]

(2) how many specialist nurses to treat Parkinson's disease there are in *(a)* England and *(b)* Gloucestershire; and if he will make a statement. [64447]

Jacqui Smith: We do not hold information centrally on the skills profile of nurses at either a local or national level. We understand from the Parkinson's Disease Society however, that there are currently 134 of these nurses in post.

Funding is allocated to health authorities so that they can take decisions about the staff and services they need to provide to meet the health needs of their local populations. Funds are not earmarked centrally to support the funding of particular staff groups.

Residential and Nursing Care

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average cost per person of care for is *(a)* residential care and *(b)* nursing care broken down by local authority. [64388]

Jacqui Smith: The table shows the average cost per person per week of residential and nursing care for 2000–01 broken down by local authority in England as reported by councils to the Department. Information on unit costs by client group is available on the key indicators graphical system, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Unit cost of residential and nursing care, 2000–01

£ per week

	Residential care	*Nursing care*
Barking and Dagenham	—	—
Barnet	587	420
Barnsley	259	232
Bath and North East Somerset	412	350
Bedfordshire	—	—
Bexley	420	489
Birmingham	418	378
Blackburn with Darwen	291	357
Blackpool	328	366
Bolton	373	352
Bournemouth	336	363
Bracknell Forest	648	491
Bradford	—	—
Brent	—	—
Brighton and Hove	482	362
Bristol	413	410
Bromley	438	459
Buckinghamshire	456	462
Bury	317	348
Calderdale	338	333
Cambridgeshire	325	366
Camden	487	497
Cheshire	323	365
City of London	561	566
Cornwall	285	363
Coventry	—	—
Croydon	410	448
Cumbria	332	393
Darlington	328	348
Derby	326	387
Derbyshire	338	344
Devon	373	445
Doncaster	372	350
Dorset	358	351
Dudley	473	297
Durham	335	342
Ealing	516	509
East Riding of Yorkshire	260	430
East Sussex	673	245
Enfield	526	517
Essex	—	—
Gateshead	404	390
Gloucestershire	403	472
Greenwich	480	415
Hackney	479	391
Halton	349	407
Hammersmith and Fulham	560	499
Hampshire	400	408
Haringey	—	—
Harrow	522	489
Hartlepool	381	378
Havering	475	450
Herefordshire	477	417
Hertfordshire	—	—
Hillingdon	529	654
Hounslow	581	476
Isle of Wight	292	352
Isles of Scilly	—	—
Islington	586	468
Kensington and Chelsea	583	565
Kent	—	—
Kingston upon Hull	341	336
Kingston upon Thames	546	442
Kirklees	337	299
Knowsley	351	373
Lambeth	—	—
Lancashire	315	379
Leeds	421	391
Leicester	342	332
Leicestershire	329	371
Lewisham	514	405
Lincolnshire	331	247
Liverpool	383	310
Luton	446	373
Manchester	343	372
Medway Towns	376	361
Merton	423	335
Middlesbrough	349	347
Milton Keynes	374	354
Newcastle upon Tyne	307	342
Newham	499	416
Norfolk	397	449
North East Lincolnshire	320	230
North Lincolnshire	306	426
North Somerset	318	450
North Tyneside	—	—
North Yorkshire	340	370
Northamptonshire	393	350
Northumberland	351	351
Nottingham	323	339
Nottinghamshire	314	376
Oldham	325	425
Oxfordshire	499	432
Peterborough	395	419
Plymouth	445	413
Poole	393	392
Portsmouth	—	—
Reading	560	465
Redbridge	485	462
Redcar and Cleveland	—	—
Richmond upon Thames	591	463
Rochdale	318	378
Rotherham	339	344
Rutland	363	345
Salford	372	352
Sandwell	386	359
Sefton	395	363
Sheffield	300	377
Shropshire	350	364
Slough	479	467
Solihull	440	355
Somerset	—	—
South Gloucestershire	385	341
South Tyneside	—	—
Southampton	322	470
Southend	426	372
Southwark	611	427
St. Helens	408	335
Staffordshire	333	344
Stockport	387	522
Stockton-on-Tees	360	374
Stoke-on-Trent	360	359
Suffolk	398	379
Sunderland	360	375
Surrey	395	366
Sutton	462	443
Swindon	420	396
Tameside	285	368
Telford and Wrekin	309	333
Thurrock	406	424
Torbay	308	390
Tower Hamlets	—	—
Trafford	360	374
Wakefield	393	383
Walsall	388	374
Waltham Forest	449	433
Wandsworth	492	527
Warrington	426	351
Warwickshire	420	306
West Berkshire	565	397
West Sussex	—	—
Westminster	706	465
Wigan	333	367
Wiltshire	425	416
Windsor and Maidenhead	565	423
Wirral	455	311
Wokingham	—	—
Wolverhampton	485	361
Worcestershire	373	407
York	351	353
England	389	377

Care Homes

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on fee levels for *(a)* care homes for older people and *(b)* care homes operating in other sectors of care; [64999]

(2) what investigations his Department is carrying out into the models of pricing care, with specific reference to reducing levels of paperwork; [65031]

(3) if he will make a statement on the recent report of Laing and Buisson on care home costs. [65014]

Jacqui Smith: The Government welcome the contribution made by the Joseph Rowntree report to the discussion about the appropriate level of care home fees. We support any publication that aids councils in setting fair and realistic fee levels. The Government are putting record levels of investment into the system. We increased resources to social services by 20 per cent. in real terms between 1996–97 and 2002–03, this represents a national real terms increase of 3 per cent. per annum. There is evidence that this extra investment is making a difference. In a recent report by Laing and Buisson, the authors of the Joseph Rowntree report, it is stated that councils have raised care home fees by an average of 3 per cent. in the last year.

The social services performance assessment framework indicators published in October 2001 contain information on local council's unit costs for nursing and residential care for different client groups.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) pursuant to the answer of 22 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 424W, on care homes, how many of the letters from *(a)* hon. Members and *(b)* the public were about increases in care home fees related to the introduction of free nursing care; and if he will list the other subjects which (i) hon. Members and (ii) members of the public wrote concerning the introduction of NHS-funded care; [60793]

(2) pursuant to the answer of 22 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 424W, on free nursing care, how many letters have been received from hon. Members regarding the failure of care homes to pass on the NHS free nursing care contribution, broken down by party. [60794]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 12 June 2002]:* Since October last year, the Department has received in excess of 10,000 letters from hon. Members and in excess of 24,000 letters from members of the public. Of the letters received, 232 and 150 from hon. Members and members of the public respectively covered issues relating to free nursing care, including fee levels, the process of assessment, banding levels for registered nursing care contribution, policy justification, the mechanisms of payment and the costs of equipment. The letters from hon. Members are broken down by party as follows:

Labour: 118
Conservative: 95
Liberal Democrats: 19.

Long-term Care Beds

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 17 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 167W, on long-term care beds, what resources and local priorities will prevent primary care trusts and NHS trusts from providing continence services. [63866]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 24 June 2002]:* Primary care trusts and national health service trusts provide continence services as part of their general community based services.

It is for health authorities in partnership with primary care trusts and other local stakeholders to determine how best to use their funds to meet national and local priorities for improving health, tackling health inequalities and modernising services.

As a result of the Budget, the NHS in England will receive an annual average real terms growth in resources of 7.4 per cent. for the five years from 2003–04 to 2007–08. This means that over the same five year period there will be an increase of £34 billion in NHS funding for England. This is the highest sustained growth in funding in the history of the NHS.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 17 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 167W, on long-term care beds, if he will set out the factors he considers other than number of beds in his determination of planning expenditure on long-term care. [63868]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 24 June 2002]:* Chapter 2 and Research Volume 1 of the Report of the Royal Commission on long-term care set out the factors which affect the demand for and cost of long-term care.

Intermediate Care

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on progress towards the introduction of intermediate care. [65015]

Jacqui Smith: Intermediate care has made rapid progress over the last two years—there is very good progress towards the targets set in the NHS Plan and there are many examples of good practice around the country. However, it is still a relatively new service and there is more work to be done to ensure that it becomes firmly established and meets its full potential.

The Department's recent review of intermediate care—Intermediate Care: Moving Forward—is available on the website and a copy has been placed in the Library. The full results of the Department's survey of intermediate care provision conducted last summer are also in the Library.

Hearing Aids

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when digital hearing aids will be available in West Sussex. [64667]

Jacqui Smith: An announcement about which national health service trusts will join the modernising hearing aid services project and will be providing digital hearing aids by the end of March 2003, was made in my reply to the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) and the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) on 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 465–66W.

In addition to the second wave sites, we intend to provide at least a further 15 sites with the training and equipment they need to start fitting digital hearing aids from April 2003. I understand that Surrey and Sussex Healthcare has already expressed an interest in being one of those sites.

Neonatal Care

Mr. Sedgemore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he intends to publish the report of the National Review of Neonatal Care by Dr. R. MacFaul and others; and if he will make a statement. [64683]

Jacqui Smith: The report follows a very important review of provision for neonatal services. The report is under active consideration at present. I expect to determine the next steps in this process shortly.

Chelmsford PCT

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what accumulated deficit has been identified by the Chelmsford PCT from 1 April. [55737]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 14 May 2002]:* It is not possible to provide information on liabilities inherited by Chelmsford Primary Care Trust as it was newly established on 1 April 2002. The information will be published in the final accounts at the end of the financial year.

Worthing and Southlands Hospital Trust

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many matrons have been recruited to the Worthing and Southlands Hospital Trust since his Department's announcement on the issue. [59571]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* Available information was published in a report, "Modern Matrons in the NHS: a progress report", on 15 April 2002, showing that there are 1,895 nurses in modern matron posts across the national health service in England. Data broken down by individual trust are not available centrally.

Fostering

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children have been placed in foster families broken down by *(a)* region and *(b)* health authority in each of the last five years. [61354]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* The data available are shown in the table. The table shows the number of looked-after children who started one or more periods of foster care during the year.

Number of looked after children who started one or more periods of foster care during the years ending 31 March 1997 to 2001

England *Number*

	Year ending 31 March				
	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
England	32,900	33,300	32,400	32,700	29,800
North East	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000	1,800
Shire counties					
Durham	300	270	300	305	160
Northumberland	210	230	215	220	175
Unitary authorities					
Darlington	55	55	85	60	95
Hartlepool	70	75	105	100	120
Middlesbrough	100	120	100	110	140
Redcar and Cleveland	135	115	145	115	115
Stockton on Tees	115	130	130	115	90
Metropolitan districts					
Gateshead	110	155	145	90	145
Newcastle upon Tyne	265	280	310	335	285
North Tyneside	255	190	175	195	210
South Tyneside	100	95	125	85	[1]—
Sunderland	250	255	180	230	155
North West	3,900	4,000	3,900	3,800	3,300
Shire counties					
Cheshire	330	370	405	375	275
Cumbria	270	295	350	325	300
Lancashire	815	800	675	585	605
Unitary authorities					
Blackburn and Darwen	150	105	80	95	120
Blackpool	185	190	190	180	205
Halton	115	130	155	160	125
Warrington	110	135	100	90	45
Metropolitan districts					
Bolton	160	190	155	190	155
Bury	110	75	90	90	75
Manchester	780	775	775	745	585
Oldham	110	135	165	130	110
Rochdale	105	150	145	125	55
Salford	200	180	160	210	180
Stockport	110	130	115	110	100
Tameside	150	140	120	120	150
Trafford	70	90	85	100	90
Wigan	165	155	170	210	145
Merseyside	900	1,000	1,100	1,100	900
Metropolitan districts					
Knowsley	145	125	120	145	190
Liverpool	445	450	530	550	450
Sefton	80	105	105	110	80
St. Helens	65	80	90	70	80
Wirral	205	230	205	175	145
Yorkshire and Humberside	3,700	3,800	3,500	3,400	3,100
Shire counties					
North Yorkshire	305	275	210	200	215
Unitary authorities					
East Riding of Yorkshire	110	120	110	145	85
Kingston upon Hull	395	420	325	285	270
North East Lincs	170	155	120	140	150
North Lincolnshire	115	100	125	75	50
York	100	80	75	95	105
Metropolitan districts					
Barnsley	135	150	150	120	115
Bradford	470	425	405	370	320
Calderdale	120	145	150	95	95
Doncaster	230	165	235	220	175
Kirklees	155	170	140	180	140
Leeds	600	675	625	645	585
Rotherham	185	205	210	170	195
Sheffield	335	430	400	400	440
Wakefield	320	315	265	245	125
East Midlands	2,400	2,700	2,600	2,500	2,400
Shire counties					
Derbyshire	315	290	315	385	365
Leicestershire	165	175	240	275	220
Lincolnshire	365	305	290	275	275
Northamptonshire	410	450	415	400	310
Nottinghamshire	330	385	385	410	415

Number of looked after children who started one or more periods of foster care during the years ending 31 March 1997 to 2001

England *Number*

	Year ending 31 March				
	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Unitary authorities					
Derby	235	205	165	160	155
Leicester	240	410	425	345	405
Nottingham	355	425	385	280	285
West Midlands	3,700	3,900	3,600	3,700	3,200
Shire counties					
Shropshire	140	90	90	135	110
Staffordshire	290	260	260	280	255
Warwickshire	330	395	310	330	245
Worcestershire	300	285	320	385	295
Unitary authorities					
Herefordshire	130	120	130	75	80
Stoke-on-Trent	105	180	155	165	195
Telford and Wrekin	130	70	90	75	100
Metropolitan districts					
Birmingham	930	1,085	865	880	820
Coventry	205	195	165	220	145
Dudley	170	150	195	235	140
Sandwell	335	375	370	295	225
Solihull	165	150	130	130	105
Walsall	235	295	300	305	290
Wolverhampton	240	200	190	175	175
South West	3,800	3,500	3,200	3,300	2,900
Shire counties					
Cornwall	590	580	545	485	375
Devon	470	405	410	450	385
Dorset	285	280	200	160	140
Gloucestershire	280	280	290	310	280
Somerset	345	300	285	285	305
Wiltshire	280	285	245	230	165
Unitary authorities					
Bath and North East Somerset	85	85	65	100	65
Bournemouth	160	175	145	145	150
Bristol	345	320	275	260	270
North Somerset	150	160	135	135	135
Plymouth	300	185	140	250	225
Poole	100	125	90	125	100
South Gloucestershire	90	70	95	85	85
Swindon	195	155	130	155	160
Torbay	115	120	135	105	90
Eastern	3,400	3,300	3,100	3,400	2,900
Shire counties					
Bedfordshire	225	195	180	180	190
Cambridgeshire	325	385	345	285	185
Essex	795	665	670	860	695
Hertfordshire	445	450	425	370	340
Norfolk	480	435	520	490	450
Suffolk	400	415	370	380	360
Unitary authorities					
Luton	180	150	180	210	200
Peterborough	215	290	180	285	185
Southend	190	215	175	185	165
Thurrock	110	90	80	150	120
London	5,000	5,100	5,300	5,400	5,300
Inner London					
Camden	155	185	230	220	190
Greenwich	135	140	225	275	240
Hackney	285	280	260	220	205
Hammersmith and Fulham	135	175	155	200	270
Islington	140	135	160	185	120
Kensington and Chelsea	75	105	95	70	100
Lambeth	295	260	280	245	265
Lewisham	250	300	220	270	205
Southwark	335	345	270	265	260
Tower Hamlets	245	100	120	125	115
Wandsworth	205	195	190	185	240
Westminster	135	145	145	140	140
Outer London					
Barking and Dagenham	65	95	115	135	155
Barnet	95	120	170	150	200
Bexley	120	140	165	150	140
Brent	220	220	215	215	245
Bromley	115	155	130	110	70
Croydon	235	135	165	170	175
Ealing	125	130	195	215	215
Enfield	85	100	120	90	125
Haringey	175	165	210	205	255
Harrow	75	95	100	140	95
Havering	85	75	105	125	80
Hillingdon	150	110	140	230	250
Hounslow	155	160	115	150	150
Kingston upon Thames	60	60	65	40	65
Merton	120	145	150	150	85
Newham	255	340	385	320	305
Redbridge	185	190	140	110	70
Richmond upon Thames	80	50	80	80	55
Sutton	95	60	90	85	80
Waltham Forest	155	190	110	155	130
South East	4,200	4,100	4,100	4,200	4,200
Shire counties					
Buckinghamshire	135	115	130	165	130
East Sussex	365	250	300	280	300
Hampshire	410	435	460	505	465
Kent	875	995	1,090	1,060	1,105
Oxfordshire	245	180	245	200	225
Surrey	255	210	265	255	280
West Sussex	455	500	370	545	440
Unitary authorities					
Bracknell Fore[illegible]	40	40	30	35	35
Brighton and Hove	355	340	265	220	200
Isle of Wight	140	155	135	155	90
Medway Towns	155	170	165	135	150
Milton Keynes	125	175	150	[1]—	[1]—
West Berkshire	70	40	50	55	65
Portsmouth	115	125	105	95	150
Reading	95	75	30	30	45
Slough	65	30	55	55	35
Southampton	180	195	190	235	240
Windsor and Maidenhead	50	35	20	35	45
Wokingham	25	30	40	40	45

[1] Not available.

Notes:

1. The table excludes children looked after under a series of short term placements.

2. All local council figures have been rounded to the nearest five.

3. Data for three local councils, Rutland, City of London and Isles of Scilly, have been suppressed for reasons of confidentiality. All regional and England figures include estimates for missing data and have been rounded to the nearest 100.

Cycle of Abuse

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has conducted to examine the link between abused children and their potential to become abusive adults. [62717]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 19 June 2002]:* Between 1992 and 1996, the Department's policy research programme (PRP) funded a study by Professor David Skuse at the Institute of Child Health with the title: "The transition from sexually abused to abuser: a preliminary enquiry", at a total cost of £346,000.

Subsequently, from 1996 to 2000, the Department provided funding for Professor Skuse to undertake a study entitled "A prospective study of the onset of sexually abusive behaviour in boys who were sexually abused in early childhood: validation of risk index". This study cost £566,000.

Two further studies of relevance were each funded by one of the Department's regional offices: "A survey of the psychological effects of child abuse and the resulting medical/other agency intervention of general health and personal benefits as adults (pilot study)" by Michelle Robson, from the Hull and East Yorkshire NHS Trust, which was funded from December 1999 to April 2000, and a study on "Emotional and behavioural problems in children of women who experienced maltreatment in childhood", by Professor J. W. Hill, at the Royal Liverpool Children's Hospital NHS Trust, funded from February 1999 to June 2000.

Epilepsy

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to make more funds available to ring fence funds to prevent sudden deaths in epilepsy. [62987]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 19 June 2002]:* Local health and social care organisations are responsible for planning and providing services for people with epilepsy. The recently announced budget settlements for the national health service (representing an annual average increase of 7.6 per cent. above inflation over the five years 2003–04 to 2007–08) and personal social services (PSS) (representing an annual average increase of 6.0 per cent. above inflation over the three years 2003–04 to 2005–06), will provide the investment needed to support services which best meet patients' and users' needs.

The Department has recently welcomed the publication of the Government funded national sentinel audit of epilepsy-related death. The audit looked at investigations into epilepsy deaths, care provided prior to death and contact with bereaved families. The Department has given a commitment to consider the recommendations of the audit and develop an action plan by September 2002 to try to improve epilepsy services and reduce the number of preventable deaths from epilepsy.

The Department is also undertaking a range of initiatives to improve services for the care and management of people with epilepsy. For example, we have:

> Provided funding to the Joint Epilepsy Council (JEC) to develop a "National Statement of Good Practice for the Treatment and Care of People who have Epilepsy", which was published in May 2002. The statement makes a series of recommendations for good quality epilepsy services. It is intended to facilitate commissioning and will be of use to NHS purchasers, providers and service users.
>
> Asked the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) to develop a clinical guideline (due in summer 2004) for the diagnosis, management and treatment of epilepsy to help address widespread variations in clinical practice and contribute to the improvement of services. This will be supported by a technology appraisal (due autumn 2003) of the clinical and cost-effectiveness of new anti-epileptic drugs in children and adults, to help promote appropriate uptake and equitable access.
>
> Announced that the national service framework (NSF) for long term conditions is expected to develop standards of care for specific neurological conditions, including epilepsy. The NSF is expected to be published in 2004. Implementation is expected to start from 2005.
>
> Developed the expert patients programme, which aims to provide training in self-management skills for people with long term chronic conditions. The first pilot phase will include people with epilepsy.
>
> Provided funding to the national society for epilepsy for its living well project. The project aims to promote independent living by providing locally based short-term courses for people with epilepsy to develop self-help and self-management techniques.

Care Records

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if, under standard 16 of the National Care Standards, it is compulsory for receivers of care to complete daily records which can be accessed by other people; and what mechanisms are in place to accommodate those who, on grounds of privacy, refuse to do so. [63629]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 26 June 2002]:* Standard 16 of the domiciliary care national minimum standards (consultation version) states that it is not compulsory for the service user to keep records. The requirement is for the service provider to keep records.

Drug Addicts

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the waiting time is for drug addicts for residential rehabilitation; and what he expects the waiting time to be in two years. [63335]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 20 June 2002]:* Estimated figures for waiting times for residential rehabilitation from referral to initial consultation are shown in the table. Figures for other treatment modalities are provided as a comparison. These figures were compiled to assist the national treatment agency in setting targets for reducing overall waiting times and are the latest currently available. Figures for 2000–01 are currently being collated and will be available shortly.

The targets for treatment services are shown in the table. This information relates to the local authority area, not for each individual agency.

Treatment modality	*Average baseline waiting time (weeks) 1999–2000*	*Maximum acceptable length of wait (weeks) 2002–03*	*2003–04*
In-patient detoxification	6.1	4	2
Community prescribing—specialist	10.2	6	3
Community prescribing—GPs	5	4	2
Structured counselling	4	4	2
Structured day care programme	3.3	4	3
Residential rehabilitation	5.4	4	3

The information that is available to the Government is the longest wait for different modalities of treatment in each drug action teams area. DAT reported these figures in December 2001 as part of the routine planning process for treatment at local level. The national treatment agency will publish more comprehensive data later this year.

Care Home Patients

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many residents aged over 65 were in *(a)* local authority, *(b)* independent residential, *(c)* independent nursing and *(d)* independent dual registered homes (i) in total and (ii) as a percentage of the population aged over 65 in each of the last 10 years. [64288]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 26 June 2002]:* Information on the number of residents in care homes is not readily available. The available information is provided in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1: Registered care places for older people[1], as at 31 March (rounded numbers)

	Total	Local authority staffed homes	Independent residential care homes[2]	Independent nursing care homes[3]	Independent dual registered care homes[4]
1995[5]	407,680	62,440	176,560	155,210	13,460
1996[5]	412,450	60,160	176,950	158,750	16,600
1997[5]	415,060	54,680	183,390	153,440	23,540
1998	428,230	52,730	186,730	159,620	29,140
1999	418,040	49,110	185,270	152,940	30,710
2000	412,450	45,210	183,250	149,020	34,970
2001	401,980	41,830	182,470	141,920	35,770

[1] Includes places for older mentally infirm people.

[2] Includes residential care beds in small homes (less than four places).

[3] Excludes registered nursing beds in private hospitals and clinics.

[4] Registered residential care places only.

[5] Information on nursing beds relates to registered beds during the period 1 October (of the previous year) to 31 March each year.

Source:

Department of Health's annual returns

Table 2: Registered care places for older people as a percentage of population aged over 65, as at 31 March

Percentage

	Total	Local authority staffed homes	Independent residential care homes[1]	Independent nursing care homes[2]	Independent dual registered care homes[3]
1995[4]	5.3	0.8	2.3	2.0	0.2
1996	5.3	0.8	2.3	2.0	0.2
1997	5.3	0.7	2.4	2.0	0.3
1998	5.5	0.7	2.4	2.1	0.4
1999	5.4	0.6	2.4	2.0	0.4
2000	5.3	0.6	2.3	1.9	0.4
2001	5.1	0.5	2.3	1.8	0.5

[1] Includes residential care beds in small homes (less than four places).

[2] Excludes registered nursing beds in private hospitals and clinics.

[3] Registered residential care places only.

[4] Information on nursing beds relates to registered beds during the period 1 October (of the previous year) to 31 March each year.

Source:

Department of Health's annual returns

HOUSE OF COMMONS PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES (HANSARD) ● 2001-02

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INDEX TO THE

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

SIXTH SERIES

VOLUME 387

SESSION 2001–2002

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Printed indexes to Hansard

The volume index is one of three printed indexes to Commons Hansard produced from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Indexing Service (POLIS). It contains references to material in the bound volumes of Hansard. The other indexes produced are:

- The fortnightly index to Hansard. This covers the same date range as the volume index but references are to the column numbering in the daily parts and weekly edition of Hansard.
- The sessional index to Hansard. This contains references to material in the bound volumes for a whole session.

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SCOPE

The indexes include entries covering:

- The content of all material recorded in Hansard, including debates, procedural motions and questions.
- The names of all Members contributing to the Parliamentary business recorded in Hansard.
- The names of some types of Parliamentary business whenever they occur in Hansard. These are 'Ministerial statements', 'Business statements', 'Opposition days' and 'Estimates days'.

ARRANGEMENT

- All headings are in one word-by-word alphabetical sequence, with Members' contribution entries distinguished from other entries by italics.
- Where a Member contributes to Parliamentary business and is the subject of Parliamentary business there are separate contribution and subject entries, the subject entry coming first.
- Entries beginning 'Mac' and 'Mc' are sorted in one sequence as 'Mac'.
- 'St', when abbreviated for Saint, is filed as 'Saint'.
- Numbers are filed as if spelt out, e.g. '10 Downing Street' as if 'Ten Downing Street'.

HEADINGS

Choice of headings

- *Specificity*—Entries summarise the overall content of a debate or question as specifically as the various POLIS thesauruses allow. For example, Education, Higher education, Universities or the name of a particular university is used depending on the breadth of the item.
- *Name headings*—Specific entries are included for the names of people, places, institutions, organisations, committees, programmes, initiatives, publications and legislation when these constitute the overall subject of an item.
- *Organisations and subjects*—Organisation entries are preferred for material about the general performance, administration and staffing of an organisation (for example, United Kingdom Passports Agency, Standards). Subject entries are preferred for what organisations do as part of their duties (for example, Passports, Fees and charges).

Geographical coverage

- *Subject headings*—Subject headings are assumed to refer to the whole of England, Great Britain or the United Kingdom unless otherwise stated.
- *Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales*—Material relating to the whole of Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales is indexed under these headings.
- *Places within the UK*—Material about specific towns, areas and institutions is entered under the name of the specific town, area or institution.
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Parliamentary material and business

- *Material about Parliament*—This is indexed under 'Parliament', the names of the two Houses, the 'Palace of Westminster' and parts of the Parliamentary estate (such as 'Portcullis House').
- *Committees*—Material about committees is indexed under 'Committees', types of committee (such as 'Select committees') and the names of individual committees (such as 'Home Affairs Select Committee').
- *Parliamentary proceedings/procedures*—Material discussing these is indexed under the specific type of proceeding (such as 'Parliamentary questions' or 'Oral questions'), procedure (such as 'Calling of Members') or issue (such as 'Unparliamentary expressions').
- *Legislation*—Entries for Parliamentary proceedings on bills and statutory instruments are entered under their titles. Where the lead word of the bill or statutory instrument does not provide a full or clear indication of the subject there are additional subject entries when the bill or instrument is debated. For example, debates on the 'Child Support Pensions and Social Security Bill' have entries under 'Pensions' and 'Social security benefits' as well as under the title of the Bill.
- *Members' names*—These are given in the form by which the Member prefers to be known.
- *Speaker and Chair*—Contributions by the Speaker and deputies are brought together under the heading 'Speaker and deputies'. Contributions from the chair during Committees of the Whole House are brought together under 'Chairman of Committee of the Whole House'. Significant rulings and statements (as opposed to routine comments) are indicated by the sub-heading 'Rulings and statements' in both cases.

Guidance on headings

- *Cross references*—'See' references indicate all the material has been entered under another heading. 'See also' references indicate that additional information may be found under another heading.
- *Concept thesaurus*—A copy of the subject thesaurus to POLIS, listing the concept entries used in the index, is available on the Parliamentary website. A hard copy is available from the Head of the POLIS Unit, House of Commons Library, 1 Derby Gate, London, SW1A 2DG (020 7219 6456).

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- References in the indexes are to columns rather than pages.
- References to debates, but not questions, are accompanied by the date of the item.
- There are separate sequences in Hansard for the material taken on the floor of the House, Westminster Hall sittings and written questions:
  - References consisting of a number by itself indicate material taken on the floor of the House.
  - References ending in 'wh' indicate Westminster Hall sittings.
  - References ending in 'w' indicate written questions.
- References under all headings except the names of Members contributing to Parliamentary business and the titles of legislation are listed in one numerical sequence irrespective of whether the material is taken on the floor of the House, is discussed at a Westminster Hall sitting or is a written question.
- References under the names of Members contributing to Parliamentary business and the titles of legislation are listed in numerical sequence under the following headings:
  - *Debates etc.* (which includes interventions and points of order as well as significant contributions to debates);
  - *Sittings in Westminster Hall* (covering all debates held as part of the Westminster Hall sittings); and
  - *Questions* (which includes written, oral and private notice questions).

ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used in connection with the progress of bills:

- 1R=First reading
- 2R=Second reading
- Com=Committee stage
- Rep=Report stage
- 3R=Third reading
- res=resolution
- amendt(s)=amendment(s)
- *=matter taken formally without debate or division.

Parliamentary background

- The Parliamentary website at http://www.parliament.uk contains a range of information about Parliament and the full text of some Parliamentary papers and proceedings including Hansard.
- Information on current Parliamentary business is provided in the House of Commons Information Office *Weekly Information Bulletin*, available on the website and from The Stationery Office (020 7873 8499).
- Further information on Parliamentary proceedings and procedures is available from the House of Commons Information Office (020 7219 4272).

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